

**REPORT OF THE ACTION GROUP
ON ACCESS TO THIRD LEVEL EDUCATION**



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MAY 2001

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH
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4-5 BÓTHAR FHEARCHAIR, BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH 2,
(Teil: 01 – 6476834-5; fax: 01 – 4752760)
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DUBLIN
PUBLISHED BY THE STATIONERY OFFICE
To be purchased directly from the
GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS SALE OFFICE,
SUN ALLIANCE HOUSE, MOLESWORTH STREET, DUBLIN 2
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GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS, POSTAL TRADE SECTION,
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IR£5.00

€6.35





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FOREWORD

Over the past decade, a good deal of work has been undertaken to address the issues of under-participation in higher education. However, it has been uncoordinated and has often lacked a clear direction and focus. Our failure, to date, to successfully confront our short comings in terms of the under representation at third level of certain groups, and in particular disadvantaged students, students with disabilities and mature students, surely belies our much vaunted claim to the title "Island of Saints and Scholars". Our failure is all the more striking when considered in light of considerable success on the economic front.

It is surely ironic that while there is near universal agreement that increased participation rates at third level have been central to the achievement of that success, the fact that whole segments of our society are so significantly underrepresented has not, as yet, sufficiently impacted on our consciousness. Yet the future growth and stability within our society will be determined in large measure by our success in confronting just that issue.

The Action Group considered both the challenge and the wide range of possible solutions, primarily in the context of the proposals outlined in the National Development Plan. While greatly welcoming the proposed allocation, it quickly became clear to us that we must, in the immediate future, be prepared to commit even greater resources and at a variety of levels if our shortcomings are to be confronted. Any failure to do so must surely relegate us to the lower end of the international league in terms of competitiveness as we enter the new Millennium.

On my own behalf and on behalf of the Group I would like to acknowledge the interest and commitment of the Minister, Dr Michael Woods, the Secretary General of the Department, Mr John Dennehy, the many organisations and individuals who shared their expertise with us; Aidan O'Connor, Principal Officer in the Department of Education and Science was a tower of strength throughout and bore the main burden of guiding us through a complex maze in just three months; his colleagues John Moloney, Thérèse Conlon and Grace O'Malley; Margaret Kelly, Mary Dunne and Ian McKenna, from the Department, who provided valuable input; Caroline McGrath and Berni Brady for their respective contributions to the chapters on students with disabilities and on mature students; Seán Ó Foghlú, of the Higher Education Authority, and Edwin Mernagh, from the Northside Partnership, who provided such invaluable assistance at the drafting stage.

In particular I would like to acknowledge the help and support of Professor Pat Clancy of U.C.D., our special advisor, whose several reports and statistical analysis were indispensable to our work, and the following third level students who, on a particularly cold and wet winter's night, when transport facilities in our capital were seriously compromised, came to share experiences with us:

Ayoibi, Salma
Buckley, Trevor
Doherty, Denise
Fitzgerald, Amy
Giney, John
Hand, Anne-Marie
Lanigan, Ann
McCormack, David
McDermott, Roisín
McKenna, Mandy

Meehan, Paula
Meleady, Michelle
Monaghan, David
Mooney, Alan
Morrissey, Gerard
O'Connor, Antonette
O'Regan, Lisa
O'Sullivan, Siobhan
Rafferty, Paul
Scallon, Laura

Ultimately whether, or to what extent, we may have succeeded in our mission, time and others will judge. The challenge to our society, embracing as it does political, social, religious, cultural, economic and other issues, is complex; failure, however, cannot be contemplated.

Dr. Cormac Macnamara
Chairman
Action Group on Access to Third Level Education

List of Acronyms used in Text

ACE	Accessing College Education,Tallaght
ACLD	All Children Learn Differently, Ireland
ADM	Area Development Management Ltd
AHEAD	Association for Higher Education Access and Disability
AMA	Access made Accessible
AONTAS	National Association of Adult Education
APEL	Acquired Prior Experiential Learning
AT	Assistive Technology
BITE	Ballymun Initiative for Third Level Education
BMW	Border Midland Western
BTEA	Back to Education Allowance
CAO	Central Applications Office
CDA	Child Dependant Allowance
CERT	The State Tourism Training Agency
CHEAP	Clondalkin Higher Education Access Programme
CHIU	Conference of Heads of Irish Universities
CRC	Central Remedial Clinic
DAWN	Disability Advisers Working Network
DCU	Dublin College University
DES	Department of Education and Science
DIT	Dublin Institute of Technology
DSCFA	Department of Social Community and Family Affairs
EAN	European Access Network
ESLI	Early School Leaver Initiative
ESF	European Social Fund
ESRI	Economic Social Research Institute
FÁS	Foras Áiseanna Saothair
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
FIS	Family Income Supplement
GBDP	Greater Blanchardstown Development Project
HEA	The Higher Education Authority
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
IOT	Institute Of Technology
LCAP	Leaving Cert Applied Programme
LCBEI	Limerick Community Based Education Initiative
MRC	Market Research Company
NAD	National Association for Deaf People
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NCBI	National Council for the Blind of Ireland
NCEA	National Council of Educational Awards
NCGE	National Centre for Guidance in Education
NCVA	National Council for Vocational Awards
NDP	National Development Plan
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Services
NOW	New Opportunities for Women
NQAI	National Qualification Authority of Ireland
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
P2000	Partnership 2000
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
PPF	Programme for Prosperity and Fairness
PPS	Personal Public Service Number
QAA	Qualified Adult Allowance
S&E	Southern and Eastern
SSRI	Stay in School Retention Initiative
TAP	Trinity Access Project
TLA	Third Level Allowance
UA	Unemployment Assistance
USI	Union of Students in Ireland
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme
WERRC	Women's Education Research and Resource Centre

Executive Summary

In line with a commitment under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness the Minister for Education and Science, Dr Michael Woods, established the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education, in September 2000, to advise the Minister on the development of a co-ordinated framework to promote access by mature and disadvantaged students and students with disabilities to third level education.

Chapter one Introduction

Chapter 1 explores definitions of access and the reasons, economic and social, why access by under-represented groups to third level education should be improved. It also details the legislative background. The Action Group was given three months to complete its work and, accordingly, the group relied, to a large extent, on existing, relevant reports which are outlined. The Group also carried out the maximum degree of consultation possible, given the tight timeframe for its work.

Chapter two Students from Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Backgrounds

The need to increase representation by students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds is considered in chapter 2. Recent reports by Clancy and Wall and by Osborne and Leith underpin the discussion. The Action Group agrees that barriers to access begin at a very early stage in a child's development; accordingly, current provision and initiatives at the stages from pre-school to second-level are reviewed. The importance of guidance provision at second level is stressed: the Action Group has grounds to believe that existing guidance provision is not always effective, particularly in reaching the lower socio-economic groups, and the Group makes a number of recommendations in this regard.

A number of key recommendations set out proposed criteria for a special rate of maintenance grant, targeted at disadvantaged students most in need, and the means of identifying those students who will be eligible for the special rate of grant. Recommendations on income limits governing eligibility, both within the constraints of the funding available under the National Development Plan (NDP), and outside the NDP framework, are also made.

The National Development Plan provides for a Third Level Access Fund of £95m over the period 2000-06 and the Action Group has had to have regard to the constraints imposed by this amount in making certain of its recommendations. The Group recommends, in chapter 6, how this £95m can be allocated. As part of the process of securing and drawing down NDP funding, there is an obligation to establish indicators and targets for each measure, to be achieved by, firstly, 2003 and, secondly, by 2006. The Action Group proposes such baseline indicators and targets for increasing representation by the three target groups - students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, mature students and students with disabilities – in the respective chapters dealing with each group.

The Action Group considers that the current systems for student financing are unsatisfactory and in need of reform. The Group notes that the Minister for Education and Science has established a special project team to carry out a review of every aspect of the maintenance grants, and other student supports, to ensure their relevance to the needs of present day third level students. The Group believes that this review constitutes an opportunity to develop a more coherent framework of financial supports and makes a number of recommendations for consideration by the project team.

The Group recommends that responsibility for the means testing and payment functions relating to the student maintenance grant schemes be transferred to the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and that the level of financial support available to students in the target groups should be benchmarked against financial supports provided by the State to other non-student groups.

Chapter three Students with a Disability

The barriers faced by students with a disability in accessing third level education and the findings of a recent survey on provision for those students are discussed in chapter 3. Admission procedures and current funding provisions for students with a disability are set out. A key recommendation is to the effect that existing supports should be strengthened through the development of the Department of Education and Science's Special Fund for Students with Disabilities into an entitlement-based scheme. The Group also recommends that each university and institute of technology should have a minimum of one full-time permanent Disability Officer post.

Chapter four Mature Students

Chapter 4, on mature students, notes that they account for only 5% approx. of full-time students in higher education, well below the average for Western countries. Issues relating to quotas for mature students, alternative entry routes and appropriate application and selection systems are examined. The financial barriers, inadequate information, a lack of a coherent guidance service for mature students and the issue of childcare provision are discussed and recommendations made. The Action Group endorses the setting up of the Targeted Higher Education Mature Student Fund, as proposed in the White Paper on Adult Education and urges immediate implementation of the recommendations in the White Paper relating to payment of fees for certain categories of part-time students. The proposed special rates of maintenance grants should equally be available to mature students, subject to specific conditions.

Chapter five Disadvantaged Communities

The role, present and future, of Area-Based Partnerships and Community Groups in assisting individuals from disadvantaged communities to prepare for, gain access to, and remain in higher education is set out in chapter 5. Proposals relating to the Millennium Fund, announced by the Minister for Education and Science at the launch of the Action Group, are outlined. The Fund, with a provision of £1m in 2001, will be administered by the Department of Education and Science, in conjunction with the Area Partnerships.

Chapter six A Co-ordinated National Framework

In chapter 6 the Action Group proposes the development of a co-ordinated framework of measures to increase participation in higher education by the targeted disadvantaged groups. A key recommendation to realise the framework is that a single co-ordinating body is essential. It is recommended that a **National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education ("The National Office")** with a dedicated staff, be established within the Higher Education Authority. The remit of the National Office will be to draw up policy proposals and to oversee the implementation of measures, in close liaison with the Department of Education and Science and other stakeholders.

The Group notes that the birth rate has fallen by one third between 1980 and 1994 and accordingly the number of potential entrants to third level will fall between 1999 and 2013. The Group considers that this 'demographic dividend' provides an unprecedented opportunity to increase participation rates among the target groups. Over the next five years, therefore, it is possible to put in place quotas for the three target groups while actually increasing the chances of any school leaver, who is not in one of the target groups, of entering higher education.

While the Action Group welcomes the commitment by Government in the NDP to increase funding for targeted access measures, it believes that the scale of the challenge faced requires significant further funding from an early date (2001/02). The Group, therefore, recommends additional funding of at least £25m per annum for the new targeted funding.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION



CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

The Minister for Education and Science, Dr Michael Woods, established the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education (hereafter referred to as the Action Group or the Group) to advise on the most effective ways of increasing participation by disadvantaged groups (students with disabilities, students from disadvantaged backgrounds and mature “second chance” students) at third level. The Terms of Reference for the Group are attached as ANNEX 1.

The membership of the Action Group is given at ANNEX 2.

The Action Group was established in line with a commitment under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF). An extract from Framework IV of the PPF relating to the work of the Action Group is attached as ANNEX 3. The Action Group also considers that many of the PPF commitments in the areas of Early Childhood Education and the Community Dimension are also crucial to Third Level Access.

The Action Group was given three months to complete its work. For this reason the Group relied heavily on recent reports pertaining to its terms of reference, but also carried out the maximum possible degree of consultation.

The Action Group placed an advertisement in the National Press on 20 September 2000, inviting submissions from interested parties. In all, 41 submissions were received from interested parties, a list of which is attached as ANNEX 4.

The Group also held a focus group meeting, in DIT Aungier Street, with 20 students from the three target groups and pupils from second level schools, on 22 November, 2000. A list of those students is attached as ANNEX 5.

The Group convened in Tullamore on 30 November 2000 to meet with the Network of Third Level Institutions in the BMW Region.

The Group invited a number of parties to make oral presentations to the Group and a list of those parties is attached as ANNEX 6.

Action Group members also participated in the ‘Analysis of Issues’ Groups at the HEA Forum on Equity in Higher Education which was held on 10/11 October, 2000 in Dublin.

1.1 Economic and social reasons for improving access

Education makes a fundamentally important contribution to the quality and well-being of Irish society. Education plays a crucial role in the social, intellectual, cultural, economic and political life of the country. The State, through its involvement in education, seeks to achieve a range of aims, in particular those concerned with economic prosperity, social well-being and a good quality of life for all citizens within a democratically structured society. The State’s role in education is underpinned by the principles of pluralism and diversity of individual needs for education, of equality and the elimination of educational disadvantage, and of partnership between all interests in the development of new policies.

Widening opportunity for and in higher education has many benefits in strengthening democracy, achieving economic and social progress, advancing human rights, and improving the efficiency, quality and performance of the educational system.

The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness sets out the objective that *“Investment will be sustained and enhanced so that Ireland is well within the top quarter of OECD countries in terms of the participation of the population in post second level education and training, and in the quality of that education and training”*.

The Report of the Review Committee on Post Secondary Education and Training Places (HEA, 1999) made reference to the evidence that investment in education and training is vital to national competitive advantage. This is particularly the case for a country which aims to achieve higher living standards for its people based on skills and productivity. The Report went on to state:

*“All the evidence supports the view that returns to education are high both for the individual and for society. The educational attainment of the population is a (and may be *the*) key source of international competitive advantage and is an important factor in the success of the Irish economy in recent years. Investment in education is not only a good investment but it is a necessary investment.”*

Based on ESRI forecasts, the second report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (Forfás, 2000) projected that employment in Ireland will increase by 356,000, or by over one-fifth in the years to 2009. The ESRI anticipates that the bulk of the increase in employment is expected to be in the high skills areas.

At the level of the individual, there is a very significant positive correlation between educational attainment and earnings. The 2000 edition of the OECD Report, *“Education at a Glance”*, shows that degree-level graduates earn substantially more than upper secondary graduates in all OECD countries. In 1997, for men in the age-range 30-44, the premium was 77% while the corresponding figure for women was 87 per cent. Overall, the earnings premium was 84%.

In 1998, 46% of the relevant age cohort transferred to full-time Higher Education. The rate for the unskilled manual worker socio-economic group was 22%.

1.2 What is meant by “Access”

The Report by Professor Malcolm Skilbeck and Dr Helen Connell *“Access and Equity in higher education: An International perspective on issues and strategies”* (Skilbeck and Connell), which was published by the HEA in May 2000, presents the following definition of access for students:

“the global, inclusive term of ‘equity’...refers to... policies and procedures for enabling and encouraging groups in society at present under-represented as students in higher education institutions and programmes or study areas, to gain access to and demonstrate successful performance in higher education, and transition to the labour market...”

This definition is similar in scope to the European Access Network (EAN) definition:

“Access – is understood to encompass not only entry to higher education, but also retention and successful completion”.

The Action Group regards these definitions as being appropriate in scope for the purpose of this Report and the actions recommended.

It is clear that there is no single solution to the issue of equity in participation but that concerted action is needed to make effective progress. Skilbeck and Connell have described future equity directions for higher education in the following terms:

“At its simplest, most basic level, achieving greater equity in higher education is a matter of extending opportunity to participate and progress and using all possible, ethically sound means to do so. Widening opportunity for and in higher education has many benefits in strengthening democracy, achieving economic and social progress, advancing human rights, and improving the efficiency, quality and performance of the educational system. These matters are no longer in serious dispute. The task is to concentrate on ways and means, on improving data, evaluation and follow-through.”

1.3 Contextual Factors for the Action Group’s work

1.3.1 Legislative Background in the area of Equity in access

The Action Group reviewed existing legislation which impacts on equity in access opportunities for students. The legislative background, setting out the particular statutory responsibilities of the various third-level institutions and the HEA, is set out below.

Third-level institutions in Ireland have certain rights and responsibilities, enshrined in legislation, to determine their own admissions policies. In relation to institutes of technology, the Regional Technical Colleges Act, 1992, and the Dublin Institute of Technology Act, 1992, contain provision for academic councils to make recommendations to governing bodies “for the selection, admission, retention and exclusion of students”.

The Regional Technical Colleges Act, 1992, sets out in section 7(5) that “In performing its functions a governing body shall have regard to the attainment of gender equity and of equality of opportunity in education”. The Dublin Institute of Technology Act, 1992, contains a similar provision.

The Universities Act, 1997, provides that academic councils shall make recommendations to governing authorities on the admission of students. Section 14 sets out that “A university, in performing its functions shall—

- (a) have the right and responsibility to preserve and promote the traditional principles of academic freedom in the conduct of its internal and external affairs, and
- (b) be entitled to regulate its affairs in accordance with its independent ethos and traditions and the traditional principles of academic freedom, and in doing so it shall have regard to—
 - (i) the promotion and preservation of equality of opportunity and access,
 - (ii) the effective and efficient use of resources, and
 - (iii) its obligations as to public accountability,

and if, in the interpretation of this Act, there is a doubt regarding the meaning of any provision, a construction that would promote that ethos and those traditions and principles shall be preferred to a construction that would not so promote.”

Under section 12 of the Universities Act, 1997, universities are required “to promote gender balance and equality of opportunity among students and employees of the university” as well as “to facilitate lifelong learning through the provision of adult and continuing education”.

Section 18 of the Universities Act, 1997, states that a governing authority, or a committee where appropriate, shall, inter alia, “have regard to the attainment of gender balance and equality of opportunity among the students and employees of the university and shall, in particular, promote access to the university and to university education by economically or socially disadvantaged people and by people from sections of society significantly under-represented in the student body”.

Section 36 sets out that a governing authority shall “prepare a statement of the policies of the university in respect of—

- (a) access to the university and to university education by economically or socially disadvantaged people, by people who have a disability and by people from sections of society significantly under-represented in the student body, and
- (b) equality, including gender equality, in all activities of the university;”

and shall implement the policies set out in the statement.

The HEA has an advisory and review role in relation to statements of equality and their implementation.

In addition, section 47(1) of the Universities Act, 1997, states that the National University of Ireland determines the basic matriculation requirements for the constituent universities but that each university is empowered to prescribe additional requirements generally or in respect of particular faculties of the university. Section 3 of the Higher Education Authority Act, 1971, sets out that among the functions of the HEA are “furthering the development of higher education” and “promoting the attainment of equality of opportunity in higher education”.

1.3.2 The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act sets out that a National Qualifications Authority of Ireland is to be established with three principal objectives—

- The establishment and maintenance of a framework of qualifications for the development, recognition and award of qualifications based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners;
- The establishment and promotion of the maintenance and improvement of the standards of awards of the further and higher education and training sector, other than in the existing universities;
- The promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression throughout the span of education and training provision.

While it is apparent that the Qualifications Authority will not be an equality agent by setting quotas etc., the Authority is to set out the procedures for access, transfer and progression which must be implemented by most State providers of further and higher education and training, including the Institutes of Technology, the PLC providers, FÁS, CERT and Teagasc. The existing universities will be required to demonstrate how they are facilitating access, transfer and progression arrangements for holders of NQAI awards.

1.3.3 Education Act, 1998

It is also of note that one of the objectives of the Education Act, 1998 is “to promote equality of access to and participation in education and to promote the means whereby students may benefit from education”. Educational disadvantage is defined in the Act as “the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools”. Section 32 sets out that “the Minister shall by order, following consultation with patrons, national associations of parents, recognised school management associations, recognised trade unions and staff associations representing teachers and such other persons as the Minister considers appropriate, establish a committee, hereinafter referred to as the “education disadvantage committee”, to advise him or her on policies and strategies to be adopted to identify and correct educational disadvantage.”

The committee must prepare a statement for the Minister containing:

- “(a) proposed policies and strategies for the identification and correction of educational disadvantage, relating to such period as it considers appropriate, and
- (b) the areas of activity to which the committee accords priority”.

In relation to students with disabilities the Education Act, 1998:-

- Contains a comprehensive and inclusive definition of disability and special educational needs;
- Provides that one of the objects of the Act will be to give practical effect to the constitutional rights of children, including children with a disability or other special educational needs;
- Requires the Minister, wherever practicable, to consult with persons representing people with disabilities and other special education needs. The Minister will have to ensure that there is made available to each person, including those with a disability or other special education needs, an appropriate level and quality of education and appropriate support services;
- Provides that each school will have to ensure that the education needs of all students, including those with a disability or other special educational needs, are identified and provided for;
- Provides that each board must publish the policy of the school concerning admission to and participation in the school by students with disabilities or other special educational needs;
- Provides that the Inspectorate must include persons with expertise in the education of students with special education needs; it also provides that members of the Inspectorate will assess the implementation and effectiveness of any programmes of education which have been devised in respect of students with a disability or other special educational needs; finally, it provides that members of the Inspectorate will advise recognised schools on policies and strategies.

The Act also introduces the following definition of “disability”:

- (a) the total or partial loss of a person's bodily or mental functions, including the loss of a part of the person's body, or
- (b) the presence in the body of organisms causing, or likely to cause, chronic disease or illness, or
- (c) the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of a person's body, or
- (d) a condition or malfunction which results in a person learning differently from a person without the condition or malfunction, or

- (e) a condition, illness or disease which affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgement or which results in disturbed behaviour.

1.3.4 Equal Status Act, 2000

Discrimination is dealt with in detail in the Equal Status Act, 2000. As between any two persons, discriminatory grounds are gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race, and traveller community (section 3 (2) (a – i)). Section 7 of the Bill, dealing with educational establishments, relates directly to 'a university or any other third-level or higher-level institution, whether or not supported by public funds.'

Section 7 (2) states

'An educational establishment shall not discriminate in relation to:

- (a) the admission or the terms or conditions of admission of a person as a student to the establishment
- (b) the access of a student to any course, facility or benefit provided by the establishment
- (c) any other term or condition of participation in the establishment by a student, or
- (d) the expulsion of a student from the establishment or any other sanction against the student.'

Further sections of the Act make various provision for variable fees and allocation of places to nationals of a member state of the European Union and other nationals, for sponsorships, scholarships etc., exchange student arrangements and in relation to some aspects of disability and to sporting facilities. The Equality Authority will have among its functions the promotion of equality of opportunity in relation to the matters to which the Act applies.

The Act includes a requirement to provide a reasonable accommodation to students with a disability and permits positive action in promoting equal opportunity for people with disabilities.

1.3.5 Employment Equality Act 1998

The Employment Equality Act 1998 is also very relevant. The same discriminatory grounds are referred to as in the Equal Status Act. Section 12 of the Act sets out that there cannot be discrimination in entry to vocational training and defines vocational training very broadly in terms of any system of instruction which is exclusively concerned with training for an occupational activity.

1.3.6 Education (Welfare) Act, 2000

The Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 provides a statutory framework to deal with the problems of school non-attendance, early school leaving and poor educational attainment among primary and post-primary students. The Act provides, inter alia, for the raising of the school leaving age to 16, or completion of lower second level education, whichever is the later.

1.4. National Development Plan

The National Development Plan (NDP) notes that participation in further education, particularly at third level, remains skewed by social class with the lower social class groupings continuing to be underrepresented. While the factors underlying this phenomenon go beyond the educational system,

there is need for targeted intervention at the transition from second to third level education and at third level itself. Building on the existing arrangements, the NDP states that the development of third level Access is necessary to promote the participation of students with disabilities, students from disadvantaged backgrounds and mature “second chance” students.

The NDP provides for a **Third Level Access Fund** of £95 million over the period 2000-06 (£60.8m in the Southern and Eastern (S&E)¹ and £34.2m in the Border, Midlands and West (BMW)² region). The stated objective of this measure is to facilitate and improve access to the labour market for the beneficiaries whilst improving their long-term employability. In particular, it is intended by the NDP to:

- Meet the specific needs of students with disabilities in terms of equipment and support services;
- Provide financial support to disadvantaged students by way of additional support to the existing maintenance grants scheme;
- Develop outreach initiatives currently undertaken by a number of third-level institutions which involve links with second level schools and community groups and are designed to both assist students to meet the points requirements for the standard CAO entry procedures and to provide complementary special entry arrangements; and
- Expand the provision of particular services, such as counselling and mentoring services, to meet the needs of non-traditional students.

The NDP indicates that approximately 10,000 grant holders will receive additional support under this measure, with approximately 6,400 in the S&E Region and approximately 3,600 in the BMW Region.

- The Border, Midlands and West (BMW), which meets the criteria for classification as Objective 1 status, thereby qualifying for an aid intervention rate of 75%;
- The Southern and Eastern (S&E), which is now classified as Objective 1 in transition and qualifies for an aid intervention rate of 50%.

1.5 Recent Reports

The Terms of Reference of the Action Group required that it advise the Minister for Education and Science on the development of a co-ordinated framework to promote access by mature and disadvantaged students and students with disabilities to third level education, building on the experience of current initiatives, and to make findings and recommendations accordingly.

In particular, the Group was required to have specific regard to the objectives in this area as set out in the National Development Plan (in particular, at paragraphs 5.56 and 5.57) and in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (in particular, at Framework IV, Post-Second Level Participation, including by Mature Students). The Group also had to have regard to the recommendations in this area made by the Commission on the Points System.

There follows a brief outline of a number of recent initiatives and Reports which were reviewed by the Action Group. These outlines are presented here for ease of reference without any comment by the Action Group.

¹ The S&E region comprises counties Kilkenny, Carlow, Wexford, Clare, Kildare, Meath, Wicklow, Kerry and Waterford City & County, Cork City and County, Tipperary NR & SR, Limerick City & County, Dublin City, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal and South Dublin.

² The BMW region comprises counties Donegal, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan, Louth, Sligo, Offaly, Longford, Westmeath, Laois, Mayo, Roscommon and Galway City & County.

1.5.1 The Commission on the Points System

This Report was published in December 1999. The relevant features are summarised as follows:

Commission on the Points System and Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Students

The Commission noted:

“Initiatives to increase participation in third-level education by students with educational disadvantage should be the culmination of a range of strategies aimed to tackle educational disadvantage throughout a student’s schooling. Fuller participation in third level education by students who are educationally disadvantaged depends on measures to ensure access to and retention of students in full-time education at primary and second levels as well as initiatives which focus on the transition from second to third level and on the third-level sector itself.”

The Commission recommended that there should be a quota for disadvantaged students in third-level education set at 5% of the intake into third-level education. It recommended that this quota should apply to all courses. The longer term aspiration should be to increase the percentage of disadvantaged young people in third-level education so that it would reflect more accurately their proportion in the population as a whole. As is currently the case, students applying for a third-level place within the disadvantaged quota would also be eligible for a place under the normal CAO arrangements.

The Commission acknowledged the need for the continuation of strategies that focus on designated schools because of the high concentration of disadvantaged students in such schools. The Commission considered that there is a value in maintaining the links between individual third-level institutions and designated disadvantaged schools, as well as extending these schemes to individual disadvantaged pupils. However, it also noted that, throughout the process of consultation, there was a general view that initiatives to tackle disadvantage at third level should be capable of reaching out to all disadvantaged students. The Commission recommended that, building on existing initiatives, there is a need to develop a national approach to ensuring that special access schemes should encompass disadvantaged students who are attending non-designated as well as designated schools. While the Commission recognised that there may be difficulties in this approach, it considered that there is a need to develop a definition of a disadvantaged student based on the individual student. In this regard, the Commission suggested that the Educational Disadvantage Committee, to be set up under Section 32 of the 1998 Education Act, in consultation with the HEA and the Combat Poverty Agency, might advise the Minister for Education on the precise criteria for defining a disadvantaged student.

As a first step towards extending the access schemes, the Commission recommended that a National Access Officer for Disadvantaged be appointed to support and co-ordinate the current initiatives at third level. The role of such an officer would be to help third-level institutions to develop co-ordinated approaches to supporting disadvantaged students both before and after entry to third-level institutions. A further role would be to advise the HEA and the Department of Education and Science on appropriate criteria for defining disadvantaged students and on related policy issues.

The Commission did not rule out the possibility that substantive access courses might need to be provided for disadvantaged school leavers to enable them to make up some course requirements or to develop some prerequisite skills. However, it considered that these courses might more appropriately be provided by bodies such as the VECs rather than by the third-level institutions. In general, the Commission was not convinced that school leavers from disadvantaged backgrounds need to undertake a specific and substantive access course prior to entering third-level education. Any scheme that will increase the number of years which a disadvantaged student is required to spend in full-time education, before graduating with a certificate or a diploma or a degree, could well serve as a disincentive for such students to remain in full-time education.

The Commission also recommended that additional financial support, over and above the current maintenance grant scheme, be made available for disadvantaged students attending third-level education. This grant should be available to all such students and should not depend on whether a student's home was adjacent to the third-level institution. It also recommended that the Department of Education and Science's Hardship Fund for third level students be increased.

The Commission also stressed the need for support services to be available for students when they have entered higher education. The Commission considered that in relation to disadvantaged students, it would be important that support services would not develop in such a way as to isolate them from the rest of the student population but would lead to their successful integration into the community of the third-level institution. The Commission also considered that there is a need to encourage the effective participation of disadvantaged students in the social and cultural life of third-level institutions.

Commission on the Points System and Mature Students

The Commission on the Points System also looked at access by mature students to higher education. The Commission recommended that by the year 2005, each third-level institution should set aside a quota of at least 15% of places for students entering at age 23 or above. This could be done by increasing the intake of mature students on a gradual basis over the next five years. In the longer term, say by the year 2015, this target might be raised to 25% - a proportion which would bring Ireland closer to the average participation rate for mature students in OECD countries as a whole.

The Commission noted growing dissatisfaction with the diverse mechanisms operated by different institutions for mature student selection. The Commission considered that there should be a single evaluation of a mature person's application for a third-level place in any broad course area and that, where diverse courses are applied for, there should be a common base evaluation of each application. In this regard the Commission recommended that third-level institutions should move towards a co-ordinated system of assessment of mature student applications, under the CAO, and that such a system be in place for mature students seeking a place commencing in Autumn 2002.

The Commission considered that there is a need for increased clarity in relation to access courses which do not necessarily lead to access to third-level institutions. To avoid misleading potential applicants, the Commission recommended that institutions should not use the title "access courses" unless there is guaranteed access to a third-level course on the successful completion of a so-called access course.

The Commission also stressed the need for support services to be available for students when they have entered higher education. The Commission considered that in relation to mature students, it would be important that support services could include induction courses. The Commission also considered that there is a need to encourage the effective participation of mature students in the social and cultural life of third-level institutions.

The Commission stressed the need for greater opportunities for students to return to third-level education on a part-time basis. It recommended that the definition of part-time education needs to be revisited. The Commission considered that a person who did not enter third-level education on leaving school should have access to the same financial support as a school leaver, if he/she wished to enter third-level education in later life, whether that be on a full-time or on a part-time basis. As an immediate step, the Commission recommended that the Department of Education and Science and the HEA develop a fund to support part-time undergraduate third-level courses. Institutions could seek an allocation from the fund on the basis of proposals for part-time courses over a certain period. Proposals would be evaluated using criteria to be drawn up by the Department of Education and Science and the HEA. The criteria should take account of and reflect major policy priorities aimed at promoting equity

across society and strengthening the economy. These priorities include the promotion of opportunities for lifelong learning, skills needs (of the individual, the economy and society) and increased participation among the disadvantaged. The extent to which courses are linked within the national framework of qualifications, particularly the extent to which they are linked to full-time courses, and the availability of transfers to these, would also be relevant. Other areas which could be taken into account in evaluating proposals include the emphasis in proposed courses on personal development and capability enhancement, as well as the need (highlighted earlier in the chapter) to develop further the provision of distance education.

Commission on the Points System and Students with Disabilities

The Commission on the Points System also looked at access by students with disabilities to higher education. The Commission recommended the continuation of the special arrangements made by the Department of Education and Science to accommodate students with physical and learning disabilities in sitting the Leaving Certificate Examination.

The Commission further recommended that each third-level institution should set aside a number of places for students with physical and learning disabilities and that institutions should consult each other in relation to ensuring the consistent consideration of applications by such students. The Commission supported the existing system of entry whereby students with a disability are categorised by the CAO as “special category applicants” and are invited to specify on their application form any special health or other special needs requirements.

The Commission also recommended that the amount in The Special Fund for Students with Disabilities should be linked directly to the participation of disabled students in third-level education and that it should increase as participation increases. The Commission urged all third-level institutions to ensure that the physical environment on-campus is accessible to the physically disabled.

1.5.2 Report by Professor Malcolm Skilbeck and Dr Helen Connell – “Access and Equity in Higher Education: An International Perspective on Issues and Strategies”

This Report was commissioned by the HEA. The authors conclude that, while the equity heartland in higher education remains the institution, the issue of equity is broadly social, cultural and economic and not just educational. Therefore, education policies alone are unlikely to be sufficient. Further progress will require more coherent, coordinated approaches across several sectors of public policy.

Based on international experience, the authors set out the elements of a comprehensive and coherent approach, which would seem to have general applicability. They also provide a framework of objectives for promoting equity in higher education which describes how opportunity can be, and is being, extended in all the stages of education from early childhood learning to postgraduate study and staff career development – the ‘educational equity chain’.

As the authors point out

“The rationale for this approach is simply that, for tertiary education to be equitable, early childhood, primary and secondary education, too, must be equitable – otherwise, the pool of students is not available.”

This report of international experience was prepared at the invitation of the HEA. Its purpose is to enlarge and deepen the consideration of policy issues, legislative requirements and institutional practice in Ireland and to assist in the development of action programmes.

The Report identifies five equity groups as the focus of education policy and debate:

- People of low socio-economic status;
- Women and girls;
- Mature age and part-time students;
- Ethnic and other minority groups;
- Persons with a disability.

The Report also refers to emerging groups (such as the mounting concern in some countries regarding poor achievement in secondary schools by adolescent boys).

With regard to socio-economic status, the report notes that expansion and diversification in higher education has increased numbers in all socio-economic categories but overall the balance remains much the same even in those countries that have striven very hard, through government intervention, to create a more equal society. A question arises, therefore, about the credibility and effectiveness of the measures taken in the educational drive for equity in social class terms, given the powerful forces in the wider socio-economic setting.

The Report points out that a significant limitation in drawing general conclusions for future action on the basis of “international good practice” is the dearth of evaluative research on the impact of established policies and programme initiatives. There are compelling reasons for improving data flows and for maintaining observatories on trends.

The Report advocates a comprehensive and coherent approach based on:

- State actions: legislation, monitoring, compliance;
- Expanding provision;
- Achieving diversity and flexibility;
- Moving toward policy coherence and integration across the education levels;
- Networks, self help, mutual advancement;
- Focus on institutions;
- Improving overall performance;
- Financing, resourcing and managing.

Continued overall volume growth in tertiary sector remains one of the most effective ways to achieve inclusiveness.

Policy, structural and vertical programme coherence across the levels of education, from early childhood to tertiary education, is often weak. Early identification and intervention are necessary at the school level, if progress is to be made in increasing the proportion of under-represented groups, seeking and eligible for, access at the tertiary level. The Report cites a publication by the World Bank in 1993: -

“The distribution of enrolments and the quality of instruction at the lower levels of education are the major determinants of representation in higher education”.

Increased provision for mature students does not of itself provide extra places for the socially and economically disadvantaged. Studies are cited suggesting that those most likely to embark on study as mature students have successfully completed secondary education, may also have tertiary level qualifications, are established in a career and seek professional advancement.

With regard to direct financial support to meritorious but needy students, the Report notes that there is increasing interest in this as an effective instrument for increasing their participation. It points out that subsidies are indiscriminate when not means tested. It concludes that well-targeted financing will continue to play an important role in equity strategies.

The Report notes that it is poor economy to admit large numbers of students and then to accept high failure and dropout rates.

For tertiary education to be equitable, early childhood, primary and secondary education, too, must be equitable – otherwise, the pool of students is not available. The Report outlines an educational equity chain – framework of objectives for promoting equity in higher education at the institutional level. This sets out objectives from basic school level through to the first years of tertiary education and academic progression.

The Report identifies future equity directions for higher education. It concludes that the task now is to concentrate on ways and means, on improving data, evaluation and follow-through. The expansion, broadening and diversification of higher education is one path to follow. The other is the hands-on encouraging, assisting and enabling of all who can benefit and contribute, whether as students, staff or both. A stronger, better evaluated knowledge base, greater clarity of purpose, and an increased readiness to consult and negotiate, are needed in policy making and implementation alike.

All must contribute if policies are to be effective: individuals institutions, governments, policy makers, special interest groups and those sections of government departments and specialist agencies that have a direct interest in or responsibility for equity in education in all its forms. Better monitoring, more evaluative, analytical and transparent studies of the conditions affecting performance and the results of interventions are advocated.

In relation to students with disabilities, Professor Skilbeck's report points out that two important features distinguish this group from other equity groups. The first is that disability can affect individuals from families throughout the social structure, and at any time with a certain randomness and the second is that, in general, persons with a disability are not a tight knit or easily identifiable group.

The Report concludes with a set of 14 propositions of wide, general applicability across the broad field of equity in higher education through which further progress towards a more equitable system of higher education may be achieved. This requires shared responsibility and concerted action between the various actors (teachers, researchers, institutions and government). These propositions are reviewed in Chapter Two.

1.5.3 Report to the HEA by Professor Robert Osborne and Ms H Leith: Evaluation of the Targeted Initiative on Widening Access for Young People from Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Backgrounds

A process of external evaluation of HEA targeted initiatives has commenced, starting with an evaluation of the initiatives for disadvantaged school-leavers being under taken by Professor Bob Osborne of the University of Ulster and Ms Helen Leith of Queens University Belfast. The report was published on 21 September, 2000. This Report is reviewed in Chapter Two.

1.5.4 “Social Background of Higher Education Entrants” by Patrick Clancy and Joy Wall

This is the first part of the fourth national survey of entrants to higher education compiled for the HEA by Professor Patrick Clancy and Ms Joy Wall. The report indicates that the overall rate of admission to higher education has risen from 20% in 1980 to 46% in 1998. The findings are reviewed in detail in Chapter Two.

1.5.5 Review of “Higher Education: Dream or Reality” (Dr. Phyllis Murphy)

This 1996 document reports on an evaluation of the Higher Education Support initiative of the Northside Partnership. This initiative was developed as a response to the very low rate of participation in higher education in the designated area of the Partnership. The strategy is to support local students from disadvantaged families and communities to enable them to complete their studies: these role models support further strategies to encourage younger students to set high ambitions for themselves. The initiative therefore has both personal and community-focused outcomes.

The report describes the operation of the initiative. It is based on an intensive personal approach: each participating student is interviewed, and a tailor-made mix of supports is put in place. Typically, the mix comprises financial or material assistance, and guidance / mentoring. Financial assistance is not provided in grant form: amounts vary widely, and are made available in non-cash formats such as travel vouchers, payment of fees, accommodation costs, credit with suppliers of books, equipment and materials, etc.

The basis of the evaluation is a survey of the perceptions of participating students, and the report illustrates the findings with direct quotations from those interviewed. These personal reflections carry the core message of the report: tailored support is a powerful and practical model methodology for supporting disadvantaged students in higher education.

1.6 Existing and planned State Initiatives at Third-Level

Approximately 40% of full-time students (including PLC students) are in receipt of maintenance grants. The student support schemes provide relatively small grants to a large number of students and are often criticised for not covering the full living costs of very poor students. It is clear that the schemes do not aim to assist a small population of very disadvantaged students, rather the aim is to support a large number of the less well off. The Report of the Advisory Committee on Third-Level Student Support was published in 1995 and raised questions about the effectiveness of the means test for student support.

The total cost of student support, comprising free fees and maintenance grants, amounted to more than £250 million in 2000. This does not include the cost of tax reliefs on fees paid or the specific interventions at third level described below.

A Table setting out details of the financial allocations at Third Level aimed at promoting access by disadvantaged persons to higher education is set out at the end of this chapter (TABLE 1). Resources for interventions at third level, aimed at promoting access by disadvantaged groups to higher education, have been significantly increased over recent years. Overall, funding for measures at third level targeted at disadvantaged students amounted to £6.8 million in 2000.

1.6.1 The Student Assistance/Access Fund

Funding for the Department of Education and Science's Student Assistance/Access Fund (originally titled the Hardship Fund) has increased from £120,000 in 1994 to £1.8 million in 2000. The Fund is intended to tackle educational disadvantage by providing financial support to disadvantaged students who might otherwise, because of financial reasons, suffer severe hardship or be unable to continue their third-level studies.

The Fund is devolved to the third level institutions. Allocations to individual colleges are based on the total full-time student enrolment in the previous academic year. The Fund is administered locally by the individual colleges. In any particular year all registered students are eligible to apply for assistance.

1.6.2 Special Fund for Students with Disabilities

Funding for the Department of Education and Science's Special Fund for Students with Disabilities has increased from £700,000 in 1999 to approx. £1.2 million in 2000. Funding is provided towards the cost of services and the purchase of equipment for students with disabilities attending courses in third level institutions or Post Leaving Certificate courses. The Fund applies to students who have serious sensory, physical and/or communicative disabilities. Grants are awarded towards the cost of special equipment, special materials, technological aids, targeted transport services, sign language interpreters and personal assistants.

The Fund is administered centrally by the Department. The Special Fund provided assistance to 314 individual students in the 1999/2000 academic year and to 512 students in 2000/01. Since its introduction in 1994, the Special Fund for Students with Disabilities has operated on a case-by-case basis.

1.6.3 Millennium Partnership Fund for Disadvantage

On 14 September, 2000, the Minister announced a new Millennium Partnership Fund for Disadvantage with a provision of £1 million in 2001. This Fund will be administered by the Department in conjunction with the Area Partnerships. It will build on the experience of the support scheme for students from disadvantaged families operated by the Dublin Northside Partnership which assists students to participate in higher education. The Area Partnerships will be invited to submit proposals.

1.6.4 HEA Targeted Initiatives

Since 1996, the HEA has been allocating funds to universities under the HEA's targeted initiatives to support institutional initiatives in these areas. Universities are invited each year to apply for funds. The HEA has not, so far, been prescriptive as to the type of initiative that may be put forward, although they must be within the broad strategic guidelines of the White Paper on Education and the Report of the Steering Committee on the Future Development of Higher Education which both made recommendations for improving the participation of these groups. Some more details on these targeted initiatives are set out on the following page.

Disadvantaged School Leavers

Types of initiative supported by the HEA to address access and participation of disadvantaged school leavers include:

- Development of links with second level schools designated as disadvantaged, involving liaison and outreach work;
- Direct entry arrangements;
- Summer schools and mentoring programmes;
- Co-operation with area-based partnership bodies;
- Parents' programmes;
- Supervised study;
- Guidance counselling;
- Supplementary tuition;
- Orientation programmes;
- Input to teacher education in relation to combating disadvantage.

Mature Students

Initiatives supported by the HEA for mature students include:

Provision of outreach workers

- Training of adult tutors;
- Development of courses and course materials;
- Orientation programmes for mature students;
- Guidance and counselling support;
- Courses in preparatory skills (study, note-taking, library and computer usage etc);
- Information packs;
- Mentoring;
- Development of on-line materials;
- Promotional materials.

Students with Disabilities

HEA support for students with disabilities is for programmatic initiatives such as:

- The development of flexible assessment mechanisms;
- Devising suitable examination arrangements;
- Provision of assistive technology and services such as braille;
- Counselling and guidance support;
- Campus transport.

TABLE 1
ALLOCATIONS PROVIDED BY/THROUGH THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
AND SCIENCE FOR THE ALLEVIATION OF DISADVANTAGE (£000)

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Student Assistance/ Access Fund	120	100	110	182	150	1,296	1,964
Special Fund for Students with Disabilities	80	105	115	218	250	700	1,233
Northside Partnership						60	75
Seed Funding for Access Officers in the IoT sector						730	109
BITE							47
TOTAL ALLOCATIONS	200	205	224	400	400	2,786	3,428
FUNDING FOR HEA TARGETED INITIATIVES							
Disadvantaged School leavers			260	475	695	785	1,069
Mature students			240	601	680	1,285	1,415
Students with Disabilities			290	567	400	539	664
Continuing Education and Training			210	239	185	55	
New Initiatives						40	
Travellers and refugees							235
TOTAL HEA			1,000	1,882	1,960	2,704	3,383
OVERALL TOTAL			1,224	2,282	2,360	5,490	6,811

CHAPTER TWO

STUDENTS FROM SOCIO-ECONOMICALLY
DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS



CHAPTER TWO STUDENTS FROM SOCIO-ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS

2.1 Introduction

Socio-economic disadvantage is about more than purely economic poverty: it is also about poverty of horizons or choices. Education is fundamental to the creation of an individual's life options and, as such, is a major factor in the response to poverty and the risk of poverty.

People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living that is regarded as 'standard' by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities that are considered standard for the majority of the population (ref. Combat Poverty Agency).

'Poverty', therefore, is not defined solely in terms of financial resources, but includes reference to the level of social exclusion experienced.

Barriers to access begin at birth and significant progress on increasing participation at third level can be achieved only in the context of the whole range of initiatives in place to tackle the underlying issues of poverty and social marginalisation. Poverty and educational disadvantage are concentrated in disadvantaged communities. Perhaps the most critical environmental factor impeding educational attainment and progression is the relatively low levels of educational attainment of the parents and adult relatives of many young disadvantaged people in junior and senior cycle education.

Poor progression rates to third level are a result of a variety of factors; however, there is a strong view that, to a significant extent, they reflect the lack of resources at second level.

In the Economic and Social Research Institute's (ESRI) Medium Term Review 1999-2005, the authors note that-

"With over 80 per cent of the younger generation having at least a Leaving Certificate, low levels of education will not only make success in the labour market very difficult, they may cut those affected off from the bulk of the population in other ways, culturally and socially. Rising levels of education alters attitudes and tastes directly, as well as indirectly through the rise in incomes. The changing nature of employment is also affecting expectations about lifestyle, leading to more sophisticated tastes. As a result, the types of goods and services consumed will change; for example, dining out and expenditure on leisure activities will become more and more the norm. In such a society social exclusion may be defined differently from today, but that will not make it any the less real.

The opportunity to tackle the underlying structural roots of disadvantage by directing educational investment towards the least advantaged now presents itself. The low entry rate to third level education among some social groups may require a much broader programme of intervention than has previously been considered. While resources must be allocated to adult education and to tackling early school leaving after the event, there are also likely to be high returns to investment in early education. The lack of state investment in the under-4 age group was one of the areas highlighted by the *Commission on the Family* (1998). The Commission's proposed "Early Years Opportunity Subsidy" for 3 year olds, to encourage and

support early education in a wide variety of settings, provides just one example of the type of initiative required. Finally, there will be a need to ensure that educational standards are further raised through attention to the training and evaluation of teachers.”

In short, improved equity of access opportunity can contribute to breaking the cycle of deprivation.

This chapter deals primarily with disadvantaged students other than mature students.

2.2 Clancy and Wall

Social Background of Higher Education Entrants is the first part of the fourth national survey of entrants to higher education compiled for the HEA by Professor Patrick Clancy and Ms. Joy Wall. This work builds upon the previous studies that were undertaken by Professor Clancy on behalf of the HEA, Participation in Higher Education (1982), Who Goes to College? (1988) and Access to College: Patterns of Continuity and Change (1995). These reports allow us to track the changing social background of entrants to higher education in Ireland over almost two decades. They paint a picture of society in transition.

The current work is based on new entrants to higher education in Autumn 1998 and provides a comprehensive profile on the social background of entrants. The full report on 1998 entrants will be published in 2001 by the HEA. The work also looks at differential participation and performance in second-level education, updating work undertaken by Professor Clancy in 1995 for the Technical Working Group of the Steering Committee on the Future Development of Higher Education. In so doing, the report takes account of the information arising from surveys carried out in 1996, 1997 and 1998 by the ESRI for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

2.2.1 Clancy and Wall Report - Summary of Key Findings

The report measures the progress of students from different social groups in entering higher education. Two indicators used are particularly relevant. The participation rate tracks the progress of different social groups in terms of estimating the proportion of that group entering higher education. The participation ratio tracks the progress of the groups in a relative way against the progress of the other social groups in society.

For the purpose of this report, the Action Group considered that it would focus its attention on the participation rate.

Participation Rate

The report indicates that the overall rate of admission to higher education has risen from 20% in 1980 to 46% in 1998. Most social groups have experienced a progressive increase in the proportion going on to higher education is shown in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2
ESTIMATED PROPORTION OF AGE COHORT ENTERING FULL-TIME HIGHER EDUCATION BY FATHERS' SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUP IN 1980, 1986, 1992 AND 1998

Socio-Economic Groups	1998	1992	1986	1980
Farmers	0.75	0.53	0.42	0.30
Other Agricultural Occupations	0.35	0.24	0.12	0.06
Higher Professional	1.00 ³	0.85	0.72	0.59
Lower Professional	0.48	0.42	0.47	0.33
Employers and Managers	0.84	0.67	0.45	0.42
Salaried Employees	0.55	0.48	0.58	0.59
Intermediate Non-Manual Workers	0.33	0.27	0.28	0.22
Other Non-Manual Workers	0.31	0.26	0.11	0.09
Skilled Manual Workers	0.34	0.28	0.13	0.09
Semi-Skilled Manual Workers	0.23	0.19	0.11	0.09
Unskilled Manual Workers	0.22	0.12	0.04	0.03
TOTAL	0.46	0.36	0.25	0.20

(Source: Table 15, Clancy and Wall, 2000)

The highest proportionate increase has occurred for those social groups which had very low participation rates in 1980. However it is clear that there are still 6 of the 11 social groups where less than 40% of the relevant population enter higher education. A summary of the position for these social groups is as follows:

- 22% of the children of Unskilled Manual Workers entered higher education in 1998, up from 12% in 1992. This group includes transport porters and labourers;
- For the children of Semi-skilled Manual Workers, 23% entered, up from 19% in 1992. This group includes office cleaners, laundry workers, textile and clothing workers and packers and bottlers;
- 31% of the children of Other Non-Manual Workers, for example, bus drivers and postmen/women, entered, up from 26% in 1992;
- In relation to the children of Intermediate Non-Manual Workers, for example, clerks, typists, shop assistants and bar-workers, 33% entered, up from 27% in 1992;
- 34% of the children of Skilled Manual Workers entered, up from 28% in 1992. This group includes electricians and mechanics;
- For other Agricultural Occupations, including agricultural labourers and foresters, 35% entered, up from 24% in 1992.

Furthermore, it is clear that there is only a pattern of modest improvement in participation in higher education among two social groups over the period since the second report in 1986 - Lower Professionals (for example, teachers, nurses and journalists) and Intermediate Non-Manual Workers. In addition, for the Salaried Employees group (for example, sales representatives and insurance brokers),

³ Clancy's report notes that this is an over estimate.

the 1998 estimated participation rate is below the 1980 estimate although there has been an improvement (from 48% to 55%) between 1992 and 1998.

In all four surveys, the Higher Professional group (including university lecturers, doctors, dentists, accountants and lawyers) has had the highest participation rate, with an estimate of full participation in 1998 (although the report does note that, for technical reasons, this is an overestimate), up from 85% in 1992. The group with the second highest participation rate is the Employers and Managers group (including senior civil and public servants and employers). The 1998 estimate for this group is 84%, having increased in each successive survey from 42% in 1980. The participation rate of the Farmers group is the third highest, having reached an estimated 75% in 1998. Here, also, the pattern is one of continuing improvement, with the increase between 1992 and 1998 (from 53% to 75%) being especially noteworthy.

It is clear from looking at these participation rates that all groups, with the exception of Salaried Employees, have increased their participation rate in higher education since 1980. This general pattern would be expected from the major increase in the provision of third level places. However, it is also clear that all groups show a participation rate of more than 20% - a major contrast with the position in 1980. In general, the emerging picture is as follows:

- For 2 of the 11 social groups, less than 25% of the relevant population go to higher education - Unskilled Manual Workers, Semi-Skilled Manual Workers;
- For 4 of the 11 social groups, around one third of the relevant population go to higher education - Other Non-Manual Workers, Intermediate Non-Manual Workers, Skilled Manual Workers and other Agricultural Occupations;
- For 2 of the 11 social groups, around one half of the relevant population go to higher education - Salaried Employees and Lower Professionals;
- For the remaining 3 social groups - Farmers, Employers and Managers and Higher Professionals - 75%, or over, of the relevant population go to higher education.

2.2.2 The Three Critical Transitions

The focus of this survey by Clancy and Wall, as well as of the three earlier studies, has been on the pattern of access to higher education. However, it is well established that the patterns of inequality which are apparent at the point of entry to third level are the result of a cumulative process of disadvantage which first manifest themselves much earlier in the educational cycle. The source of educational disadvantage is rooted in the differential economic, social and cultural capital of families. It is reflected in unequal opportunities in accessing pre-school education, and in differential participation and performance at first level. However, differential participation and performance at second level serve as more proximate determinants of access to higher education.

Three crucial schooling transitions have been identified, at which the effects of social background are significant: -

- Students from lower socio-economic groups are significantly less likely to complete second level education;
- Those students from lower socio-economic groups that sit the Leaving Certificate tend to achieve significantly lower grades; and
- For students with modest levels of performance in the Leaving Certificate, those from higher socio-economic groups have a higher transfer rate to higher education.

The first transition relates to whether students remain on in school to take the Leaving Certificate. While overall, almost 81% of school leavers have taken the Leaving Certificate and less than 4% left before taking the Junior Certificate, the second-level retention rate varies by social group. For example, 8% or less of the two Professional groups failed to take the Leaving Certificate, by comparison with 35% of the Unskilled Manual group. The report shows that the main change over the period since the earlier report is an improvement in the retention rates among the lower social groups. There has been an increase of 13% in the numbers from the Semi-Skilled and Unskilled Manual groups who leave school with Leaving Certificate level of education.

The second transition relates to the level of achievement of those school leavers who stay to complete the Leaving Certificate. The pattern of attainment is strongly influenced by social group; the higher the school leavers' social group, the higher the level of attainment.

The report shows that, while there is some improvement in the overall level of achievement, there is no clear pattern in the changes in performance by social group.

The third transition is in respect of those who have both survived to Leaving Certificate level and achieved a minimum attainment threshold in this examination. In general, for those with modest levels of attainment the percentages going on to higher education are lower for the Unskilled Manual, Semi-Skilled Manual, Skilled Manual and Intermediate Non-Manual groups. For those with five pass grades but no honours grade at Leaving Certificate and those with just one honour and at least four passes, the percentages from the Unskilled Manual group entering higher education are just 9% and 8% respectively. This compares with more than 30% for the Higher Professional group. However, for those achieving higher grades in the Leaving Certificate, the social differentials in the transition to higher education are not significant. This absence of significant social group differentials is most marked for those with the highest level of attainment (5 or more honours).

The report shows that there has been an increase of 12% in the numbers, overall, going on to higher education. While this increase is more marked for those with high levels of attainment it is also significant for those with only five passes in the Leaving Certificate. There has only been a minimal change in the transfer rate from the Higher Professional and Employers and Managers groups, perhaps because the transfer rates from these groups were already close to saturation in the early 1990s.

In summary, the series of transitions, which these data allow us to examine, make it clear that parental socio-economic status is a powerful determinant of progress through the educational system. The effect of social background is especially evident at three transition points. First, retention rates to the end of the senior cycle are highly class specific. Second, for those who stay on to complete the Leaving Certificate, levels of achievement are also highly class specific; the percentage differences between the socio-economic groups are especially significant at this transition. Third, the likelihood of those with modest levels of performance going on to higher education is strongly related to class. However, for those who survive to Leaving Certificate and achieve a high level of attainment in this examination the socio-economic group differences in transition rates are not very significant.

Clancy and Wall conclude that:

“...it is necessary to recognise one of the paradoxes of higher education policy with respect to equality of access. Our analysis of data from the most recent School Leavers' Surveys confirms our view that it is likely that some of the most fruitful areas for policy intervention lie outside the higher education system. The socio-economic differentials which we have identified at each of the educational transitions suggests that policies in respect of increasing

retention rates to Leaving Certificate and facilitating higher attainment levels at this level will be especially effective in reducing socio-economic group inequalities in access to higher education. The broadening of the policy agenda to encompass initiatives at second level does not, of course, imply that policy makers at third level sector can abdicate their responsibility to tackle inequalities. Policies which facilitate completion and enhanced attainment at second level are viewed as complements, not alternatives to third level initiatives."

2.3 Osborne and Leith

Starting in 1996, the HEA commenced allocating funding towards a number of targeted initiatives. An outline of these was given in chapter one.

A process of external evaluation of the HEA targeted initiatives has commenced, starting with an evaluation of the initiatives for disadvantaged school-leavers undertaken by Professor Bob Osborne of the University of Ulster and Ms. Helen Leith of Queens University Belfast. Their report was published by the HEA on 21 September, 2000.

The report concludes that the universities have responded positively to the challenge of creating a series of activities designed to enhance the opportunities of those from the lower socio-economic backgrounds under the HEA's Targeted Initiative. The report considers that, judged solely on a numbers basis, the schemes have not matched expectations nationally or those set by the universities themselves. The report argues that it is not appropriate to reach a judgement solely on the basis of entry numbers and stresses two factors - the extent to which the task of increasing the numbers of entrants is a long-term one, and the effect of the booming economy and the availability of jobs.

The report considers that while the universities have made good progress in developing schemes, the period of innovation is now over and it is appropriate to consider a more standardised and coherent approach at national level. A national approach is appropriate, not just in order to ensure the effective delivery of national policy, but also to ensure that students' interests are not put below those of individual institutions. State support for widening access must also ensure that programmes are cost-effective. Mutual recognition of institutions' access programmes and transferability between institutions are vital for students. Widening access is a task for the third level sector, as identified in the 1995 White Paper, not just a task for the universities alone. Regional partnerships between universities and with other third level colleges must be encouraged.

The report suggests that there are a number of matters that the development of a national strategy can endorse. First is the extent to which financial support is targeted on students from the least well-off backgrounds. While in Europe this typically includes a grant, other countries also target other benefits. Guidance and counselling is particularly well developed in Finland with "comprehensive services embedded in the school system from the lower secondary level upwards". These are designed, inter alia, to make progress to higher education a simple and accessible process for students, particularly those with no parental experience of it. European experience also suggests the value of regional partnerships, with a range of third level institutions co-operating within a region to encourage wider access. Spain and the Netherlands have developed effective regional partnerships to encourage transfer and participation. European evidence also identifies a common problem of inadequate data at the national level to track changes and to monitor for improvement, a problem also identified in Ireland.

The report identifies a series of good practice policy and delivery issues for the universities and the HEA in order to improve the efficacy of the current Targeted Initiative. Some of these require immediate consideration by the HEA with regard to future funding. Among the specific points raised in the report are that: -

- The universities need to develop a more rounded and robust rationale for widening access activities;
- Alongside this need for a robust rationale for widening access there is also much to be done by the universities in terms of ensuring that widening access is placed in the mainstream of policy making and as regards academic and resource decisions;
- All universities should give equal importance to targeting young people from disadvantaged backgrounds as well as to widening opportunities for mature students and students with disabilities. Some universities seem to regard different parts of the widening access agenda as more important than other parts;
- Currently there is an uneven picture in the extent to which institutions match their funding from the Targeted Initiative with resources from their block grant or through additional external funding. Institutions should demonstrate their commitment to widening access by either raising external funding or allocating resources from their block grants, or both;
- The absorption of financial penalties students incur, as a result of experiencing academic difficulties (e.g. payment of repeat year tuition fees), is a practical issue to be considered and addressed;
- Institutions are conscious of the need to provide adequate pastoral and academic support for students progressing onto undergraduate courses from widening access programmes. Support must be available but not intrusive. Increasing numbers of access students may overwhelm existing support provided by individual Access Officers.

The report seeks to identify further issues for consideration under a national strategy. Among the specific points raised are that: -

- Universities need to promote their widening access schemes as much as possible. Information should appear in Prospectuses and have dedicated pages on University Web sites. This is part of the need for universities to be more overt about their widening access activities;
- The criteria for the selection of partner (second-level) schools need to be clear;
- Likewise, the selection of individual pupils needs to be explicit and based on common criteria;
- The HEA needs to insist that universities conduct appropriate statistical monitoring of all their activities under the Targeted Initiative. This monitoring of activities and tracking of individuals should be done on a common basis;
- Universities should focus their activities on the three transition points outlined above. This may involve, for example, an extension of activities to the upper part of the primary sector in terms of 'taster' and 'fun' activities on campus to ensure increased completion of second level education of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds;
- Individual student funding needs consideration. The impact of part-time working in schools is having a negative impact on the numbers of students progressing into third level. Financial assistance to pupils whilst still in second level could help reverse this trend;
- The HEA should insist that universities put in place measures for quality assurance specific to widening access programmes. These evaluations must pay due regard to the national policy framework. The appointment of External Examiners is appropriate in some circumstances;
- The HEA should, after discussion with the universities, provide a common basis for monitoring and tracking of activities undertaken in widening access programmes and for individual student's progress within institutions. Tracking should also encompass individuals who progress to a third level institution other than that running the access programme.

2.4 Issues arising in relation to Disadvantaged School Leavers

The Action Group considers that the emerging issues affecting disadvantaged school leavers could be outlined as follows:

- The need for a national strategy for improving access by disadvantaged students to higher education which would enable policies and practices to be developed in a co-ordinated way, including at appropriate regional levels;
- The need for funding to support the scale of developments that are needed;
- A concern is that there is a very low number of students taking direct access places to date under the initiatives;
- The need for higher education institutions to develop a robust rationale for widening access activities and to place widening access in the mainstream of policy making and academic and resource decisions;
- The need for attention to be focussed not only to ensuring that disadvantaged students can access higher education but also that they can participate and benefit from higher education once they have entered – there can be a problem with failing a year and needing to pay fees for repeats;
- The need for national co-ordination of the initiatives at second level including linkages to third-level institutions;
- The need for a clear national definition of a disadvantaged student;
- The need for increased co-ordination between access schemes, e.g., where a student wishes to go to a third-level institution other than the one to which his or her school is linked;
- The need to consider links with individual disadvantaged students outside of a (designated) disadvantaged school;
- With the booming economy, disadvantaged students who have succeeded in getting a third level place may increasingly be turning down places in order to take up work;
- The need to conduct appropriate statistical monitoring of all access activities on a common basis;
- The extent to which a national approach should have third-level involvement in assisting disadvantaged students at each of the three key transitions – completion of second-level education, performance in the Leaving Certificate and transfer to higher education;
- The need for post-entry supports;
- The need for a level of student support for disadvantaged students which would enable them to participate fully in higher education.

2.5 Links with programmes at first and second levels

There are strong links between poor educational achievement and leaving school without certification, on the one hand, and subsequent unemployment or under-employment on the other. Targeting supports at young people who are at risk of educational disadvantage and early school leaving is therefore a priority issue for the Department. Such targeting begins in a limited way at pre-school level and more widely at primary and post primary levels.

The key measures underlying the Department's approach to countering educational disadvantage are: -

- Prevention
- Early Intervention
- Targeting
- Individual Needs Identification

- Parental Involvement and Development
- Positive Discrimination
- Curricular Adaptation
- Methodological Adaptation
- In school and out of school services
- Mentoring
- Allocation of resources to school subject to specific conditions

2.5.1 Pre-schooling/Early Childhood Education

Current provision by the Department of Education and Science:

The first initiative in the area of pre-school education was the Rutland Street project, which involved the Van Leer Foundation in the 1969-74 period and has since been supported by the Department. The project caters for 95 pupils aged 3-5 years; the pre-school centre has a specific teaching staff allocation, classroom assistants, secretarial services and cooks, together with the provision of school meals. In 1999, £125,000, exclusive of teacher salaries, was spent on this programme.

Early Start is a one year pre-school intervention programme for pupils aged 3 years who are most at risk in areas of social disadvantage. It aims to expose young children to an educational programme which will enhance their overall development, prevent school failure and offset the effects of social disadvantage. Each Early Start project attracts special capitation funding of £75 per pupil, a qualified primary teacher and a trained childcare worker, a start up grant of £4,500 for materials and a grant of £1,500 to foster parental involvement and development. In 1999 over £2.1m was spent on this programme, benefiting 1,613 pupils in 56 classes.

In addition, the Department supports 53 pre-school classes for up to 636 Traveller children, managed by local voluntary bodies and the Traveller community. The Department pays 98% of teaching and transport costs, plus grants for equipment and materials. In 1999, £770,000 was spent by the Department on this programme.

The White Paper on Early Childhood Education, "Ready to Learn", was published in December 1999. It sets out a comprehensive strategy for the development of early childhood education for children up to six years. Action is proposed on a wide range of issues including: promotion of quality of provision, measures to facilitate and encourage parental involvement in their children's early education and assistance for providers in meeting quality standards and a system of inspection to determine whether they do so, and to assist them in doing so. A particular focus is placed on those groups of children, who, through disadvantage or special needs, are less likely to reach their potential from the education system. The cornerstones of the new system will be the Quality in Education (QE) mark and the Early Childhood Education Agency. The State will support existing provision to enhance quality of provision but will become involved where necessary in direct provision for the priority target groups: children from disadvantaged backgrounds and children with special needs.

2.5.2 First Level

At primary level targeted measures include the Disadvantaged Area Scheme (316 schools), the Home School Community Liaison scheme (HSCL) and the New Primary Programme, launched by the Minister on 4th January 2001, which will benefit 2,276 primary schools, involve the appointment of 204 extra teachers and extra funding of over £3.9m in grants over 3 years (incorporating Breaking the Cycle, the Support Teacher project and Learning Support teacher provision).

2.5.3. Support spanning first and second levels

Supports for designated schools at both primary and second level include concessionary/ex quota staffing, additional capitation grants and the Home School Community Liaison scheme. The HSCL scheme promotes parental involvement in collaborative work in partnership with teachers, and the development of both for the task in order to maximise the benefits for the children/young people.

The 8-15 Early School Leaver Initiative (ESLI) was initiated in 1998 and spans both primary and post primary levels. It incorporated 17 Project, Research and Support/Evaluation Strands. The 17 projects in 14 areas are testing models for the development of an integrated delivery of the services of a range of statutory and voluntary agencies to the targeted young people. The research strand includes the identification of characteristics associated with educational disadvantage and early school leaving and a study of integrated services. The 17 projects are being continued from July 2000 until August 2002 and the initiative will be extended to additional areas in 2001.

2.5.4 The National Educational Psychological Agency (NEPS)

The National Educational Psychological Agency (NEPS) is also a key support service. NEPS was established from 1 September 1999, initially on an administrative basis, as a dedicated Executive Agency that is operationally separate from other divisions and sections of the Department. NEPS has delegated authority to develop and provide an educational psychological service to all students who need it in primary and second level schools and in certain other centres supported by the Department. The NEPS budget for 2001 is £7.4m.

A Management Committee, consisting of officials of the Department of Education and Science, the Department of Health and Children, and of the Health Boards, oversees the development of the Agency. A National Policy Advisory Board acts as a consultative body in respect of planning and development. There are now 103 psychologists serving with NEPS (of whom 54 appointed since September 2000), who provide an educational psychological service to all second-level schools and to approximately 725 primary schools. Improvement and expansion of the service offered by NEPS will begin shortly once the new psychologists have completed their induction training. The aim is to have a comprehensive service in place for schools by 2004.

The Action Group in particular supports the recommendation in the report of the NEPS planning group (September 1998) for a balance of 65% casework and 35% for support and development work for educational psychologists. The report acknowledges that such support and development opens up the opportunity to help schools to develop preventative strategies in relation to learning and behavioural matters and also in relation to issues, such as truancy and early school leaving. Such matters are not dealt with effectively by casework interventions alone because underlying causes and patterns of behaviour are too well established by the time the issues arise.

***Note:** The Action Group was mandated to make recommendations and these are presented throughout the Report and are numbered in a continuous sequence.*

RECOMMENDATION NO 1

The Action Group endorses the recommendation that the NEPS implement a balance of 65% casework and 35% for support and development work for educational psychologists.

2.5.5 Second Level

At second level the Disadvantaged Area Scheme (211 schools) and Stay in School Retention Initiative (SSRI) launched in November 1999 support at risk pupils. The SSRI has been extended to 117 schools from September 2000 (15.6% of post primary schools) and seeks to improve young people's overall retention levels. Schools in 23 counties are included (no schools in Roscommon, Leitrim and Sligo are included at present). The SSRI marks a departure from traditional policy as the funding is granted to schools on the basis of plans that they will be helped to design themselves. At the core of the initiative is a multi-annual written plan for the provision of integrated services to targeted young people at risk of early school leaving. Resources are allocated to schools for the implementation of the local plan, following acceptance by the Department of its contents.

The plan will provide for a range of targeted measures directed at the particular needs of the young people at risk of early school leaving, with clear projected outcomes in terms of their retention through senior cycle completion. A key requirement of the individual retention plans will be that the school, in collaboration with the local representatives of a range of agencies, will operate on a multi-agency basis and establish appropriate cross community, collaborative working links in delivering on its commitments. The contract will also provide for additional resources and ongoing reporting and review mechanisms. Fundamental to the scheme will be a direct link between the continuation of resources and the achievement of agreed targets.

The Department has seconded three school principals to coordinate the SSRI. The role of the coordinators is to enable and support schools in developing, implementing and evaluating local collaborative plans. They also have a role in liaising between the schools and the Department.

2.6 Career Guidance Provision in Second-level Education

The Government is committed to enabling as many young people as possible to take advantage of the new opportunities in further education, training and employment. One of the main objectives of successive Governments has been the improvement of the retention rate to completion of senior cycle. An important part of the strategy is that guidance counsellors should work with students, parents and teaching colleagues to ensure that the education provided is relevant and rewarding for each individual student so that they will wish to continue in education and thus improve their life chances.

Guidance counsellors are involved in three crucial areas of influence in schools:

- Provision of careers and educational guidance to all students in the school;
- Contribution to those curricular initiatives that have a guidance dimension, e.g. transition year, work experience;
- Involvement in individual, personal counselling for those with particular needs.

All second level schools are allocated hours for guidance and counselling. These range from a minimum of 8 hours per week ex quota, up to 2 ex quota posts for schools whose enrolment is over 1,000 students. An additional 50 guidance posts are being created in second level schools as part of the "Guidance Fund" initiative, under "The New Deal - a Plan for Educational Opportunities". These posts will be allocated on the basis of proposals/applications submitted, which should have an emphasis on promoting links with local enterprises and with special reference to young people at risk. The guidance service in schools is also complemented by guidance services, under the lifelong learning measure, for young people who have not progressed within the formal system.

The National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) is an agency of the Department of Education and Science. Its main roles are to support and develop guidance practice in all areas of education and to inform the policy of the Department in the field of guidance.

Among its current activities, the NCGE is carrying out an audit of guidance provision in second level schools and is engaged in a "School Guidance Review" pilot project which has the overall aim of assisting schools in developing a school plan to improve guidance provision. This will be carried out in the context of School Development Planning.

2.7 Rural/Urban Dimension

The Action Group considered the specific aspects of equity in the context of the rural/urban dimension. The NDP provides for the allocation of the Third Level Access Fund on a regional basis (BMW Region and S&E Region).

The majority of disadvantaged pupils live in rural areas but are geographically dispersed, whereas there are large scale concentrations of disadvantage in specific urban areas. It can be more common for a rural school to have a high proportion of disadvantaged students but it may not receive specific additional resources from the Department of Education and Science. The initiative "Giving Children an Even Break by Tackling Disadvantage" which was launched by the Minister for Education and Science in January 2001 is intended, in part, to address this. The new programme will provide £26m over three years for teaching/financial resources and a support service.

RECOMMENDATION NO 2

The Action Group recommends that an immediate evaluation be undertaken by the Department of Education and Science, in the context of the current audit of guidance provision or otherwise, to determine the effectiveness of existing provision of guidance counselling at second level, with specific regard to Third Level Access by students in all schools, both urban and rural. This would enable the determination of inter alia, the appropriate level of provision. Such an evaluation should consider alternative modes of provision and should include recommendations as appropriate.

Based on its process of consultations, the Action Group has grounds to believe that existing guidance provision is not always effective, particularly in reaching the lower socio-economic groups and that substantial enhancements in the service may be necessary.

RECOMMENDATION NO 3

The Action Group recommends that the Department of Education and Science further develop in-service training, and other supports, for guidance counsellors, having specific regard to Third Level Access.

2.8 The scope of the objectives of the existing initiatives at early childhood, primary and post primary levels

In order for equity of access to have meaning, individuals must have the belief that the educational system can adapt to meet individual needs. The Action Group acknowledges that the incremental

effects of the supports in place/being put in place by the Department to support children from disadvantaged backgrounds at pre-school, first and second levels will be increasingly effective. A long-term strategy is required with defined targets and outcomes, building on the early interventions described earlier in the chapter, that will require ongoing commitment and resources from the State. Completion to the end of senior cycle by the more able young people in disadvantaged areas and their transfer to third level will result in their forming a significant cohort of role models for others in their communities and will be a key outcome of such strategies.

The Action Group emphasises the crucial importance of promoting the value of education throughout the community. Initiatives must include measures targeted at parents with a view to impacting on their children. The purpose would be to motivate both parents and children. Expectation horizons must be broadened to embrace not only the successful completion of second level but, equally, progression to, and within third-level. Community organisations must also be involved.

The Action Group notes that the Commission on the Points System pointed out that the above initiatives have developed over a number of years. Initial criteria for resource allocation have changed and in many cases have become more rigorous as a result of further research into disadvantage. The criteria for allocating additional resources need to be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that they continue to be focused on the areas of greatest need. From time to time, some schools will cease to meet the criteria and, in other cases, schools not previously designated will become eligible for additional resources if their situation deteriorates. The Commission recommended the continual evaluation of initiatives to tackle disadvantage at second-level and of the criteria used to allocate additional resources.

The Action Group endorses these recommendations and makes the following recommendations:

RECOMMENDATION NO 4

The Action Group believes that focus must be placed on students in early childhood, primary and early secondary levels, as well as on students in the upper secondary cycle. The Group recommends that the existing focus of the special initiatives, where the emphasis is on retaining children in school to Leaving Certificate level, should be reviewed. The Action Group believes that the objectives must encompass the additional objectives of increasing awareness of higher education options and encouraging and supporting better performance in the Leaving Certificate and transfer to higher education.

The structures already in place, including those for HSCL, SSRI and other Community based initiatives and other programmes undertaken by Third Level Institutions at second level, should be fully utilised to promote access opportunities and transfer to higher education should be one of the indicators used for the evaluation of SSRI.

RECOMMENDATION NO 5

The Action Group recommends that the various interventions at early childhood, primary and second level to address disadvantage be reviewed by the Educational Disadvantage Committee. The various interventions need to be further developed in an integrated and coherent fashion to ensure the optimum impact on students in greatest need.

2.9 Department of Education and Science: Special Initiatives- Disadvantaged

The Department of Education and Science currently provides financial assistance to a small number of special initiatives which support links between second level schools and local communities in disadvantaged areas and third-level institutions. Partial funding was allocated in 2000 to support the following programmes:

- Clondalkin Higher Education Access Programme (CHEAP);
- Ballymun Initiative for Third Level Education (BITE);
- Accessing College Education (ACE), Tallaght;
- Limerick Community based Education Initiative (LCBEI);
- Trinity Access Project (TAP);
- Blanchardstown Third Level Access Programme.

The Action Group notes the random and uncertain nature of this funding and believes that State support for this type of intervention must be enhanced and developed on a systematic basis.

RECOMMENDATION NO 6

The Action Group recommends that, following the establishment of the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education⁴ (The National Office):

- (a) the existing scheme of State financial assistance for special initiatives, which support links between second level schools and local communities in disadvantaged areas and third-level institutions, should form an integral part of the National Programme described in Chapter Six;**
- (b) the existing level of funding be substantially increased (at least doubled from 2000 out-turn) and administered, on behalf of the Department of Education and Science, by the National Office to enable systematic funding of existing programmes and the funding of additional programmes.**

2.10 Baseline Indicators (socio-economic disadvantage) and targets for 2003 and 2006

The NDP, published in November 1999, provides for major investment in the education sector, over the period 2000-2006, including the Third Level Access measure. As part of the process of securing and drawing down funding, there is an obligation to establish indicators and targets for each measure.

The Action Group proposes two indicators for the category of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Table 3 of Clancy and Wall shows that six of the ten socio-economic groups were under-represented in terms of entry to higher education in 1998⁵. The Action Group considers that data on the two most under-represented groups, namely Unskilled and Agricultural Workers, should be used to provide baseline data and as a basis for target setting.

⁴ One of the key recommendations of the Action Group is the creation of this Office. The rationale and functions are set out in Chapter 6.

⁵ These socio-economic groups differ from those reported in Table 2 of this Report. Table 2 of this Report is based on the older socio-economic group categories. The indicators set out here are based on new categorisations.

The objective of the measures being proposed by the Action Group is to increase participation among all six under-represented groups. The targets proposed by the Action Group are based on the two most under-represented groups as the greatest concentration of students most in need would be covered by these groups.

The Action Group emphasises that the focus of the interventions proposed is not confined to persons in the two groups being used for target setting.

RECOMMENDATION NO 7

The Action Group recommends that targets for increased participation at Third Level by students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds be fixed as follows:

Indicator No 1

National Participation Rate for Unskilled/Agricultural Workers

Baseline 1998	16%
2003	22%
2006	27%

Note: These targets are based on an estimated 10.5% of the population. This amounts to approx. 5,362 (ie $766,057 \times 10.5\% = 80,440/15 = 5,362$). At present participation among this group is 16% or approx. 860 students. Assuming a constant population, the targets would achieve

- By 2003 ($5,362 \times 22\% = 1,180$) an increase over baseline of first time entrants of 320 entrants per annum;
- By 2006 ($5,362 \times 27\% = 1,450$) an increase over baseline of first time entrants of 590 entrants per annum.

Table 6 of Clancy and Wall gives the distribution of higher education entrants by the six social class categories. This shows that three Groups were under-represented in 1998. The objective of the measures being proposed by the Action Group is to increase participation among all three under-represented classes.

The Action Group considers that data on the single most under-represented class, namely the Unskilled class, should be used to provide baseline data and as a basis for target setting. The targets proposed by the Action Group are based on this class, as the greatest concentration of students most in need would be covered by this class. The Action Group emphasises that the focus of the interventions proposed are not confined to persons in the social class being used for target setting.

RECOMMENDATION NO 8

The Action Group recommends that targets for increased participation at Third Level by students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds be fixed as follows:

Indicator No 2

National Participation Rate for the Unskilled social class

Baseline 1998	20%
2003	27%
2006	33%

Full details of these indicators, including breakdowns by region and by gender are shown in Annex 7.

2.11 Strategies aimed at meeting targets

The Action Group has been set the task of identifying steps to radically increase access by disadvantaged groups to third level education. In relation to students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, targets have been advanced aimed at increasing annual intake to third level over current baseline by 320 additional entrants per annum by 2003, and 590 per annum by 2006.

The students who will make up the increased entry are currently in the second level system: those who might enter third level in 2003 are at Transition Year or Junior Certificate stage, while potential 2006 entrants are in first year. Long-term strategies to improve levels of participation and achievement generally can not be relied on to bring about the targeted increases; therefore, a three-part, short-term strategy is proposed:

1. Identifying the Target Group
2. Encouraging and supporting the target group to transfer into third level
3. Post-Entry Support

2.11.1 Identifying the Target Group

Who are the students who will make up the projected increase in Third Level entrants? They are now in second - level education. It is very difficult to identify them within their school contexts, except where there is one school catering for a particular disadvantaged neighbourhood.

The majority of socio-economically disadvantaged students live in identifiable communities. The typical student body in a disadvantaged district consists of four cohorts:

- Those in danger of leaving school early. These are unlikely to stay in school as far as Leaving Certificate. Changing their education outcomes takes many years, beginning with very early interventions (e.g Early Start, HSCL, ESLI);
- Those who will stay in school to Junior Certificate, but whose progression beyond that is doubtful. A realistic improved outcome for this group would be retention to Leaving Certificate: many of them will take LCAP, or a 'pass' Leaving Certificate. (SSRI targets this group in many schools);
- Those who will probably stay to Leaving Certificate, but at present are unlikely to apply for college, or do well enough to get the points for a course that would interest them. A strong, well-focused intervention would increase the entry from this group;
- Those who are college-bound anyway.

A short to medium-term strategy should be aimed at the third cohort in the above list.

Local Area Partnerships and other community groups, with links to the schools, are well placed to identify the target group on a district basis.

The following factors are considered by the Action Group to be most relevant to the identification of individual students in the target groups:

- Financial
 - ESRI Net Disposable Income per Household per Adult Equivalent formula - measures the level of disposable income within a household taking into account the composition of each household (i.e. how many adults and children there are) and compares this against the average national figure. Households who have less than half-average income can be regarded as being below the poverty line;
 - Eligibility for the Local Authority Maintenance Grant;
 - Dependency on Social Welfare.
- Educational
 - Educational attainment of parents and siblings;
 - School attended (range of options available, rate of progression to third level);
 - Student targeted by Early School Leaving or Community based Access Initiative.
- Social/Community
 - Is the student living in a community targeted by an area-based Partnership company?;
 - Parents' employment status;
 - Type of housing.
- Cultural
 - Membership of a community with low progression rate to third level;
 - Membership of the Travelling community;
 - Membership of a minority ethnic group.
- Geographical
 - Living in a marginalised urban/rural community;
 - Lack of access to services like health or transport;

2.11.2 Strategies to encourage the target group to participate at Third Level

Local Area Partnerships and Third Level Access Programmes have been working to encourage and support students from disadvantaged communities to apply for college, and to improve their capacity to challenge for places and cope with the demands of study at third level. A range of actions have been found to be effective. Some concentrate on age-groups that are close to college entry, others include younger groups. The actual mix of actions undertaken will depend on the particular needs identified and on the opportunities afforded by the local situation – proximity to a college, types of schools, attitudes of school personnel. Activities such as supervised study facilities are better delivered at community level. Some actions are group focused; others are directed at supporting the learning of individual students. Typical actions include: -

- Parent support programmes;
- Programmes to discourage excessive part-time work ;
- College familiarisation programmes;
- Provision of alternative entry arrangements;
- Organisation of tutorial programmes, extension programmes, grinds;
- Provision of bursaries, scholarships, access to learning opportunities such as language classes;
- Sponsorship for participation in summer programmes such as language camps, Gaeltacht courses, Discovering University;

- Careers support – individuals, groups, events;
- Provision of local study facilities – sometimes including reference materials and IT resources. Some facilities also offer study mentoring support, either general or with specific subject focus; mentoring may involve assistance from third-level students.

In some districts, actions are implemented as cohesive local programmes – e.g. BITE in Ballymun, CHEAP in Clondalkin, CHALLENGER in Northside, ACE in Tallaght. These programmes tend to operate on a comparatively small scale, usually with uncertain funding from year to year.

There is at present no national programme funded under the aegis of the DES that has as its primary objective the encouragement of participation by disadvantaged students in higher education. The existing targeted initiatives (ESLI and SSRI) are aimed at reducing early school leaving or ensuring transition from primary to second level.

Actions to support students, post-entry to third level, including financial provision, do have a positive effect on encouraging more disadvantaged students to apply. There is considerable evidence that the role modelling provided by current students also helps to develop local acceptance of Third Level as an attainable goal. Nevertheless, the effects of these factors in increased entry are unlikely to be significant enough in the short term to contribute in a large way to the targets of the Action Group for 2003-06.

2.11.3 Post Entry Support

One of the barriers to third level facing students from lower socio-economic backgrounds is the inadequacy of the third-level grant. Under the present structure, Local Authorities and VECs devote substantial amounts of time and administrative resources to processing grant applications. If grant applications were to be processed centrally by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, the target group could be more easily identified for any proposed 'enhanced' level of grant provision.

Third level access initiatives have developed a menu of supports for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These supports include:

- Orientation programmes;
- Financial support;
- Personal Tutors;
- Guidance and progression;
- Mentoring;
- Peer Support.

Some Partnerships operate support programmes at local level, typically involving financial support, and/or guidance and mentoring.

To maximise the rate of entry, and of subsequent success in college, it is vital that programmes to encourage participation and post-entry support initiatives be carefully integrated, so that students experience a continuity of support.

2.11.4 Who should intervene and how?

Identification

Local communities should be empowered to develop their capacity to support their local children to access college. Area Partnerships and community groups should be encouraged to play a key role, working with the schools/colleges as appropriate, to identify target students.

Encouraging more Participation

RECOMMENDATION NO 9

The Action Group recommends that local consortia of schools, the Community sector and the third-level institution(s) should be formed in communities/districts identified as having low rates of participation in third level education. Each consortium should be invited to develop a plan appropriate to the particular community/district, within guidelines informed by experience to date.

At the pre-entry stage the local community and third level college, working with the Department of Education and Science, can best deliver the various initiatives. These actions have significant resource implications. Resources such as the DES support teams should be drawn upon, e.g., to disseminate information at all levels. Recommendation No 9 envisages adequate financial resourcing for such actions.

2.12 Access Pathways

Following its study of access and equity, the Council of Europe (1993) recommended, inter alia: (1) that admission procedures should recognise the different starting points and cultural backgrounds of applicants; (2) that access routes be widened, with acceptance by universities of alternatives to conventional secondary school leaving certificates; (3) credit for experiential learning; (4) provision of bridging courses; (5) greater transparency, simplicity and efficiency of admissions criteria and their application; (6) positive measures to encourage applicants from diverse cultural and social backgrounds.

2.12.1 Existing Access Programmes.

Many colleges have in place programmes which aim to address the financial, social, cultural and educational barriers facing students from socio-economically disadvantaged areas from accessing third level education. The programmes can include courses designed for young people who completed the Leaving Certificate and who have a particular academic strength or interest but who would require some additional education to prepare them for a third level course. The programmes are generally targeted programmes which are school based. Links can be established on an ongoing basis with the school population and various initiatives can be introduced at different stages of the school cycle. The programmes are informed by the principle of subsidiarity - of working in partnership with parents, schools, Area Based Partnerships, community groups, guidance counsellors and home-school liaison officers and the staff, students and graduates of the institution along with other third level institutions. The aim is to supplement rather than supplant.

The Programmes generally comprise of a range of pre-entry activities with the targeted schools. An integral element of the programmes are the post-entry supports provided for the undergraduate students by the Access Officer.

The key elements of existing Access Programmes at pre-entry include: -

- Visits to the Third Level Institution;
- Summer Schools;
- Award Schemes;
- Shadowing Day;
- School Visits / Outreach School Programmes;
- Transition Year Projects;
- Study Skills Seminars;
- Supervised Study Programmes;
- Mentoring Programmes;
- Programmes for Parents.

At the post-entry stage, students from the targeted initiatives have access to all the student services of the institution as well as the additional support of the Access Officer.

The students also participate in a range of further undergraduate supports:

- Summer Orientation Course;
- Scholarships / Studentships;
- Tutorial and Academic Support;
- Mentoring / Peer Support;
- Personal Tutor System.

2.12.2 The Access Made Accessible Group

Given the dramatic increase in the number of access initiatives, some level of co-operation and dialogue between institutions has emerged as a crucial factor for the future development in the field. In 1996, the Access Made Accessible (AMA) group, a national network of Access Officers, was established to provide a forum for discussion, mutual support and the sharing of experience and information for those involved in access. The group meets on a regular basis with a view to exploring ways of developing areas of co-operation between third-level institutions and to minimising duplication of effort.

A summary of Access programmes, prepared by AMA, is attached as ANNEX 8.

An outline of access programmes by sector is given as follows:

- HEA sector (ANNEX 9);
- IoT sector (ANNEX 10);
- DIT (ANNEX 11).

2.12.3 Access Courses

Access Courses should be geared to the individual needs of the student. In this context the Action Group agrees with the analysis presented by the Council of Heads of Irish Universities (CHIU) in its

oral presentation to the Group whereby students could be placed in one of three categories cited in Recommendation No. 10, below.

Osborne and Leith have highlighted that the University of Dundee offers a substantial academic 'top up' delivered in an intensive three - month period (June to August). Students are given an intensive programme (9-5 every day), covering study skills together with academic courses that are assessed by course work and examination. Dundee has the statistical evidence to demonstrate that students progressing from this course do as well subsequently as those entering through the more conventional routes, including those studying in Law, Medicine and Engineering (for a description of the Dundee system see CVCP (1998)).

RECOMMENDATION NO 10

The Action Group recommends that Access programmes be geared to the needs of the individual student in terms of content, duration (e.g., summer, late autumn or year-long) and provider, based on the following categories:

First category – students who achieve just over three hundred points. With this level of attainment course options are very limited and exclusion stems from rationing rather than the individuals abilities. Students in this category could be catered for through a system of reserved places with direct entry. This would off set the competitive disadvantage of such students.

Second category – students who achieve only minimum matriculation requirements (2 grade Cs and 3 passes). Students in this category are at high risk if they enter without further preparation. These students need a pre-entry preparatory programme as well as reserved places with direct entry. Supports post-entry would not be sufficient.

Third category – Students in this category would not have attained minimum matriculation requirement for access to higher education. Such students are the least supported and face very few options. Bridging courses must be a major part of the strategy.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 11

The Action Group recommends that the National Office should encourage higher education institutions to set up new types of access courses, of varying content and duration, on a pilot basis. One such development would be to have pilot regional consortia of institutions providing intensive Summer Schools (both top-up and orientation) to targeted students.

Such pilot schemes would enable an evaluation of the capacity of short-term intensive programmes to provide a top-up for students with lower achievements at second level. Students successfully completing such programmes should proceed to the higher education institution of their choice since mutual recognition would be established.

RECOMMENDATION NO 12

The Action Group recommends that the scope of the schemes of maintenance grants and of the free fees initiative should be extended to validated access courses.

RECOMMENDATION NO 13

The Action Group recommends that the higher education institutions provide supports to target students, particularly in the first year, which are appropriate to their needs, including academic and personal counselling, and specific tutorial arrangements.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 14

The Action Group recommends that the scope of the schemes of Maintenance Grants and Free Fees should be extended to allow students in receipt of the special rate of maintenance grant [see below par. 2.13] to repeat a single year.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 15

The Action Group recommends that access courses should be described as such only if successful completion confers eligibility, subject to faculty/school/department requirements, on a candidate to be offered a place.

The important context for further developmental work being undertaken in this area is the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act of 1999. Crucially, the objectives of this legislation include the establishment of transfer and progression across further education, training and higher education, to be developed and coordinated by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI). These pathways will be vital also for adults to continue their education throughout their working lives ('Lifelong Learning').

RECOMMENDATION NO 16

The Action Group recommends that the Institutions engage with the NQAI to introduce common validation of Access courses enabling transferability.

RECOMMENDATION NO 17

The Action Group recommends that the Higher education institutions recognise certain NCEA/NCVA/FETAC awards (including in respect of certain courses pursued at PLC level), and other programmes at an equivalent level as advised by the NQAI, for entry to Higher education, including for entry to ab initio degree programmes.

RECOMMENDATION NO 18

The Action Group recommends that the NQAI undertake an urgent review of existing progression routes and advise on the development of a framework to facilitate progression, including through the development of links between the further and higher education institutions.

2.13 Financial Support

2.13.1 Special rates of Maintenance Grants targeted at those most in need

The Action Group believes that it is not equitable or efficient for students from more advantaged social backgrounds to be in receipt of financial aid from the State to attend higher education. While the most

effective interventions designed to reduce inequality can be made at earlier stages of education, it is also necessary to look specifically at the point of transition from second level to third level.

At this stage, economic considerations, especially the short-term opportunity cost of staying in education, become highly significant. Both Professor Pat Clancy of UCD in his 1995 Study "Access to College: Patterns of Continuity and Change" and Professor Malcolm Skilbeck and Dr Helen Connell in their recent report, "Access and Equity in Higher Education: An International Perspective on issues and strategies", have stressed the important role of well-targeted assistance for disadvantaged students in addressing inequalities in access.

At the launch of the Action Group on 14 September, 2000, as a purely initial step and pending the findings of the Action Group, the Minister for Education and Science announced special rates of maintenance grants, targeted at disadvantaged students most in need, as follows:

Special rates of grant targeted at disadvantaged students most in need

Non Adjacent Rate (more than 15 miles from college)

Full Maintenance	£2,000	Part Maintenance	£1,000
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Adjacent Rate (15 miles or less from college)

Full Maintenance	£1,000	Part Maintenance	£500
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These special rates compare with the standard rates as follows:

Standard Rates of Grant (2000/2001)

Non Adjacent Rate (more than 15 miles from college)

Full Maintenance	£1,775	Part Maintenance	£887
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Adjacent Rate (15 miles or less from college)

Full Maintenance	£710	Part Maintenance	£355
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2.13.2 Proposed Criteria for the Special Rate of Maintenance Grant

Background

The Terms of Reference of the Action Group specifically require it to advise the Minister on the specific interventions which would be most effective in making further progress in promoting access by the three target groups. In approaching this task, the Group distinguished between resources to be allocated under the National Development Plan (NDP) "Third Level Access Fund" and additional funding beyond this source which the Action Group believes would be necessary to enable the medium to longer term objectives of full equity in access opportunity to be achieved.

The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness contains the following commitment:

"Additional financial supports for disadvantaged students, including disadvantaged mature students, will be put in place, targeted at those most in need."

The NDP provides for a Third Level Access Fund. The objective of this measure is to facilitate and improve access to the labour market for the beneficiaries whilst improving their long-term employability. It will *inter alia*

“Provide financial support to disadvantaged students by way of additional support to the existing maintenance grants scheme”

Identification of the students from disadvantaged backgrounds most in need

The Action Group considers that the target group of “those most in need” could best be defined in terms of the child dependants of claimants of long-term welfare payments, in respect of whom continued Child Dependant Allowance (CDA) is currently being paid, by virtue of their being in full-time education (child dependants in the age group 18 to 22).

Child Dependants

In the case of persons in receipt of a social welfare payment (excluding Disability, Health and Safety, Occupational Injury, Unemployment Benefit or the short-term rate of unemployment assistance), a child aged 18 and up to 22 continues to be dependant until the end of the academic year in which s/he reaches age 22 if s/he is in full-time education by day.

It is proposed to confine eligibility for the special rate of maintenance grant to persons in receipt of social assistance payments with full-rate CDAs. Half rate CDAs are payable where the recipient's spouse/partner currently has an income greater than £135 per week. [This proposal excludes dependant children of persons in receipt of social assistance and social insurance payments with half-rate CDAs.] It would be inequitable to exclude persons on social insurance payments who are in receipt of full-rate CDAs and the proposal is to include such persons within the scope of the scheme. In order to avoid any disincentive effects, it is proposed to include similar categories of person in the scheme, including those in receipt of FIS, those on Community Employment and VTOS.

RECOMMENDATION NO 19

The Action Group recommends that the special Rate of Maintenance Grant should be based on the eligibility criteria set out in the “Detail of the Proposed Scheme” set out in ANNEX 12.

An estimated income profile of maintenance grant holders is given at ANNEX 13.

2.14 Amount of the Special Rate of Maintenance Grant

The level of resources within the Third Level Access Fund would not be sufficient to enable the payment of the special rate of Maintenance Grant to all child dependants of persons in receipt of eligible payments. Therefore, the Action Group is constrained to propose an income limit for the special rate.

Within the NDP resources, the Action Group considered the options of a top-up of £1,000 (for up to 8,300 students initially) or £1,225 (for up to 7,000 students initially) and decided, unanimously that, in order to achieve significant progress in promoting access, resources should be tightly focused.

In reaching this position, the Action Group also had regard to available information on the actual living costs for a student at college. The Action Group was advised that there are only two sources of information on this.

(a) USI commissioned survey

A survey of 500 third level students in locations all over Ireland was compiled by Market Research Company⁶.

It found that the cost of living for students was as follows:

Living away from home in Dublin (based on 36 weeks) [Excluding Alcohol and cigarette expenditure]	£3,906 per annum
Living at home in Dublin (based on 36 weeks) [Excluding Alcohol and cigarette expenditure]	£1,403 per annum

For more details, see ANNEX 14.

(b) DCU

DCU has also produced figures but these are only estimates⁷.

The Action Group considers that for the Special Rate of Maintenance Grant to have an effective impact, it must be pitched at a level which would, to the greatest extent possible, remove the financial barrier to access. Therefore, it must be set at a level which relates to actual living costs. On this basis the Action Group would have wished to recommend an amount which relates to actual living costs. However, due to the resource constraint, a figure of £3,000 is being proposed at this juncture for the non-adjacent grant.

2.15 Recommendations of the Action Group**2.15.1 Within the NDP funding framework**

Within the constraints of funding within the NDP, the Action Group makes the following recommendations:

RECOMMENDATION NO 20

- **The special rate of Maintenance Grant (Non-Adjacent) should be fixed at £3,000 (equivalent to a “top-up” of £1,225) and the special rate of Maintenance Grant (Adjacent) should be fixed at £1,200 (equivalent to a “top-up” of £490)⁸.**
- **An income limit should be fixed at a level which would, at a minimum, include persons on Unemployment Assistance (long-term) with a Qualified Adult Allowance (Full-rate). The Action Group notes that the long-term rate of Unemployment Assistance (UA) as at 5 April, 2000 was £73.50 and that the full rate of Qualified Adult Allowance (QAA) at that time amounted to £43.20. This equates to an annualised income of £6,150.09 (based on a factor of 52.7 as used by DSCFA). Given that financial factors are crucial to access, particularly at the lower end of the scale, the Action Group recommends that, for the academic year 2000/01, the Reckonable income limit for the special rate of Maintenance Grant be fixed at £6,150.09 (net of standard exclusions and net of CDAs).**

⁶ Field work took place in January-February 2000. 492 face to face interviews. Quotas for full-time and part-time students were calculated per college. Full Quality control procedures were applied (IQCS and ISO 9001).

⁷ DCU estimates

Based on experience of dealing with students who apply for assistance under the Student Assistance/Access Fund, DCU has produced the following very approximate estimates of the living expenses of students as follows (based on eight and a half months):

Living away from home in Dublin £5,100 [£4428, excluding social life etc]

Living at home in Dublin £2,652 [£2074, excluding social life etc]

⁸ These rates substitute for the initial special rates announced in September, 2000.

It is estimated that the potential number of eligible students benefiting from the above recommendation will be 7,000 in the short-term (See ANNEX 15 for details of estimate), increasing to some 9,000 by 2006. However, as these projections are partly based on estimates, the income limit for 2000/01 should be increased to £6,561.15 (ie the rate of UA plus QAA as of 26/04/2000) if there is any shortfall on the number of students actually qualifying for the special rates of Maintenance Grants.

RECOMMENDATION NO 21

The Action Group recommends that, if necessary, the income limit for the special rate of maintenance grants should be increased to ensure that at least 7,000 students qualify initially, extending to at least 9,000 by 2006/07.

RECOMMENDATION NO 22

The Action Group recommends that the income limit for the special rate of maintenance grant be revised annually in line with increases in Unemployment Assistance and the full rate of the Qualified Adult Allowance. The Action Group notes that these rates were increased from 26 April, 2000 to £77.50 and £47.00 (which equates to an annualised income of £6,561.15) and that, based on the increases announced in the Budget on 6 December, 2000, the annualised income would be £7,351.65 (£85.50 + £54.00*52.7).

RECOMMENDATION NO 23

The Action Group recommends that, for the purpose of the special rate of maintenance grant only, Child Dependant Allowance(s) payable should be excluded from the calculation of reckonable income.

RECOMMENDATION NO 24

The Action Group recommends that, in view of the complexity of the conditions attaching to the special rates of maintenance grants, the Department of Education and Science engage with the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs to ensure that the certification provided to students by the latter Department for the purpose of applying for Maintenance Grants is fully comprehensive and meet the full information requirements of the standard and special schemes of Maintenance Grants.

RECOMMENDATION NO 25

The Action Group recommends that the Department of Education and Science implement effective publicity and information campaigns to ensure that there is early awareness of the availability of both the standard and special schemes of Maintenance Grants, and how to apply for a grant, and that application forms are made available at the same time as CAO application forms. Consideration should also be given to basing the means test assessment on the tax year prior to that now used. This could be considered in the context of the forthcoming alignment of the tax and calendar years.

2.15.2 Outside the NDP funding framework

Reform of Student Financial Support Systems

The Action Group notes that resources available within the NDP framework will not permit all students, who could reasonably be regarded as being in need, to qualify for the special rate of maintenance grants.

While the Action Group strongly believes that the special rates of maintenance grants recommended above are an important step forward in widening access to third level by the three target groups, they can only constitute a first step in addressing the overall challenge of increasing participation by disadvantaged students in third level education.

In his overview of Clancy and Wall, the Chair of the HEA, Dr Don Thornhill remarked:

“There has been much debate about the effectiveness of the existing system of student support. Issues in this regard have recently been raised in the Report of the Commission on the Points System. The issue was dealt with by a special advisory committee whose report, The Report of the Advisory Committee on Third-Level Student Support, was published in 1995. This Report now raises issues again in relation to the effectiveness of the means test, in particular. A major issue is that while the State is aiming to increase the number of entrants to higher education from disadvantaged groups, many people from these backgrounds do not receive financial aid from the State, while many from more advantaged social backgrounds do receive such aid.”

The PPF states that:

Additional financial supports for disadvantaged students, including disadvantaged mature students, will be put in place, targeted at those most in need. (Framework IV: 28; page 112)

Osborne and Leith (page 32) recommended that the value of the local authority grant should be increased but the increases should be targeted at those from the least well-off backgrounds. Further to this, in presenting evidence of international good practice in his report to the HEA, Prof. Osborne states that student financial support “is the most common (and sometimes almost the only provided) solution to addressing under-representation. In all six countries, students from low-income backgrounds are supported by grants, often accompanied by a package of other benefits, including child allowance, tax relief, and housing allowance together with a range of subsidised services including accommodation, meals and travel. Several countries are concerned to ensure that unemployment is not better financially supported than studying, and in most countries there is a slow improvement in the amount of grant”.

Research commissioned by the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) for its policy paper, “The Grants a Joke – But we’re not laughing” (2000) carried out by the Market Research Company (MRC), highlights the fact that the difference between the cost of going to college and the current level of student financial support is sizeable. This document suggests that there are four significant barriers to students’ participation in third level education, which result from inadequate financial support: -

- Deterring students from disadvantaged backgrounds from planning or working towards going to college;
- Preventing students who actually gain sufficient points for third level from accepting places;
- A decline in the number of students who enter third level completing their studies;
- Poor academic performance of students at third level. Students who have to balance part-time employment and study to support themselves financially are prevented from reaching their full academic and social potential.

During the consultative process, the Action Group heard that the availability of financial support is crucial in assisting students in the target groups to participate in further and higher education.

The Action Group considers that the current systems for student financing are quite unsatisfactory. At present a student who is economically or socially disadvantaged may apply for financial aid through a variety of bodies using a variety of criteria.

These include:

- The system of Grant Assistance available for higher education, provided by National Government and administered by Local Authorities and Vocational Education Committees;
- Various schemes for additional financial supports through College Access Programmes in many colleges, supported by Colleges' own resources, the HEA, etc.;
- Financial support through the Department of Education and Science's "Student Assistance/Access Fund";
- Student financial support provided by Local Area Partnerships, already piloted in some Partnership areas and to receive additional support under the Millennium Partnership Fund for Disadvantage.

In addition to the above, with NDP funding the new special rates of maintenance grants will be introduced for some students. This has been proposed in order to kick-start the process of substantially increasing participation rates of economically and socially disadvantaged students in third level, as outlined in the Group's Terms of Reference.

Realistically, this entire system needs reform. The Action Group notes that on 11th November 2000 the Minister for Education and Science announced that he was setting up a special project team to carry out a comprehensive review of every aspect of the maintenance grants, and other student supports⁹, to ensure their relevance to the needs of present day third level students. This review will include the level of grants, the methods by which they are paid, eligibility and income limits, accommodation needs, student support services, the most suitable paying agency, the provision of an appeals system, student loans and taxation measures. The project team is to report by the end of March 2001.

The Action Group believes that this review constitutes a unique opportunity to develop a new and more coherent framework of financial supports. We believe that the work of the special project team should take into account the views of the Action Group on key aspects of student financial supports. Accordingly we make the following recommendations: -

RECOMMENDATION NO 26

Prioritising the reform of student supports

The Action Group believes that future action in the area of student supports must focus resources on those most in need. Assuming that the NDP resources are applied as recommended above, we have unanimously identified the following sequencing of priorities:

- 1. Increase the reckonable income limit for the special rate of maintenance grants up to 60% of average industrial earnings (currently circa £17,000), i.e. £10,300 in today's terms. This move will ensure the inclusion of students in families where one parent is working full-time earning the national minimum wage. This would allow an estimated further 11,400 students to qualify at an additional cost of £12 million initially per annum.**
- 2. Increase amount of the special rate of maintenance grant to actual student living costs. Based on available data, this would involve a non-adjacent rate of £3,900 and an adjacent rate of £1,400 and would cost an additional £14 million initially per annum (18,400*£760).**

⁹ The term "other student supports" is understood to include free fees

- 3. Increase reckonable income limit for special rate of maintenance grant to 75% of average industrial earnings, i.e. £12,900 in today's terms. This would allow an estimated further 4,000 students to qualify at an additional cost of £7.4 million initially per annum (4,000*£1,838).**

These priorities are advanced in the context of resources becoming available following the conduct of an overall review and re-balancing of supports, including the introduction of a capital test and the transfer of responsibility for administration of the grant schemes to the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA). The special project team should consider the recommendations in the "Report of the Advisory Committee on Third-Level Student Support" (1995) with regard to a capital test being incorporated into the means test process and should also consider the existing means tests operated by DSCFA, and make recommendations accordingly.

RECOMMENDATION NO 27

The Action Group recommends that, before the beginning of the academic year 2002/03, responsibility for the means testing and payments functions relating to the student maintenance grant schemes be transferred to the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and that such means testing should include a capital test consistent with the existing means tests administered by that Department.

The Action Group recommends that the level of financial support available for students in the target groups should be benchmarked against financial supports provided by the State to other non-student groups and should reflect the reality of the support needs of full-time students. Such benchmarking should encompass the childcare needs of mature students.

See also recommendation No 61

Locating the student support function in DSCFA would ensure improved co-ordination of income supports for education. The Group notes that such a transfer would have major implications for the Local Authorities and the Vocational Education Committees. The Action Group also notes that the Minister for Education and Science has indicated his intention that there will be full consultation with all interested parties and that no irrevocable decisions will be taken in relation to any future arrangements prior to such consultation taking place.

There seems to be little rationale behind differences between financial supports provided through some social welfare payments, such as unemployment assistance, and financial supports for many third level students who incur similar costs of living. In the context of the transfer of the administration of student support to DSCFA, a benchmarking exercise should be undertaken relative to social welfare rates which would then serve as the basis for student financial supports.

RECOMMENDATION NO 28

The Action Group recommends that a new student finance framework should be instituted which would involve the State providing a more coherent, graduated and targeted scale of financial supports for students, with the level of financial support being provided varying according to various criteria.

This is already practiced to some extent, with the application of criteria relating to eligibility based on dependent children within the family unit as well as different levels of reckonable income. These criteria need to be integrated with criteria for the levels of financial support ("maintenance", both 'adjacent' and 'non-adjacent' rates) which apply and the waiving of fees (which was designed in an era before the 'abolition' of fees). A single, coherent and simplified graduated system, which integrates current and planned 'top-ups' by various bodies, should be instituted.

RECOMMENDATION NO 29

The Action Group recommends that , in the context of a generalised reform, some bodies which are currently involved in topping-up existing state financial supports to students in the target groups should be allowed to disengage from this provision and concentrate their efforts on non-financial supports to students.

These bodies currently include Local Area Partnerships and colleges providing Access Programmes. It is important to note that the Action Group does not advocate the immediate disengagement of these bodies which are currently providing essential financial supports to students. We believe, however, that students and potential students in the target groups would benefit from the bringing about of much greater coherence and simplicity in State financial supports, when and only when, the level of financial aid meets their needs. The Action Group recognises and supports the need to continue with the provision of funding at institution level to address individual hardship cases.

These other bodies should continue to focus on the development of the range of other essential support services they provide in enabling students to access third level education and in contributing to their retention and performance within third level education.

2.16 Other supports

The Action Group endorses the Commission on the Points System where it noted that the induction of disadvantaged students into third-level education and continued monitoring and support can be important elements in ensuring their successful participation in third-level education. The need for these supports is greatest during the first year as the available evidence indicates that non-completion rates are highest at this stage. These general supports could be similar to those for mature students. In relation to disadvantaged students, it would be important that support services would not develop in such a way as to isolate them from the rest of the student population but would lead to their successful integration into the community of the third-level institution.

There is also a need to encourage the effective participation of disadvantaged students in the social and cultural life of third-level institutions. The recommendations of the Commission in relation to increased financial support for disadvantaged students aim to reduce the need for such students to take up part-time employment during their studies and thus enable them to play a fuller role in the social and cultural life of third-level institutions. Inadequate child-care facilities in third-level institutions and in the wider community further disadvantage single parents attempting to integrate and succeed in higher education. The child care issue is addressed in more detail in Chapter Four (see also recommendation No 27).

The Action Group recalls that, in its Recommendation No 14, it recommended that the scope of the schemes of Maintenance Grants and Free Fees should be extended to allow students in receipt of the special rate of maintenance grant to repeat a single year.

CHAPTER THREE

STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY



CHAPTER THREE STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY

3.1 Introduction

The 1994 Report to the HEA of the Committee on Access and Participation of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education defined disability as follows:

“a student is disabled if she/he requires a facility which is not part of the mainstream provision of the college concerned, to enable participation in the college to the full extent of her or his capabilities and without which she or he would be educationally disadvantaged in comparison with peers”.

The Committee, in adopting this definition, recognised that disability is socially constructed, and as such that the underrepresentation of people with disabilities in higher education is not a result of lack of ability but rather the consequence of attitudinal and environmental barriers, both within higher education and external to it, which preclude and diminish the possibility of students participating within that process. The Action Group concurred with this definition of disability as the appropriate basis for its work.

In so doing, however, it is noted that the Employment Equality Act and the Equal Status Act contain a different definition of disability and that higher education institutions may need to use a different definition which facilitates colleges in tracking the participation rates of students with different types of disabilities.

It is estimated that there are some:

7,400 children with disabilities attending 100 special schools
 3,000 children with disabilities attending 300 special classes attached to mainstream schools and,
 8,000 children with disabilities attending mainstream schools on a fully integrated basis.

In this respect the initiative of the Government in November 1998 regarding integrated education for children with special needs, an initiative which, for the first time provided automatic supports for many children with disabilities, is significant. The responsibilities within the Education Act 1998 for school boards of management to publish the policy of the school on admission and participation by students with disabilities and to incorporate such policy in the school plan is also an important development in supporting integrated education by students with disabilities. The Act also requires that schools use the resources provided by the State to make reasonable provision and accommodation for students with disabilities or other special needs including, where necessary, alteration of buildings and provision of appropriate equipment.

A Planning Group was established in October, 1999, to make recommendations to the Minister for Education and Science on the arrangements which should be put in place to ensure the most effective provision of a high quality, co-ordinated service at all stages of the education system for students with disabilities. The report of the Planning Group has been submitted to the Minister.

RECOMMENDATION NO 30

The Action Group recommends that appropriate linkages are put in place between the structures to emerge from the Planning Group, the NEPS and the National Office to ensure an effective and coherent service to students with disabilities.

3.2 Initial findings of Survey

Since the start of the 1990s there has been an increase in the number of students with disabilities studying at third level institutions in Ireland. A survey commissioned by the HEA was undertaken by the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) in 42 third level institutions and the initial findings were published in November 2000. The findings show that there were 850 undergraduate students with disabilities attending full-time higher education in this country in 1998/99. This figure represents 0.8% of the total undergraduate population. The total number of students on first year undergraduate courses was 329 or 0.9% of the total intake.

The report provides information on:

- The number of students with disabilities in third level education;
- The gender profile of students with disabilities;
- The population of students with different disabilities in third level;
- The fields of study of students with disabilities.

Outlined below is the profile of the undergraduate population of students with disabilities for the academic year 1998/1999.

TABLE 3

DISABILITY PROFILE OF THE TOTAL UNDERGRADUATE POPULATION WITH DISABILITIES, BY TYPE OF INSTITUTION, FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 1998/1999.

Nature of Disability	HEA Aided		Institute of Technology		Other		Total	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Physical Disability Ambulant	94	19%	26	8%	1	2%	121	14%
Physical Disability Non-Ambulant	34	7%	14	4%	2	5%	50	6%
Blind	10	2%	4	1%	0	0%	14	2%
Visual Impairment	42	9%	16	5%	5	12%	63	7%
Deaf	13	3%	21	7%	0	0%	34	4%
Hard of Hearing	21	4%	23	7%	3	7%	47	6%
Specific Learning Difficulty	188	39%	200	62%	24	57%	412	48%
Other (Neurological)	48	10%	1	0%	2	5%	51	6%
Other	36	7%	17	5%	5	12%	58	7%
Total	486	100%	322	100%	42	100%	850	100%

The report also highlights the fields of study of students with disabilities, with the highest numbers of students with disabilities studying in Arts (27%), Business, Economic and Social Studies (15%), Engineering (13%), Science (12%) and Art and Design (10%).

3.3 Policy framework

The participation of students with disabilities in higher education is improving. This improvement has

taken place against the background of a number of developments – the development of a legislative framework prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability, the establishment of AHEAD by individuals working in the higher education sector, and the introduction of targeted funding initiatives supporting access to higher education by students with disabilities - have all been significant. Significant, also, is the major initiative announced by the Government in November 1998, for integrated education for children with special needs, and the introduction of the Education Act, 1998.

The Action Group considers that no single policy instrument will be effective in developing an inclusive higher education system, which respects and embraces diversity and disability. At a micro/institutional level, ensuring access and engaged participation of students with disabilities in higher education requires:

- General policy
- Statistical information and monitoring systems
- Admission procedures
- Student Support Services
- Examination Arrangements
- Staff Development
- Careers Services and Employment opportunities
- Physical Provision
- Resources

3.4 Barriers Faced by Students with Disabilities

The Action Group noted from consultation, the submissions and from other reports that there are a number of potential barriers faced by students with disabilities in accessing and participating in higher education, and which consequently will need to be considered through policy development and provision.

- Traditionally, people with disabilities would not have been expected to progress to third level education, and instead would have entered specialist training centres. The absence of 'expectation' persists, and must be addressed at individual, school and community level;
- Educational disadvantage at second level: limited access to the curriculum and support services as well as disability related absences may limit a students ability to compete within competitive entry systems such as the points system;
- Students with disabilities may experience physical barriers in accessing the campus and its facilities, due to inaccessible transport, accommodation, campus buildings and difficulties in accessing personal assistants. This in particular will be the situation for students with physical and sensory disabilities;
- Traditional assessment procedures may not be effective in assessing the knowledge of some students with disabilities;
- Students with disabilities may have difficulties in accessing the academic curriculum;
- The lack of access to part-time third level programmes, absence of funding support, inaccessible lecture theatres, lack of loop provision, difficulty in accessing sign language interpreters, absence of information on appropriate adaptive technology and lack of disability awareness amongst teaching staff may all impact on the participation of students with disabilities in higher education;
- Students may experience difficulties in learning in the current teaching environment. This may be a particular issue for students with specific learning difficulties;

- Students may experience difficulties in demonstrating their knowledge in the traditional examination setting;
- Students with disabilities may experience difficulties in accessing work experience or employment after graduation. Limited access to career advice, restrictions imposed by disability related social welfare payments, lack of disability awareness amongst employers, lack of access to employment-based supports, restrictions on participation in the student summer employment programme all pose barriers to students and graduates with disabilities accessing employment. Research for post university earnings for the Deering Report in Britain claims that:
“While returns to graduation are positive for all groups, - women, ethnic minorities and the disabled enjoy lower returns in general than white male equivalents”;
- Students with disabilities consistently report that the greatest barrier facing them in education and employment is a lack of awareness of disability amongst the general population. Lack of awareness extends beyond the academic life of students and impacts on the social and cultural inclusion of students with disabilities.

3.5 The Identification and Tracking of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education

One of the difficulties in assessing current participation rates by students with disabilities (school leavers and mature students) is that, currently, no reliable information exists on the numbers of students with disabilities at second level or the numbers of people with disabilities in society generally.

Actions on equality at third level need to be informed by reliable information on the potential numbers of third level students with disabilities. The current second level survey, being undertaken by AHEAD, attempts, for the first time, to quantify the number and profile of students with disabilities at second level.

RECOMMENDATION NO 31

The Action Group recommends that the Department of Education and Science puts in place a mechanism for systematically collecting this information on a national basis.

The issue of identifying and monitoring participation rates amongst students with disabilities is centrally linked to the issue of disclosure of disability. If students are to be identified and tracked through higher education, then concerted efforts must be made to reassure students that any disclosure of a disability will not have an adverse impact on a student's application and that such information will be treated in a confidential manner.

It is proposed that the following actions are implemented in identifying and tracking students with disabilities at third level:

The Action Group welcomes the decision taken by the CAO to include a question regarding disability on its 2001 application form. The Action Group understands that this is linked to a clear equal opportunities statement setting out why the information is being requested and the purpose for which it is to be used. In addition to the question on the CAO form, the Action Group understands that the CAO is forwarding a supplementary form to all students who will indicate that they have a disability and circulating this (completed) form to all higher education institutions to which the students have applied. This will provide an effective and cost-efficient way to ensure that colleges have access to the

appropriate information necessary to consider the support needs of students with disabilities entering college.

RECOMMENDATION NO 32

The Action Group recommends that in addition to entering higher education institutions through the CAO, students with disabilities should also enter via alternative direct entry routes e.g. direct entry for mature students, through an access programme – in each of these instances the application form/process should include a clear statement of equal opportunities and an invitation to students to disclose a disability.

In addition to students who have a disability on entering college, other students may acquire a disability, or have a specific learning difficulty identified, during the course of higher education studies. It is thus important that such students have an opportunity to avail of supports and to disclose a disability. The HEA Survey on Provision for Students with Disabilities highlights the situation that students with specific learning difficulties are the largest group of students with disabilities at third level and that the number of students with learning difficulties in higher education is also growing.

The following is a definition of Dyslexia:

Dyslexia is a neurologically based familial disorder, which interferes with the acquisition and processing of linguistic information, varying in degrees of severity. It is manifested by difficulties in receptive and expressive language, including phonological processing, reading, writing, spelling and sometimes arithmetic. Dyslexia may occur concomitantly with other limiting factors such as lack of motivation, sensory impairment or inadequate instructional or environmental opportunities, but it is not the result of these conditions. Although Dyslexia is life-long, individuals with Dyslexia successfully respond to timely and appropriate intervention. (International Dyslexia Association, 1996)

The basis on which such students are recorded varies, from students who have been assessed as having a learning disability by the Department of Education and Science, at second level, to students who have been assessed through the Dyslexia Association of Ireland or other external assessment process, to students who have not been assessed previously. While a number of higher education institutions have been supported through HEA targeted funding in developing support services for students with dyslexia, the level of understanding of the difficulties experienced by students with dyslexia or other learning difficulties, the nature of support services and access to assessment, varies significantly throughout the sector. Where supports are in place, the emphasis is on moving towards providing learning support services to students and to referral, internally or externally, for assessment, where required.

Significant challenges face higher education institutions in defining learning difficulties at third level, in that appropriate methods for assessing adults need to be specifically considered. Delays in accessing assessment, and the difficulties for higher education institutions in interpreting assessments, add to the difficulties for students and the institutions. Models of good practice are emerging and it is submitted that particular attention needs to be focused on developing a national policy and guidelines on dyslexia and other learning difficulties in higher education.

Given the prevalence of dyslexia across all higher education institutions, it is submitted that particular attention should be given to establishing learning support programmes at institutional level, which will

be effective in supporting students. Given the difficulties for students in accessing assessment and the prohibitive cost involved in assessing large numbers of students, it may be appropriate to consider funding such support services based on premium funded costs, based on the total number of students enrolled in each higher education institution, rather than the total number of students assessed. The development of such learning support centres will have a key role in supporting other non-traditional students such as mature students. The role of assistive technology in supporting students with dyslexia/learning difficulties is considered later in the chapter.

RECOMMENDATION NO 33

The Action Group recommends that in capturing information on students with a disability each higher education institution should have a clear policy regarding confidentiality and procedures for ensuring that any information disclosed is not released to any third party without the express permission of the student concerned.

RECOMMENDATION NO 34

The Action Group recommends that in addition to tracking students with disabilities entering higher education, monitoring is also required, following graduation, in evaluating access to employment for students with disabilities. The current reports submitted by the higher education institutions to the HEA recording employment rates amongst graduates and published by the HEA as the annual First Destinations Report, would provide an ideal mechanism in which to gather this data.

Clearly, if data is going to form a useful tool for policy development and evaluation then the definitions and categories used must be comparable at each of the points at which it is gathered. In this respect it is noted that, in the current survey being undertaken by AHEAD, on behalf of the HEA, particular difficulties arose in recording the total number of students with significant psychological conditions, and specific attention needs to be focused on resolving this issue.

3.6 Transition to Third Level

The Skilbeck report makes the point that a significant factor in the improvement in third level participation rates by people with disabilities in some countries is impacted positively by the follow-on effect of mainstreaming policies at second level. This mainstreaming has led to a greater number of students with disabilities completing secondary schooling and aspiring to tertiary education as a natural continuation of higher education. This must be a priority strategy in the Irish context, with effective policy and practice to ensure the full inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream second level education.

If students with disabilities are to access third level education, then they must enjoy equality of access and engaged participation in primary and second level. It is anticipated that specific recent initiatives addressing pupil teacher ratios, increasing remedial teaching posts and the number of special needs assistants, as well as developments in the provision of accessible transport services and assistive technology to students with disabilities, will all contribute to increasing equality of access to mainstream primary, second and third level education by students with disabilities. Increased attention needs to be given to the experience of students with disabilities in second level and higher education in progressing from school to further studies. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of recent developments and initiatives must include a review of their impact on student progression from second level.

RECOMMENDATION NO 35

The Action Group recommends that in order to ensure a smooth transition for students with disabilities from second level to third level, the Department of Education and Science, in consultation with the National Office, should allow for the possibility of assistive technology being allocated directly to some students at second level rather than to the school.

The meetings held by the Action Group with students with disabilities highlighted that one of the most significant barriers facing people with disabilities generally is accessing information on educational opportunities at third level. This issue was also highlighted by the Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities.

RECOMMENDATION NO 36

The Action Group recommends that particular attention must be focused on ensuring access to effective guidance counselling by students with disabilities in schools. The Department of Education and Science should ensure that every student with a disability has access to a guidance service that meets their needs and should ensure that appropriate in-career development is available to all guidance counsellors.

In addition, the initiatives of higher education institutions in developing guidance services, open days, transition programmes and orientation programmes for students with disabilities are to be welcomed. Such programme and collaborations between higher education institutions and schools must be further developed in supporting students with disabilities in the transition to higher education. While higher education institutions, through the activities outlined above, and through Disability Offices, provide a central source of information to potential applicants and students with disabilities, students studying in PLCs and smaller higher education institutions do not have a direct source of information, in particular in the area of access to evaluation and adaptive technology supports.

At present a number of higher education institutions, funded by the HEA, are developing local resource centres in the area of assistive technology and could provide the basis for the development of regional access centres. The experiences of the STATEMENT project¹⁰ a pilot programme which provided evaluation services to students with disabilities in 98/99, could also provide a model for working with existing disability organisations providing Assistive Technology evaluation services.

In so doing it is critical that any such evaluation services are firmly placed within the context of third level education, and also to recognise that an understanding of the conditions prevailing in the individual student's institution is fundamental to effective assessment of need. It is also important that evaluation services do not, in any way, seek to take on the responsibilities of higher education institutions in the provision of services and supports to students with disabilities in third level.

3.7 Alternative Admission Procedures

Historically, many people with disabilities will not have had any opportunity or indeed expectation of accessing third level education. Even as this situation slowly changes, it is clear that many students with disabilities will not be able to compete within the points race for a third level place.

¹⁰ Within the Statement project the CRC, NCBI and ACLD provided evaluation/assessment services to students with disabilities

Many higher education institutions, in recognising this fact and in furtherance of equality objectives, have developed alternative admission procedures for students with disabilities. The current admission situation for students with disabilities can be summarised as follows:

- Many students with disabilities achieve the points required for the course they enter;
- Alternative admission procedures may be arranged around a number of mechanisms including interviews, submission of a written application to an admission board, informal consultation and/or link in programmes;
- Some students with disabilities are also applying to college through routes for mature student entry, or access programmes for socio-economically disadvantaged students;
- Significant numbers of students with disabilities apply each year to several colleges and participate in diverse admission procedures in a number of different colleges;
- Some students with disabilities who apply to third level do not receive an offer of a place and in some instances fail to meet minimum entry requirements;
- Some higher education institutions do not operate any alternative admission procedures for students with disabilities.¹¹

While diversity in institutional policy and practice is both anticipated and welcomed, the difficulties presented to students with disabilities in seeking access to information on alternative admission procedures is significant. The desirability of developing some consistency of approach is recognised by the Report of the Commission on the Points System and the White Paper on Adult Education, which acknowledge the need to establish consistency in dealing with applications from people with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATION NO 37

The Action Group recommends that alternative admission procedures in supporting access to higher education by students with disabilities and appropriate assessment arrangements be further developed by higher education institutions. In this regard standards for such alternative procedures should be agreed by all higher education institutions which would protect academic standards, assess the true potential of the candidate and at the same time be equitable and transparent. In particular the National Office should support the development of such procedures.

The current work being undertaken by AHEAD in consultation with higher education institutions on the area of admission policy, higher education and disability is a key part of this work.

3.8 Existing Targeted Interventions

3.8.1 The Department of Education and Science Special Fund for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities may require a range of individual supports in order to attend and participate equally in higher education – the provision of such supports is central to any equality policy in higher education. Funding is provided towards the cost of services and the purchase of equipment for students with disabilities attending courses in third level institutions or Post Leaving Certificate courses through the Department of Education and Science Special Fund for Students with Disabilities. The Fund applies to students who have serious sensory, physical and/or communicative disabilities. Grants are awarded

¹¹ 1998 AHEAD Survey of Alternative Admission Policy in Higher Education.

towards the cost of specific equipment, specific materials, technological aids, targeted transport services, sign language interpreters, personal assistants and other educational support workers such as note-takers. The Fund is administered centrally by the Department. Applications are submitted to the Department by the individual students through their third level institution or PLC Centre. Allocations are made to the relevant institutions in respect of the particular students.

The amounts allocated to the Fund since 1994 are as follows: -

- 1994 - £80,000
- 1995 - £105,000
- 1996 - £115,000
- 1997 - £218,000
- 1998 - £250,000
- 1999 - £700,000
- 2000 - £1,233,000

The Special Fund provided assistance to 314 students in the academic year 1999/2000 and to 512 students in 2000/01.

The existing Special Fund for Students with Disabilities, while a central part of the current provision for students with disabilities, does not provide certainty as to the availability of support for all students with disabilities. Under the current Fund students with disabilities do not know from year to year whether they will be allocated funding, or when that allocation is likely to be made.

RECOMMENDATION NO 38

The Action Group recommends that the existing supports for students with disabilities be strengthened through the development of the Special Fund for Students with Disabilities into an entitlement-based scheme. The Group recommends that, if feasible, this development should be concluded in advance of the 2001/2002 academic year and, at the latest, in advance of the 2002/2003 academic year.

The Action Group recommends that the scheme be administered by the National Office and that an appropriate appeals mechanism be put in place.

The Action Group further recommends that a working group be established by the Department of Education and Science immediately to advise on the specific issues to be addressed in terms of criteria, eligibility etc in establishing this fund on an entitlement basis. In this regard the Group recommends that (a) the fund would be developed to ensure that allocations can apply on a multi-annual basis, (b) that applications can be made to provide for entry by students to courses at varying times of the year and (c) that the fund must be administered in such a way that students have efficient access to funding for support needs when accessing higher education.

There will be a need for the Working Group, in devising a scheme, to incorporate full linkages with the measures arising from the implementation of the recommendations of the Planning Group, established in October, 1999 to make recommendations to the Minister for Education and Science on the arrangements which should be put in place to ensure the most effective provision of a high quality, co-ordinated service at all stages of the education system for students with disabilities.

Although detailed criteria will, of course, need to be considered to govern the operation of an entitlement based funding structure, it is considered that the following additional core issues, in particular, must be addressed.

- Clarity is required regarding the role of the fund and to whom it is applicable – the current criteria whereby the fund is available to students who have serious sensory, physical or communicative disabilities, needs to be considered in light of the needs of students with learning difficulties, mental health difficulties and significant health conditions for specific supports in third level, and to reflect the actual applications and allocations made through the fund in recent years;
- Specific attention must be given to the issues of assessment of students with dyslexia and assessment of Assistive Technology (AT) needs of students with disabilities;
- The fund must be administered in such a way that students have efficient access to funding for support needs when accessing higher education. This is a challenge given the short turnaround time between the point at which a student receives a CAO offer and the point at which a student enters higher education. For some students the appropriate support needs do not become apparent until after the student has spent a period of time in college. In other instances students will acquire a disability, or start late in term, and will need to make an application to the fund during the year. It is necessary that the fund be administered in such a way that applications from students are accepted on an on-going basis;
- Specific attention will be needed to ensuring that there is an independent appeals process for applicants for support who are dissatisfied following the consideration of their application.

3.9 Back to Education Allowance

Disability Related Social Welfare Payments

Students with disabilities may be in receipt of a range of disability related payments, administered by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA) or by the Health Boards. Students in receipt of Disability Allowance, Blind Persons Pension and Invalidity Pension may qualify for the Back to Education Allowance. A number of recommendations outlined below are intended to address current anomalies within payment systems, which impact on people with disabilities participating in third level education.

RECOMMENDATION NO 39

The Action Group recommends that the DSCFA should consider removing the six month criterion in the case of the Back to Education Allowance so that students with disabilities in receipt of relevant social welfare or health board payments attending third level would qualify. It further recommends that the DSCFA also consider revising the criteria, to facilitate eligibility of students with disabilities for BTEA in respect of post graduate studies.

This would address in particular current restrictions on students with disabilities undertaking work placement or work experience as part of their course of study.

Students with disabilities who, under existing criteria, may apply for the Back to Education Allowance are often reluctant to do so, in that they are concerned that difficulties may arise if they need to take time off from a course of study, or that difficulties or delays will be experienced in transferring back to

the original payment on completion of a course of study. Promotional material must include clear guidelines for students with disabilities, addressing these issues.

The impact of rent allowance regulations introduced in the Supplementary Welfare Act, 1975, can act as a disincentive to all students, including those with disabilities, seeking access to third level. While some students have retained rent allowance while at third level, this can be at the discretion of the local welfare officer. The Action Group considers that these regulations may give rise to an anomaly.

RECOMMENDATION NO 40

The Action Group recommends that DSCFA should review current regulations relating to rent allowance whereby people with disabilities entering training programmes may retain rent allowances but students with disabilities studying at third level cannot do so, in order to facilitate students attending third level in retaining or qualifying for rent allowance.

3.10 Institutional Based Support Services

While students with disabilities may require individual supports, this is just one aspect of ensuring equality of access to higher education. It is also necessary to ensure that higher education institutions work consistently to remove attitudinal, cultural and environmental barriers faced by students with disabilities seeking access to higher education. The HEA targeted funding programme has provided a core basis from which the universities have developed policy and provision in the area of disability in higher education. The funding has supported higher education institutions in appointing Disability Officers and in developing a range of other initiatives in the area of disability in higher education including dyslexia support services, assistive technology provision and assessment services, library provision, career advisory and employment support, institutional policy and disability awareness training programmes.

RECOMMENDATION NO 41

The Action Group recommends that targeted funding be provided through the National Office to assist all third-level institutions in initiating and developing support services and institutional policies in the area of disability.

The Action Group makes recommendations for such funding in Chapter 6.

Targeted funding will help with the following developments:

- Development of alternative curriculum and pedagogies which are inclusive of students with disabilities. *“If the student cannot learn the way we teach, can we teach the way in which the student learns?”*;
- Appropriate assessment services and learning support programmes for students with dyslexia;
- Institutional wide relevant disability awareness training, for staff and students;
- Introduction of a universal access policy and remedial interventions to improve accessibility to buildings etc;
- Provision of material in alternative formats, supporting full access to library and IT facilities and provision of AT assessment, evaluation and training services;
- Development of alternative admission procedures and support structures for students entering via such procedures;

- Provision of supports in accessing work experience through the careers office and the development of proactive policy in supporting the development of 'positive to disability' policies with employers with whom higher education institutions have contact;
- Development of outreach programmes to actively recruit candidates with disabilities and the facilitation of pre-admission guidance;
- Development of institution wide and departmental policies and procedures supporting the full inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education;
- Provision of support services for students with disabilities such as campus transport programmes, AT services, peer support, counselling support etc.

There is scope for higher education institutions to work in close co-operation in developing and delivering key support to students with disabilities. The extent to which such co-operation is evident should be a key criterion in funding allocations. In this respect the establishment of DAWN (Disability Advisers Working Network) is welcomed as an effective forum for the exchange of information between higher education institutions. Equally, the proposals, through a number of higher education institutions, to establish regional resource centres in the area of assistive technology services is an example of an area in which collaboration between higher education institutions can be effectively developed.

3.11 Disability Officers

The Action Group recognises the central role of Disability Officers in coordinating institutional responses to disability. The appointment of Disability Officers also highlights the central role of the post in developing and implementing institutional policy and practice in the area of disability, as do the recommendations in a number of the submissions to the Action Group for the appointment of additional Disability Officers.

RECOMMENDATION NO 42

The Action Group recommends that each university and institute of technology have a minimum of one full-time permanent post of Disability Officer.

Students with a disability need full access and participation in such areas as admissions, examinations, career advisory services, information technology, library services etc. Additional resources may be required for this.

3.12 Universal Design Principles

The Action Group recognises that a central feature of an access policy at third level must be the development of universal design policies within third level institutions.

RECOMMENDATION 43

The Action Group recommends that, in implementing a policy of “design for all at third level”, all new capital funding programmes include, as a precondition for funding, that the higher education institution adheres to universal design principles.

RECOMMENDATION 44

The Action Group recommends that all third-level institutions put in place a refurbishment programme to ensure access for students with disabilities to their buildings.

3.13 Curriculum Design

For many students with disabilities, intensive courses with long contact hours do not offer the optimum conditions for pursuing third level studies. The absence of funding structures to support access to part-time education, and the limited range of courses available on a part-time basis, remain significant obstacles to access to third level courses by students with disabilities. The Group welcomes the commitment made in the White Paper on Adult Education to provide funding to people with disabilities undertaking accredited distance education programmes and recommends the earliest possible implementation of the proposals on part-time fees.

Particular attention must also be paid to ensuring that student support services in third-level institutions and disability support services are equally available to students with disabilities studying on a part-time and a full time basis, and to students undertaking distance education programmes.

3.14 Personal Assistance

The Review Group on Health and Personal Social Services for People with Physical and Sensory Disability – Towards an Independent Future makes a distinction between third level education and other education, training and employment. Its recommendation in respect to the provision of Personal Assistance that:

“In the short term ... the funding and administration of personal assistance services ...should rest with the Department of Health through the health boards. An exception is made in the case of personal assistance for people in third level education, which should be met by the Department of Education.”

RECOMMENDATION NO 45

The Action Group recommends that the anomaly, whereby the Department of Health and Children, through the Health Boards, does not fund and administer personal assistance services for students with disabilities while in third-level education, should be addressed by that Department.

3.15 Accommodation

Many third-level institutions provide on-campus and other institutionally owned accommodation for students. In addition to the Finance Act, 1999, provides for a scheme of tax relief for rented residential accommodation for third-level students. The Guidelines for this tax relief require that at a minimum one out of every fifty units be designed for students with disabilities. There is no requirement in the guidelines that such units be allocated to students with a disability.

RECOMMENDATION NO 46

The Action Group recommends that priority should be given to students with disabilities in the allocation of on-campus or institutional owned accommodation.

The Action Group recognises that students with specific learning difficulties may not require such priority.

RECOMMENDATION NO 47

The Action Group recommends that, in the context of the evaluation of the incentives introduced in the Finance Act, 1999, which is to be set up under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, the guidelines be reviewed to assess their effectiveness in meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

3.16 Targets for 2003 and 2006

Initial findings of the AHEAD Survey on provision for students with Disabilities in Higher Education for the Academic year 1998/99 (Table 1.1, of the Report, reproduced below) show that in 1998/99, there were 329 (63% Male and 37% Female) full time first year students with disabilities, representing 0.9% of the total first year undergraduate population.

TABLE 4

FIRST YEAR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL FIRST YEAR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT POPULATION, BY TYPE OF INSTITUTION

INSTITUTION TYPE	No. of first year students	% of students in each type of institution	No of students with disabilities in first year	% of students with disabilities in each type of institution	% of first year undergraduate population with disabilities
HEA Aided	16,142	44	155	47	1.0%
Institutes of Technology	17,920	49	150	46	0.8%
Other Institutions	2,543	7	24	7	0.9%
Total	36,605	100	329	100	0.9%

Based on initial findings of an AHEAD Survey at second level, some 4% of the population at that level could be categorised as having a disability.

RECOMMENDATION NO 48

The Action Group recommends that the following national targets be set for full-time undergraduate entrants with disabilities as a proportion of all entrants:

1998	0.9%
2003	1.35%
2006	1.8%

In achieving these targets specific attention will need to be focused on ensuring increased participation in higher education by students with physical, sensory and learning disabilities. In addition it is necessary to review the accessibility of different types of higher education institutions to each group of students.

The Action Group also highlights the need to ensure that better diagnosis and/or reporting (for example in the case of dyslexia) does not distort the results.

3.17 Reporting and Evaluation by Institutions

Currently there is no systematic reporting on disability policy and provision within the higher education sector. The new arrangements set out in Chapter 6 will provide a mechanism through which institutions can report.

The Action Group considers that all of the institutional arrangements in place to encourage and support participation by students with a disability should be subject to evaluation by the institution in the first instance. Furthermore, there will be a need for the National Office to review the effectiveness of its expenditure. Possible criteria which institutions should consider in undertaking their evaluations are set out in ANNEX 16.



CHAPTER FOUR

MATURE STUDENTS



CHAPTER FOUR MATURE STUDENTS

4.1 Introduction

Since the 1960s, Ireland along with other Western societies experienced a rapid increase in enrolments in higher education. According to Clancy (1994), during the period 1970-1990, Ireland had one of the fastest rates of expansion in enrolment across Europe. Currently mature students account for only approximately 5% of full-time students in higher education. This is well below the average for Western countries, particularly compared to Britain and the USA. During the 1990s Lifelong Learning was prioritised as an important item on the political agenda, at a national and European level. The emphasis on Lifelong Learning and the promotion of social inclusion across Europe has had a profound effect on the development of policy and on investment in adult education. There remain, however, many inconsistencies in policy implementation which need to be urgently addressed. This chapter briefly outlines relevant policy developments, examines the barriers to access experienced by mature students and makes recommendations on how these barriers might be addressed.

The publication of the European Commission White Paper on Teaching and Learning (1995) marked the emergence of demands for a more flexible approach to learning through the development of a Lifelong Learning strategy. The E.U. White Paper identified the Irish education and training system as a facility often only open to the young, rather than a facility which encourages learning at all stages of life (Brutan, 1996:10). Following the deliberations of the Irish Conference celebrating the E.U. Year of Lifelong Learning with its theme of increasing participation, the Government developed the White Paper on Early Childhood Education. Extensive lobbying by organisations such as AONTAS and NALA, combined with the publication of the results of the OECD International Adult Literacy Survey, prompted the Government to appoint a Minister of State with responsibility for adult education, who in turn initiated the first ever Green Paper on Adult Education in the history of the State. The White Paper, Learning for Life, was launched in August 2000, following a wide consultation process.

The White Paper in examining the educational status of the Irish adult population states the following: -

The expansion in post-compulsory education in Ireland has been dramatic. In 1996, fifty five per cent (55%) of the population had finished their education at under the age of fifteen, whereas currently, over eighty one per cent (81%) of school leavers annually have completed Leaving Certificate. The consequence of this change is a widening gap in educational attainment between younger and older age groups. The OECD statistics show that thirty one per cent (31%) of those currently aged between 55 and 64 have completed second-level education in Ireland as opposed to sixty seven per cent (67%) of the 25-34 age cohort. This pattern is common throughout many OECD countries, reflecting the very significantly increased investment and participation in second-level education since the 1960s in the industrialised world. These figures draw attention to one of the most pervasive and persistent inequalities throughout the industrialised world, that of age-based differentials in educational attainment.

This statement indicates that in order to embed the concept and practice of lifelong learning into our educational system, much work needs to be done to develop the adult and community education sector as a key part of the overall strategy. The Minister of State, Mr. Willie O'Dea, at the launch of the White Paper, described adult education as the last area of mass education to be developed in Ireland.

The most recent OECD statistics on educational attainment of the adult population (Education at a Glance, 2000) shows that forty nine per cent (49%) of Irish adults aged between 25 and 64 have less

than upper-second level education. Only Greece, Italy, Spain, Mexico, Portugal and Turkey ranked lower. Twenty one per cent (21%) of Irish adults have completed third level education ranking us seventeenth out of twenty eight countries surveyed. The International Adult Literacy Survey showed that at least a quarter of adults in all countries tested, performed below the desirable minimum, but in some countries the proportion at this level was 50% or more (e.g. Ireland, New Zealand, Poland and the UK).

In 1997, Lynch carried out a comprehensive survey on mature students in higher education. Defining a mature student as aged 23 or over on year of entry, she found that in 1993-94 there were 6,667 mature students enrolled in higher education. Of these 1,699 were full time students. The majority, more than three quarters, were engaged in part time study. There has been no equivalent follow-up study done more recently in this area.

4.1.1 Profile of Mature Students

The findings of Lynch's study show an interesting profile of the students surveyed. She found that the majority of mature students came from a lower middle class background. Only 22% of all mature entrants came from the four lower socio-economic groups (lower non-manual to unskilled manual). Lynch's evidence suggests that the previous working life of the mature student was more likely to be one of unstable and relatively low wage employment. Mature students tend to be at the younger end of the age spectrum. Research from 1993-94 shows that seventy per cent (70%) of applicants and attending students were between the ages of 23 and 35 and that only 15% of all college entrants were over 40 years old.

Lynch's findings are supported by other pieces of research, e.g. Everything to Gain (Healy, 1997) and College Knowledge (Fleming and Murphy, 1997). In her study of students participating in higher education through the then Third Level Allowance Scheme (TLA), supported by the Department of Social Welfare, now the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA), Healy's findings showed that people who availed of the TLA in 1993 were typically under 35 years of age, single and had no children. Two out of every three were male, reflecting the Live Register eligibility requirements which prevented women working at home from participating. Healy found that, in general, TLA students had a relatively high level of education with seventy per cent (70%) having either a Leaving Certificate, undergraduate Diploma or Degree. Another fifteen per cent (15%) had completed either Foundation Courses, National Certificate or Post-Leaving Certificate courses. Fourteen per cent (14%) had a comparatively low level of education which ranged from Primary Certificate to Junior Certificate level.

An examination of socio-economic status showed almost identical findings to Lynch with participants falling into the categories ranging from Intermediate non-manual to Lower Professional. The Third Level Allowance Scheme was first introduced on a pilot basis in 1990 with the principal objective of improving the employment prospects of people in receipt of unemployment payments from the Department of Social Welfare, by facilitating them to participate in Higher education. The number of participants in the scheme increased from 67 in its first year of operation to just over 3000 in 1996/97. By 1999 the numbers of students availing of the scheme stood at over 4000 participants. (Report of P2000 Working Group on Women's Access to Labour Market Opportunities). Given that one of the eligibility requirements for the scheme is study on a course which must be a full-time (day) third level course this would suggest that the numbers of mature students in full-time higher education had increased significantly since 1993.

There was a high success rate among participants in Healy's study with eighty seven per cent (87%) of participants graduating by 1996. Those who did not graduate or left college midway accounted for twelve per cent (12%) of all participants. The field of study of participants in this research varied

extensively but by far the most popular area was Arts which was pursued by forty per cent (40%) of the sample. Another forty per cent (40%) took courses in Education, Engineering, Commerce, Science and Social Science. The remaining participants took courses in a broad range of areas such as Art & Design, Information technology, Horticulture, Health Sciences, Fine Art, Law, Theology, Music and Broadcasting.

The choice of course may well reflect the availability of places within faculties and/or the existence of quotas in particular fields of study. One of the aspects of concern was that the research showed that the TLA initiative had not attracted the target groups for whom it was originally intended, namely those who are most educationally disadvantaged. While the Action Group is examining access issues for three distinct target groups it must be remembered that mature students can fall into each of the three categories and are therefore in danger of being multi-disadvantaged.

4.1.2 Quota for Mature Students

The Points Commission recommended that by the year 2005, each third-level institution should set aside a quota of at least 15% of places for students entering at age 23 or above. This could be done by increasing the intake of mature students on a gradual basis over the next five years. In the longer term, say by the year 2015, this target might be raised to 25% - a proportion which would bring Ireland closer to the average participation rate for mature students in OECD countries as a whole. Of major importance in reaching the quota is the need to develop a range of systematic entry routes to third level other than through the Leaving Certificate.

The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, in Framework IV, "Post-Second Level Participation, including by Mature Students" equally endorsed a quota for mature students: -

"Both the Points Commission and the Review Committee on Post-Secondary Education and Training Places noted the lack of information about demand from mature students. The Higher Education Authority has been requested to undertake market research to establish the level and range of demand from mature students. In the light of the outcome of this research, measures will be designed to meet mature student demand and ensure flexible, innovative responses to mature students needs for consideration be Government. These measures will be based on the recommendations of the Points Commission and the Review Committee's Report.

Colleges will aim to provide that, by 2005, 15% of intake each year will comprise students aged 23 or over. A cross-faculty approach will be promoted and in the light of the outcomes of the research mentioned above, individual faculty targets will be set. Increasing the mature student intake over the next 5 years, in line with the Review Committee's recommendations, will involve increased part-time provision and other flexible options, such as distance learning opportunities."

4.2 Existing Entry Routes for Full-Time Mature Students

Two main entry routes are available to full-time mature students. Firstly, applications may be made through the standard CAO process and assessed on the basis of Leaving Certificate results. Alternatively, applicants may apply for a place within the mature student quota of a third-level institution, in which event their application is assessed on an individual institutional basis. Many such applicants may not have sat the Leaving Certificate or may have left full-time education some time previously and their results might not be sufficient to secure a place in the normal way. Some applicants within the

mature student quota will meet standard entry requirements but won't have the required points, whereas others will not, and will be eligible based on their age alone.

Most applications must be made through the CAO but in some cases, application must be made directly to the institution in question. In a small number of cases, application is made through a combination of both approaches.

Two universities (Dublin City University and the University of Limerick), most colleges of education and a number of other institutions require mature students to apply to them directly. Trinity College, Dublin requires direct application plus application through the CAO. The remaining universities and all institutes of technology require application through the CAO.

In 1998, 4% (1,364) of all CAO acceptances of certificate, diploma or degree places were mature students. Of these, 129 (9.5%) were offered places directly on the basis of their attainment in the Leaving Certificate and the remaining 1,235 were offered places based on other criteria. Mature students also entered some higher education institutions directly without applying through the CAO. The most recent year for which information is available on all mature students entering universities (both through the CAO and through direct application) is 1995.

Every year the Department of Education and Science publishes a *Guide for Mature Students, Entry to Full-Time Third-Level Courses*. This publication lists all of the institutions, their entrance requirements and the proportion of places that have been set aside for mature students in each faculty/school/department. It also outlines, where information is available, the individual selection procedures for each institution. The number of places set aside for mature students varies by institution and across faculties within institutions. In the case of the University of Limerick, for example, the Guide states that all places are awarded on merit and no further detail is provided. For some Institutes of Technology, the Guide states that the reserved places are 5%, or up to 10%, or that 'applications are welcome (from mature students) and no quota applies'. Dublin City University states that between 5% and 10% of places are reserved for mature students in all faculties. University College Cork sets aside specific numbers for each course including, for example, 159 places in the Faculty of Arts, one place in medicine and one place in dentistry. Mechanisms for selecting mature students vary considerably by institution, but appear to include interview, aptitude tests, portfolio assessment, essay writing and personal statement.

More recently, there is a third way whereby students, including those who are mature, can enter third level education. As part of the NCVA Higher Education Links Scheme, which is publicised each year to school principals and guidance counsellors, students can undertake a PLC course and secure an NCVA Level 2 award which is linked with a specific course in an Institute of Technology. Holders of the NCVA awards may gain points for entry to a designated course in an Institute of Technology. These links between PLC provision and courses at third-level are the possible first steps in a nation-wide co-ordinated system of non-Leaving Certificate entry routes to third-level. At present PLC courses are linked solely with courses in institutes of technology.

4.3 Application and Selection System

The Commission on the Points System noted growing dissatisfaction with the diverse mechanisms operated by different institutions for mature student selection. Applicants have to undertake similar but separate assessment processes in each of the third-level institutions in which they seek a place, and there may be different assessment processes in separate faculties in the same institution. The Commission considered that this can be both time-consuming and expensive from the point of view of the applicant and there is clearly a need to simplify and/or co-ordinate the process.

Where students do not succeed in getting a place it is not always clear to them how they can improve their chance of success when making a future application. Sometimes, those who are assessed as suitable/eligible are kept on a waiting list and may be informed of their order on the waiting list. Advice may be given to those who are deemed ineligible / unsuitable that they should undertake a formal course of study before applying again, e.g., attend a course in a local VEC school (perhaps under the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme) or complete an access course. In some cases, it is possible that unsuitability may result from failure to understand what the course they have applied for entails and they are advised to carry out more research before applying again.

The lack of a guidance and counselling service for mature students interested in applying for higher education courses was also highlighted by the Commission.

The Action Group considers that, as many mature students will not have sat the Leaving Certificate, it is not always either feasible or appropriate for them to sit it at this stage. The Group considers that there are other ways in which they can demonstrate their suitability for higher education studies and different third-level institutions have developed a variety of approaches to assessing the suitability of mature students.

The Commission on the Points System considered that there should be a single evaluation of a mature person's application for a third-level place in any broad course area and that where diverse courses are applied for there should be a common base evaluation of each application. In this regard the Commission recommends that "third-level institutions should move towards a co-ordinated system of assessment of mature student applications, under the CAO, and that such a system be in place for mature students seeking a place commencing in Autumn 2002. The Commission recommends that in moving towards a co-ordinated system of assessment, third-level institutions should consult with providers of adult and continuing education and training and of community education and training. They should also consult with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland with regard to ensuring consistent approaches for the recognition of prior learning and of prior experiential learning."

The Commission set out that the object of a co-ordinated system would be to ensure that there would not be multiple examination of an individual application for similar course areas. Moreover, where diverse course areas are applied for, there should not be separate evaluation except in cases where there are clearly identified needs for core attainment levels prior to commencing a particular course. Under the new system, feedback should be provided to unsuccessful applicants on their application. Students should be aware of the timescale involved in assessing their application and feedback should be provided within a specified period, e.g., by early July. The Commission recommended that there should be a named officer in each third-level institution to undertake this role. In particular, the Commission considered that mature applicants should be informed whether they are eligible for the course or courses for which they have applied. If eligible, they should be put on a list and guaranteed a place within a specified number of years. Ineligible applicants should be advised as to the action that they should take to become eligible. For example, they might be advised to complete a course which would enable them to make good the deficit which has been identified in their application. The general aim would be that such a system would enable mature applicants to plan for entry to third-level education within a specified number of years, if that is their goal.

The Commission also noted that setting up of a co-ordinated applications system for mature students would have a number of additional benefits for the third-level institutions involved. It would free up the time of the many academics who examine the applications of mature students at present. In addition, it would lead to increased co-operation between academics and institutions in devising appropriate selection criteria and in developing effective approaches for supporting mature students in third-level institutions.

4.4 Market Research on Demand for Mature Student Places

The Report of the Review Committee on Post Secondary Education and Training Places was published in January, 2000. In relation to mature students, the Committee recommended that there is a need to increase third level provision for mature students, to tackle under-provision in the past, and to cater for the demands imposed by the need for life-long learning. The Report indicated that this could be done through a combination of measures to increase flexibility of provision through expansion of part-time options and through increases in adult participation in full-time courses. The provision of an additional stock of up to 10,000 places for mature students to be built up over a period of years was recommended as key to raising the overall attainment levels of the population now and in the future. The Report recommended that these should primarily, but not exclusively, be in the nature of part-time courses and other flexible options such as distance learning and that the demand for such places should be validated by appropriate market research on the target population.

The primary intent of these recommendations was to seek an increase in the number of undergraduate places (whether degree or sub-degree) for mature students who have not previously accessed higher education, while recognising that other strands of mature student participation (e.g. continuing or post-graduate education) are also relevant to enhancing the attainment levels of the adult population.

The HEA has engaged consultants to undertake this market research and the research commenced in December 2000.

4.5 Issues emerging for Mature Students

4.5.1 Lifelong Learning and Community based Initiatives

In this regard adult education and, in particular, community-based adult education has a key role to play in the development of a culture of lifelong learning. Since the eighties, voluntary locally-based adult education groups have provided points of access to the most disadvantaged and hard to reach adults. Typically these groups were initiated by key individuals, usually women, sometimes with the support of local statutory or church officials, sometimes alone. The structures, programmes and activities of these groups are rooted in the day-to-day experiences, interests and needs of adults, particularly those who are disadvantaged economically, socially and educationally.

The development of community-based education was spearheaded by women and continues to provide access for women, particularly those engaged in home duties, who wish to widen their horizons, develop confidence and skills, gain qualifications and explore the possibility of returning to the workforce. Women created these opportunities for themselves because they needed provision which was available within their communities, at times which fitted with their caring responsibilities and with the crucial support of childcare facilities. None of these supports were being supplied by mainstream providers. An additional advantage was the low cost of courses which is crucial for adults who are not economically independent. These successful models of education and development have, in recent years, been incorporated into many other community based learning opportunities.

Women's education also has another very important impact on educational disadvantage. Research has shown that the educational attainment of the mother has a distinct influence on the educational development of the child. The Combat poverty Agency Report, "Educational disadvantage in Ireland"(1995) states the following: -

“The characteristics of the mother, including schooling experience, seem particularly important in structuring the educational environment of the home and research findings indicate that children of poorly educated mothers do not do as well at school, and leave school earlier, than children of better educated mothers (Baker and Stevenson). Further a mother’s level of education was found to be more closely related to children’s achievement than father’s levels. Women appear to play a key role in breaking the cycle of disadvantage...we believe therefore, that investment in resources to women’s education enhances not just the life chances of individual women, but also their children, and therefore complements and strengthens other initiatives such as “Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage.”

There are currently approximately 1,000 women's groups operating throughout the country with the majority funded by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. The White Paper on Adult Education, “Learning for Life”, recognises that community education plays a key role in tackling disadvantage, but acknowledges that it had not been recognised or supported by the Department of Education and Science heretofore, except under the auspices of the Women's Education Initiative which piloted a number of programmes from 1998- 2000. Three of these projects were concerned with access to tertiary education and provide models of good practice which could be built upon. The projects included the Power Partnership, WERRC / Greater Blanchardstown Development Project and the Southwest Kerry Women’s Association. As an example, the WERRC/GBDP project engaged in the following activities:-

- The delivery of an Access to Third Level Course to Women in their community;
- The delivery of a Third Level Outreach Certificate Programme in Women’s Studies;
- The provision of mentoring and study skills support for participants;
- The development of an Access Education Forum.

The common policy issue arising from the work of the three projects was that access to third level requires action on both on-site delivery and out-reach delivery. A number of key recommendations were made as a result of the work of these projects which could usefully be incorporated into the recommendations of the Action Group. They were as follows : -

- The provision of support for community groups to promote and deliver mentoring services, study skills groups, information technology services and training, guidance, childcare and other care services;
- Financial support to cover part-time, modularised and distance education courses;
- Provision of community based information and guidance services;
- Investment in building real partnerships between community groups and statutory providers;
- Funding for the piloting and mainstreaming of innovative access and support projects.

These pilot projects are only examples of many others piloted under funding mechanisms such as the EU Community Initiatives Programmes, in particular New Opportunities for Women (NOW). Two examples of models piloted under this initiative are the AONTAS Access Course for women with a track record of work in the community and Acess 2000 Waterford. The AONTAS Access course was delivered in partnership with the National College of Ireland, and the majority of participants subsequently accessed higher education or work. The key factor in its success was the availability of funding for fees, childcare, travel and subsistence, and course materials. The provision of an on-site support worker who provided both individual and group support was also crucial to the success of the project.

The ACCESS 2000 model was piloted in collaboration with Waterford Institute of Technology and the Open College Network (OCN), UK. Over recent years the work of ACCESS 2000 and of the five participating groups in the NOW Project has had a considerable impact on expanding education and training opportunities for women in community education settings in the Waterford/Wexford area. Ground breaking partnerships have now been established with other agencies, and accreditation has been obtained for the training modules from the NCEA and the OCN. The evaluations and reports of such programmes show similar outcomes and recommendations.

A forthcoming research report commissioned by AONTAS and undertaken by WERRC on the role of women's community-based education groups in combating poverty and disadvantage shows that locally based groups play a key role in providing access for non traditional students, and in developing a culture of learning within communities. It also shows that after nearly twenty years of involvement in provision they are still seriously under-resourced and their potential is unrecognised. The recent recommendations in the White Paper on Adult Education in relation to the development of community education provide a starting point for its development and need to be implemented as a matter of priority.

With regard to disadvantaged men, a recent research report by AONTAS, the National Association of Adult Education, entitled "Men on the Move" shows that even more work needs to be done to develop a culture of education and learning among disadvantaged men. The report showed that peer evaluation was a key strong influence in men's resistance to education and that the key to creating access lay in providing a high level of support to men in the form of mentoring, providing good role models, space and time. The emerging Men's Networks are playing a valuable role in attracting hard to reach participants and nurturing their talents and abilities. Many of the men interviewed during the research felt that being involved in education had important influences on their family life thus providing important role models for their children. In developing a comprehensive and integrated approach to educational disadvantage community based initiatives have tremendous potential and are worth supporting.

4.5.2 Pre-Entry Issues

A number of reports have been produced during the nineties which give a good insight into the barriers faced by mature students wishing to access higher education. These include those already mentioned earlier in the chapter. Others include the research by Inglis and Murphy entitled "No Room for Adults" (1999), "A Degree at Last", Martin and O'Neill, (AONTAS, 1997), "Mature Students in Higher Education. Proceedings of a conference in Athlone RTC", (Morris, March, 1996), Higher Education Equality Unit and "A Study of Feminist Education as an Empowerment Strategy for Community Based Women's Groups in Ireland" (WERRC, 1998). These reports, together with a number of submissions made to the Action Group, identify a number of common issues of concern to mature students. These were borne out by the feedback from the Student Focus Groups organised by the Action Group on November 22nd.

4.5.3 Finance

The issue most frequently cited by mature students is finance. The Technical Working Group for the Steering Committee on the Future of Higher Education found that lack of adequate financial resources was the main difficulty experienced by full time mature students. Since the publication of that report fees have been abolished for full- time students. Nevertheless, mature students tend to have more family and work commitments than traditional students and taking time out to pursue a course puts a huge strain on family finances. Given that the majority of mature students pursue higher education

through part-time or distance education options, where the fees waiver does not apply, finance is a major burden. The White Paper on Adult Education, Learning for Life, has gone some way towards addressing the issue of financial support i.e.

“arrangements will be implemented so that the higher education fees will not apply to part-time students who satisfy the residency clause, and who are social welfare means tested or unemployment payment recipients or dependants, medical card holders or dependants, persons in receipt of Family Income Supplements or dependants. These arrangements will apply to students who are pursuing: -

- A first degree;
- A first-time nationally certified certificate or diploma programme in a recognised college including the university sector;
- A nationally certified third level first time distance learning programme in Ireland;
- A first time access course that guarantees entry to further progression within the sector as recommended by the Points Commission.”

The thinking behind these recommendations was based on the need to target the most disadvantaged. The Government was also concerned at the high absolute cost of abolishing part time fees for higher education and the risk of dead weight and displacement investment where fees are directly paid by employers

Within the education system alone it is estimated that almost 167,000 students annually pursue adult education programmes on a self-funded basis. Of these, 140,400 pursue part-time courses in second and further education schools and colleges, and the remainder pursue higher education programmes. These figures exclude provision in private education and training bodies.

There is very little data available on the participation in self-funded programmes in the second and further education sector – such courses include hobby and leisure programmes, actions to promote parental support for their children’s learning, personal development programmes, second chance options to pursue basic education programmes and Leaving Certificate or Junior Cycle options, vocational training options and professional development courses. However, the relative balance between courses offering national certification and courses which are uncertified is not known. It is likely also that as the work of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland progresses, there will be increased opportunities for national certification in this area. In addition, there is no information on the profile of participants in terms of their prior educational levels on entry to the courses. For example, in the administration of maintenance grants it is policy to confine support to those progressing to higher levels of qualification, and resources are not provided to enable students to repeat a qualification, albeit in a different discipline, at the same level.

Consideration of the issue of free fees for part-time third level participants would also have to examine the position of those pursuing nationally certified learning courses in the second/further level sector who may enter with lower initial educational attainment levels, as well as the potential impact on the private sector. FAS and other bodies also provide an extensive range of part-time courses on a fee basis. The issue also has to be examined in the context of priorities for investment, given that there are 1.1m adults in the Irish population with less than upper second level education, up to 0.5m adults scoring at the bottom literacy level, and services supporting access severely under-developed.

Nevertheless, in the current economy there are many workers earning the minimum wage, or in low paid employment, or working in small firms which argue that they cannot sustain financial supports for staff

who wish to avail of education and/or training. As yet paid educational leave is at the discretion of the employer and there is no comprehensive research on the level of employer supports for employees engaged in learning opportunities. In an increasingly global economy where the need for continued upskilling is essential to maintaining competitiveness and attracting investment, at a time when almost full employment has been achieved, a lifelong learning strategy demands increased flexibility of education and training provision, enabling work, family and learning commitments to be combined. There is an inherent contradiction therefore between the recognised need to promote flexibility and the financial disincentive to part-time participation in the current fee and grants schemes.

The Action Group is of the view that, given the increase in flexible and atypical working patterns, the increased tendency for both full-time and part-time students to work, and increased flexibility in the timing, duration and modularisation of programmes, the distinction between full-time and part-time education is becoming increasingly blurred, and does not constitute a coherent basis for differentiated fees and student support policies. Labour shortages, competitive pressures, and the need for flexible approaches to attract adults to engage in lifelong learning are all converging pressures which point to the need for increased part time education and training options. Such an approach would also help to increase student throughput and enable optimum use of third level infrastructure on a continuing basis.

The financial barriers for mature students broadly concern: -

- The unavailability of free fees and maintenance grants for part-time courses (with the White Paper proposing fee relief for certain welfare/medical card categories);
- The inadequacy of the rates of maintenance grant for full time courses, and the need for support towards the cost of books, course materials and transport;
- The lack of support towards services such as childcare.

4.5.4 Information, guidance and counselling

The lack of a coherent information and guidance service for adults is the second most frequently cited barrier for mature students. An analysis of approximately 1,500 enquiries to the AONTAS Information Service for 1999 shows that the majority of callers were looking for information on getting into higher education. (AONTAS Annual Report, 1999). Most of these callers did not know where to start looking for the information and many were referred back to AONTAS by the institution to which they had been referred. Many received the information they needed by chance or by word of mouth from friends or colleagues who themselves had taken courses. For students accessing education through the Third Level Allowance the process of applying to college was quite complex. One of the main problems highlighted was that participants could be dealing with a wide variety of agencies including: -

- Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs;
- Department of Education and Science;
- Local Authorities;
- Health Boards;
- Central Applications Office;
- Third Level Institutions.

An additional issue was the lack of a transparent application process. The Inglis and Murphy study showed that there was a high level of confusion among mature applicants who were unsuccessful in gaining entry to college chiefly because of lack of feedback. The Department of Education and Science's booklet, which provides information for mature students, shows that there is no consistent policy among higher level institutions on entry processes for mature students and no demonstrable transparency in the process to provide advance public information for students on the standards expected (e.g "applications considered on merit", "interview" etc).

At the beginning of 2000 the Department of Education and Science launched a project to develop pilot adult guidance services in eleven areas. While this is a welcome initiative, it is focused on particular target groups, namely those wishing to access VTOS, Literacy and adult and community education in the further education area, where no service has hitherto existed. Third level college services concentrate on the needs of students already enrolled, leaving a gap in provision for adults wishing to access higher education. Apart from information on the procedures for application adults need comprehensive information on the requirements for, and the content of, courses.

4.5.5 Preparation for Higher Education

Mature students, especially those who have not been involved in study for a period of time or who have lower levels of educational attainment will often pursue an access or foundation course in order to enhance their chances of success in higher education. There is a growing number of access and foundation courses run by third level providers. These courses provide a valuable opportunity for mature students to prepare for entry to higher education, to develop study and essay writing skills and to accustom themselves to assessment procedures. While the National Council for Educational Awards has developed a Foundation Certificate at this level, there is as yet no systematic entry route which guarantees such courses as eligible for entry to higher education.

Other issues regarding access courses concern:-

- The dominance of full-time yearlong programmes, where needs might be more effectively met over a shorter more intensive programme, (for example a pre-entry summer programme);
- Whether such services might be provided more cost-effectively in the Further Education sector, or through partnerships between third level and further education providers;
- The trend for some colleges to recognise their own access programmes, while not according recognition to those of other institutions, or to national awards at other levels of the system, such as NCVA, FAS etc.

4.6 Post Entry Issues

The Reports mentioned earlier show that mature students were generally positive about their time in college. They appreciated the opportunity to study subjects in which they had an interest and they enjoyed the contact they had with students and staff. Also students who managed to stay in the system tend to do well in their exams. However, students expressed dissatisfaction with study and essay guidelines and were not satisfied by the guidance they received in these areas (Inglis & Murphy). These findings are borne out by the research by Fleming and Murphy. Many students experience feelings of isolation as they try to make progress in the midst of large numbers of traditional students who are much younger than them. Mature students also experience difficulties with external commitments as they try to balance student life with home, caring and work commitments. A major issue especially for female students is the provision of accessible and affordable childcare. This issue is seen as the responsibility of both the institutions and of Government.

With regard to part time mature students the findings of Inglis & Murphy are interesting. They found that part time students on the Modular BA programme in UCD were different from full time mature students. They tended to be older, married, female and have children. They also tended to be employed outside of college and to have less educational qualifications. Because they are part-time students they have to pay fees which added to the difficulties they face. Also, because they are evening students, they are divorced from the daytime atmosphere of the college and from direct contact with traditional students and staff. They also expressed difficulties balancing the demands of college work and family.

There was also a general feeling that they were, somehow, second class students, that the college did not recognise and accept their special needs and interests, that there were insufficient support structures, and that the final degree was not perceived to be as good as the standard BA.

On the other hand they did not experience the same problems with access and they also tended to do well in exams.

The stories told by the students interviewed for the AONTAS publication "A Degree at Last" bear out these findings but they also communicate the high level of motivation, persistence and sheer joy when they achieve their objectives.

4.7 Recommendations of the Action Group

4.7.1 Entry routes

It is clear from the research that adults make good students but that they have particular requirements if they are to be successful in accessing higher education and achieving their objective within it. As noted, the Report of the Review Committee on Post Secondary Education and Training places (1999) recommended that there should be 10,000 additional places at third level for mature students. The Report of the Commission on the Points System (1999) recommended targets for the establishment of quotas for mature students: 15% by 2005 and 25% by 2015.

The Action Group endorses the recommendation of the Commission, in principle. It recognises that the assessment of mature students for entry to higher education is the responsibility of third-level institutions and urges that the institutions consider how to implement this recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION NO 49

The Action Group recommends that the National Office should initiate urgent discussions among the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities, the Council of Directors of Institutes of Technology and providers of adult and continuing education and training, and of community education and training, in order to achieve:

- **The development and recognition of systemised national entry routes to third level colleges other than through the Leaving Certificate.**
- **The recognition of access courses within such a system.**
- **The exploration of partnership models between the further and third level sectors and/or community education providers for provision of different modes of outreach access courses, including short term intensive courses, embedded within a national system of entry routes. Such routes must take account of the needs of adults in specific locations and in diverse social contexts.**
- **The co-ordination of a nationally recognised and transparent procedure for assessment of mature student applications, providing for flexible entry routes taking into consideration the needs of non-traditional higher education applicants, including APEL, portfolio presentation interviews, the needs of students with disabilities etc. The Action Group envisages that the CAO would remain the central office for processing applications for third-level places for mature students.**
- **The offering of places to mature students at an earlier time than at present so as to assist mature students in planning for access to higher education.**

The Action Group considers that when these issues have been developed they should be clearly explained and extensively publicised.

4.7.2 Provision in colleges and institutional supports

In order to increase participation by mature students in higher education, both Government and higher education institutions need to introduce a number of measures to increase participation rates, particularly among disadvantaged students. The White Paper on Adult Education sets out that a Targeted Higher Education Mature Student Fund will be established to promote institutional and co-ordinated change aimed at increasing mature student participation and benefit from third-level education at undergraduate level, particularly for those who do not have the necessary points under the Leaving Certificate. The White Paper sets out that the fund will be a competitive one, to be disbursed on the basis of national criteria to institutions that display institution-wide directional shifts along the lines advocated in the White Paper. Examples of these are greater flexibility in access and delivery, assessment and accreditation and student supports. Cross-faculty/school/department approaches, partnerships with other colleges and/or accrediting bodies, and participation in networks to share results, good practice, and agree a mainstreaming strategy where appropriate, will be part of the requirements. A key focus of the fund will be on increasing participation of disadvantaged mature students in third-level education. The phased increase in the fund is to be linked to research on demand for mature student places being carried out by the HEA. The White Paper sets out that progress in individual colleges should be monitored by their Academic Councils and reports made to the HEA which should twice yearly compile a national report on the measure. The White Paper further sets out that the fund for this purpose will increase on a phased basis to £10m. per annum and should embrace undergraduate degree programmes, nationally certified short or modularised courses (including in the universities), nationally certified distance learning courses and access courses which carry an entitlement to entry. The fund will be linked to specific pre-approved initiatives and courses which will be linked to certification, and which offer progression routes to higher education.

RECOMMENDATION NO 50

The Action Group endorses the setting up of the Targeted Higher Education Mature Student Fund, as proposed in the White Paper on Adult Education, and recommends that the Fund should be administered by the National Office as an integral part of the National Programme.

While the systemic development of a wider range of national entry routes to higher education will be vitally important, there are other changes in delivery needed to better cater for the diverse needs of young people and adults. These include:-

- Flexibility in timing and provision, expanding the range of delivery modes and adopting more adult-friendly pedagogies and a culture of transparency and dialogue;
- Implementation of an equality strategy to monitor the participation of specific groups;
- Flexibility in modes of assessment, procedures for accrediting prior and work based learning, a wider range of assessment procedures incorporating a clearer outcomes focus;
- Continuous feedback and dialogue with learners;
- Comprehensive student supports;
- Full access to college library, IT, Sport and social facilities;
- The development of learning partnerships between higher education institutions, community based providers and the workplace. There are already in place models of good practice which could be supported and mainstreamed;

- Cross faculty/school and departmental training for members of decision-making bodies to ensure a high level of awareness of the issues faced by mature students, especially those who are disadvantaged;
- Cross faculty/school and departmental support structures for access officers in Higher education institutions;
- Academic support from the relevant faculty/school/department to deal with particular problems in the form of a designated academic tutor trained to work with adults;
- Training in adult teaching and learning methodology for academic staff;
- Training for administrative and student services staff in how to support and meet the specific needs of mature students.

In particular, the Action Group highlighted the importance of higher education courses being made available to students in locations which are distant from a higher education institution and noted the potential for diverse types of provision, including courses provided with an outreach component, in meeting the needs of such students. The Action Group welcomed the statement on 29th August 2000 by the Minister for Education and Science in relation to the development of outreach provision and strengthening the educational base in regions which are not well served at present.

RECOMMENDATION NO 51

The Action Group recommends that the higher education institutions identify and implement the specific changes in delivery highlighted above needed to better cater for the diverse needs of young people and adults.

4.7.3 Information, Guidance & Counselling

An integrated approach to the development of guidance services is essential so that clients can access appropriate and comprehensive information at a local level.

RECOMMENDATION NO 52

The Action Group recommends that the recent developments in regard to the evolving guidance service for further education programmes should be expanded to include guidance services for those adults seeking access to higher education programmes which, at the pre-entry level, should be provided under the auspices of the Adult Learning Boards.

RECOMMENDATION NO 53

The Action Group recommends that higher education institutions should seek to meet the needs of potential mature students at pre-entry level through providing appropriate guidance services, as part of a national approach facilitated by the National Office.

The Action Group highlights the importance of good information and relevant course choice in influencing participation and retention rates in third level education.

RECOMMENDATION NO 54

The Action Group recommends that increased flexibility through “change of mind” options and repeat options, and through opportunities for taster courses prior to long term commitment, should be available for potential mature learners.

This would help to ensure that adult learners can make viable and relevant choices in keeping with their interests and abilities. This is seen as critical if strategies to improve retention in long cycle third level courses are to be effective.

The Action Group was not in a position to assess the adequacy of the existing service within third level colleges. The Final Report and Recommendations of the Commission on the Points System and the Colloquium on Increasing Retention Rates in Higher Education both point to the need for services in this area to be expanded and their quality improved.

RECOMMENDATION NO 55

The Action Group recommends that

- **An evaluation study be undertaken to assess the scope, scale and effectiveness of existing guidance and counselling services within higher education institutions, across all colleges, and to make recommendations on the future development needs of the service. The review would take account of the full range of learning supports for students; informational, pastoral, academic and placement related;**
- **That the role of the National Guidance Centre in Education in supporting best practice be developed and resourced, working closely with appropriate interests, for higher education as well as the other levels of the system;**
- **That, in the light of the findings of the study mentioned above, an action plan is put in place within the third level sector to promote a comprehensive service and a transparent operational framework to support the optimum participation and benefit for learners This should be seen as part of an integrated strategy which is consistent with the developments and recommendations highlighted elsewhere in this Report;**
- **That a budget is provided for research and dissemination of best practice among practitioners;**
- **That in monitoring third level access policies, provision of guidance and other support services needs to be monitored systematically by colleges and by the HEA;**
- **That monitoring and evaluation arrangements and reporting formats are designed to track the effectiveness of guidance services for specific target groups.**

RECOMMENDATION NO 56

The Action Group recommends the following should be put in place: -

- **Adequate pastoral support from staff experienced in dealing with problems particular to adult students;**
- **Peer mentoring systems for adult students;**
- **Information days for mature students both on campus and in Community locations.**

4.7.4 Finance

RECOMMENDATION NO 57

As a first step, the Action Group urges the immediate implementation of the recommendations in the White Paper on Adult Education relating to payment of fees for part-time students who are medical card holders, unemployment payment or means-tested welfare or Family Income Supplement recipients, or their dependants.

The Action Group recognises the need to prioritise investment toward those most in need. The progressive extension of free fees for part time courses at further or higher education level to additional targeted groups should be considered by the Department of Education and Science.

RECOMMENDATION NO 58

The Action Group recommends that income level should be the key determinant of whether access to part time courses at further or higher education level is free, subject to participation in nationally certified programmes, and progression upwards to higher levels of education and training without repeat investment at the same level.

The Action Group has recommended the introduction of a special rate of maintenance grant for certain categories of student and the special Rate of Maintenance Grant should be based on the eligibility criteria set out in the "Detail of the Proposed Scheme" (Recommendation No 19).

The scheme of special rates of maintenance grant should also be available to mature students subject to specific conditions.

RECOMMENDATION NO 59

The Action Group recommends: -

(a) In relation to Dependant Mature Students, that

A student who is a maintenance grant holder and whose spouse/partner is in receipt of one of the payments on the "List of Eligible Payments" (items 1 to 11) and is also in receipt of full-rate "Qualified Adult Allowance" or analogous entitlement in respect of that student, should be eligible for the scheme of special rates of maintenance grants, subject to the specified reckonable income limit and other general conditions as set out in the "Detail of the Proposed Scheme" as set out in ANNEX 12.

(b) In relation to Mature Students, that

Mature students should be eligible for the scheme of special rates of maintenance grants subject to;

- **Being a maintenance grant holder;**
- **Being in receipt of one of the social welfare payments specified at items 1 and 2 in the "List of Eligible payments" set out in ANNEX 12, with the exceptions of Unemployment Assistance and Farm Assist; and**
- **Subject to the specified reckonable income limit and other general conditions as set out in the "Detail of the Proposed Scheme" as set out in ANNEX 12.**

4.7.5 Costing

The estimated number of mature students entering full time higher education in 1998 was 4,400 (1,470*3). On the assumption that 40% qualify for maintenance grant, (ie some 1,700) and that 60% of these would be in receipt of social welfare payments and that some 22% would qualify for the special rate of maintenance grant, some 230 students should qualify initially, the cost of the effective additional amount would be £1,225*230 = £280,000.

The cost would rise to £500,000 based on target increase in numbers.

RECOMMENDATION NO 60

The Action Group recommends that in order to address the specific difficulties faced by those who have spent time in prison, DSCFA should review the BTEA Scheme so that time spent in prison should count towards meeting the six month qualifying period.

4.7.6 Childcare

Access to childcare has been highlighted in various reports as critical to enabling parents to access ongoing education and training as well as access to the labour market. Provision of childcare in the education sector is currently limited to participants on VTOS, Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training Centre programmes for early school leavers and the unemployed.

The White Paper on Adult Education indicates that the lack of childcare was highlighted in the consultation process as a critical barrier to accessing education and training for adults, particularly women. It went on to indicate that additional funds will be provided under the National Development Plan to consolidate developments to date, and to expand provision in this area on a phased basis.

RECOMMENDATION NO 61

The Action Group recommends that childcare facilities be developed or expanded in the higher education sector. The Group recommends that the existing budget lines and schemes for the overall childcare strategy being co-ordinated through the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, which should enable higher education institutions, as well as community groups, to access State funding, be fully utilised by the institutions. £290m has been provided in the childcare area for the period 2000-2006 to develop a comprehensive national childcare infrastructure. The Group recommends that the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform actively seeks proposals for funding from higher education institutions, outlining how they plan to measure and meet demand for childcare and that the Department funds these proposals.

See also recommendation No 27

However, the Group also considered that the provision of childcare facilities in third-level institutions is only a partial answer to addressing the childcare needs of adult and other learners and potential learners. It is the case that funding from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform is available for community-based childcare initiatives and it can often be the case that such initiatives would best meet the needs of adult learners. However, these initiatives are only now commencing and individual learners need to be able to choose the childcare option that suits them best – it is not clear that there will be that much choice, if any, available.

4.8 Mature Students: Target Setting, Performance indicators and Evaluation

Based on statistics from Clancy (forthcoming), total full time new entrants to higher education in 1998 amounted to 32,700, of which 4.5% or 1,470 were mature (23 and over).

Based on DES statistics, the total number of part-time students in the 1998/99 academic year was 27,800. Of this number, 82% are estimated to have entered as mature students (22,796), representing an annualised intake of some 7,600. This is a very rough estimate.

On the basis of these estimates, 1998 mature student intake can be represented as follows:

Mode	Mature Entrants	Total Entrants	% Mature
Full Time	1,470	32,700	4.5
Part Time	7,600	9,267	82.0
Total	9,070	41, 967	22

The Group notes that mature entrants are estimated to make up 22% of entrants to undergraduate higher education, both full-time and part-time, and that mature students accounted for 4.5% of full-time entrants.

The Group considers that access for mature entrants needs to embrace full time and part time learning, including Open and Distance Learning.

The Action Group notes that the Commission on the Points System recommended that by the year 2005, each institution should set aside a quota of at least 15% of places for students entering at age 23 or above.

The Group noted that the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, in Framework IV, "Post-Second Level Participation, including by Mature Students" equally endorsed a quota for mature students (see par 4.1.2 above). The Group endorses these commitments.

The Action Group considers that the specific actions to be taken under the National Development Plan and the measures to be implemented under the White Paper on Adult Education Learning for Life will not, in themselves, enable mature students to be 15% of the total entrants to full-time undergraduate higher education. The Action Group considers that to attain such an aim would require significant further resources and indeed wider social, cultural and workplace developments, such as the introduction of full-time study leave for those at work.

RECOMMENDATION NO 62

The Action Group recommends that each third-level institution should aim to set aside at least 15% of full-time undergraduate places in each school/department/faculty for mature students by 2006. The Group recommends that significant additional resources should be allocated and integrated national and institution strategies are developed in order to meet this target.

The Action Group is required to set a target for the purposes of the National Development Plan. The following recommendations set out the Groups advice on these targets. However, the Group stressed that these could only be met where the specific actions to be taken under the National Development Plan and the measures to be implemented under the White Paper on Adult Education Learning for Life are fully put in place in 2001. The Group noted that the focus point of many of the recommendations of the White Paper is on assisting disadvantaged mature learners to access education and the Group considered that there should also be a specific focus within the range of developing interventions on such learners.

RECOMMENDATION NO 63

The Group recommends that the targets being set for the National Development Plan should be in relation to mature students as a percentage of all entrants to undergraduate full-time and part-time higher education. The primary National targets would therefore be:

1998	22%
2003	26%
2006	30%

The Action Group considers that, within this objective, for the purposes of the National Development Plan, there should be further targets for full-time undergraduate entrants as follows:

1998	4.5%
2003	7%
2006	10%

These secondary targets are predicated on the implementation from 2001 of relevant provisions in the National Development Plan and the White Paper on Adult Education *Learning for Life*.

The Action Group considers that the data on the number of part-time undergraduate students entering higher education should be collected more systematically by the HEA and the Department of Education and Science, and notes that such information is being collected from all third-level institutions for the academic year 2000/01. Should it be found that the information on part-time mature students, on which the targets in this report are being set, is inaccurate, the Group considers that the targets should be revised to include the same proportion of an increase overall, i.e, an increase of 18% in total mature entrants to undergraduate higher education by 2003 and an increase of 36% by 2006.

The Group considers that specific full-time and part-time targets should be set by the National Office at national level and, in consultation with third-level institutions, institutional targets should also be set. In this regard the completion of the market research currently being undertaken by the HEA and the availability of the further information referred to above will be of assistance.

The Action Group considered that a co-ordinated strategy is vital to the attainment of the targets being proposed for the National Development Plan. It stressed that many of the elements of this strategy would be beyond the control of the National Office. In particular, the Group considered that the attainment of targets depended on the Targeted Higher Education Mature Student Fund being introduced with immediate effect and with the setting up of the National Office. The Action Group also considered that any developments in relation to free part-time higher education fees would have a major impact also.

RECOMMENDATION NO 64

The Action Group recommends the development of a detailed implementation strategy incorporating

- **Clear numerical targets for increased places and provisions of support structures for mature students set nationally and by individual institutions;**
- **Precise timetables for the achievement of such targets;**
- **Monitoring and evaluation by the National Office in collaboration with higher education providers.**

CHAPTER FIVE

DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES



CHAPTER FIVE

DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES: the Community Dimension of Under-Participation.

5.1 Introduction

Since 1991, the government and the social partners have increasingly recognised the cumulative exclusion experienced by people living in certain identifiable districts. This exclusion extends to all aspects of socio-economic, cultural and political life, and results in visible, measurable effects such as extremely high unemployment rates and welfare dependency, and comparatively low levels of participation in education. Successive national agreements through the nineties have developed the social inclusion agenda, and the Community and Voluntary sector have been partners in the two most recent of these agreements.

The National Development Plan sets as a key priority the alleviation of social disadvantage and the creation of a more equal and inclusive society. It adopts the definition of social exclusion as set out in the Partnership 2000 agreement:

‘Cumulative marginalisation from production (unemployment), from consumption (poverty), from social networks (community, family and neighbours), from decision-making and an adequate quality of life.’

The Plan identifies lack of educational achievement as a key predictor of individual social exclusion. It also notes the correlation between low levels of participation in the education process and the development of socially and economically marginalised communities.

Each of the Operational Programmes in the NDP includes strategies to promote a more inclusive society. In particular, the Regional Operational Programmes address the issue of disparities within and between the Regions, and include sub-programmes of Local Development Social Inclusion measures designed to intervene in the most disadvantaged urban and rural areas. These measures will be implemented mainly through the networks of Area-based Partnership Companies and Designated Community Groups.

5.2 Partnership Companies and other Groups

Partnership Companies, Designated Community Groups, LEADER and other Community and Voluntary Organisations

Area-based Partnerships were first established in 1991. Operating in designated zones in the most disadvantaged areas in the country, they are structured as limited companies with a brief to engage in local development activities to promote social and economic inclusion. Each company has a Board of Directors reflecting a partnership between key socio-economic sectors: community & voluntary, employers, unions, State departments and agencies, and public representatives. There are now 38 Partnership companies (see map at ANNEX 17). Partnerships operate by developing and implementing Area Action Plans: at the end of 2000, they are at the early implementation stages of plans for 2001-2006 under the Social Inclusion agenda of the National Development Plan.

Every Partnership plan contains an education component. In the 1995-99 Plans, actions to increase participation in higher education featured on the agendas of 22 of the Partnerships: some of them have been engaged in this work since 1994.

In addition to the Partnerships, a second network of 32 Designated Community Groups has been developed to address social inclusion issues in smaller districts outside the areas of concentrated disadvantage. Ten of these groups are already implementing actions designed to increase participation in higher education by their target populations.

While each intervention by a Partnership or ADM Community Group is designed as a response to a locally identified need, there is considerable co-ordination of the overall effect. Area Development Management Ltd. (ADM) manages the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme on behalf of the Government. The PLANET network is a strategic alliance of all of the Partnership companies. In the education field, each Partnership has an Education Co-ordinator, and these co-ordinators have participated in a Network since 1992. At national level, ADM has an Education Co-ordinator who maintains links with the Department of Education and Science, primarily through the Social Inclusion Unit, but also through other sections as required. Partnership companies represent a well-developed resource for local delivery of educational interventions targeted at the most disadvantaged groups in our society.

In many rural areas, not catered for by Area Partnership Companies or ADM Community Groups, LEADER groups offer a potential local infrastructure on which area-tailored interventions could be based (see map at ANNEX 18).

For the purposes of this Chapter and subsequent chapters, all of the Area Partnership Companies, ADM Community Groups, LEADER groups and other community and voluntary organisations are referred to as Partnership and Community Groups.

5.3 Participation in Third Level Education – The Disadvantaged Community Dimension

National and local statistics show that in many disadvantaged areas more than 50% of the population had left full time education by the age of fifteen. Participation in education after the age of twenty falls below 4 % in some areas and is as low as 1% - 2% in districts of extreme disadvantage (e.g. areas within inner city Dublin, Finglas, Blanchardstown, Ballymun, Darndale and some remote rural areas). Partnership and Community Group initiatives to promote participation in further and higher education are determined by an analysis of locally identified needs. The experience of implementing these initiatives suggests that the nature of the student's home community is a crucial factor in determining their likelihood of developing the ambition of going to college; it also decides the level of difficulty they will encounter in realising that ambition. In other words, in a community suffering from cumulative disadvantage, even the children of families who are not actually living in poverty are affected by the general milieu, and are consequently less likely to succeed in getting to college, or even to try.

Students from such districts face a range of obstacles at personal, family and community levels to their progression to higher education:

- The personal need and aspiration to earn a wage, whatever the long-term prospects in terms of earning potential or career development;
- Family pressure to avail of employment opportunities that may arise, become economically independent, and supplement the household income;
- Lack of role models in the community, and lack of a local peer group of students in higher education.

The local dimension to under-participation in higher education is therefore a key issue to be addressed.

5.3.1 Issues affecting the Participation of Students from Disadvantaged Communities

Several issues are identified that typically affect participation in Third Level education by students from disadvantaged communities, over and above the negative effects of individual disadvantage:

- Low expectations or ambition of progression to further and third level due to:
 - poor family or community tradition of progression to college
 - fear of being isolated from or among friends
 - poor study habits and support and a sense of not being able to achieve academically
 - low teacher and parent expectations
 - personal desire or family and peer pressure to enter the workforce as soon as possible
 - poor tradition of progression to employment that requires college education
- Inability of some schools, within their resource allocation, to offer:
 - a wide or adequate range of subject options to all students
 - higher level courses in some subjects to small numbers of students
 - discretionary study and tutorial supports to help students maximise their potential

This can reduce the academic achievement of young people and consequently affects their ability to compete for a place in college. This is especially relevant in schools catering for a large number of students from disadvantaged communities, or smaller schools serving small urban centres or rural areas.

- Inability of schools, within current resources, to offer progressive and extensive career support for all students at all stages of the school cycle; this can affect the parent's and young person's understanding of:
 - the education system
 - the relationship between subject choice and future study and career options
 - the relationship between education attainment and later employment opportunities
 - alternative routes to acquiring further or third level qualifications

This issue is relevant in schools catering for a large number of students from disadvantaged communities where the allocation of resources to support career guidance is not adjusted upwards to allow adequate or concentrated support to students. It is also relevant in smaller schools that may only have access to a half-time post or limited teacher hours to provide guidance support.

- Low personal and economic resources within homes and communities to support education due to:
 - history of early school leaving among parents or siblings
 - parents' lack of understanding of the education system
 - parental or family dependency on social welfare or low income
 - personal or family pressure on young people to become economically independent, or support the family income, through part-time work which may adversely affect school results
 - personal or family pressure to opt for full-time work instead of considering full time study with associated cost implications
- Low or non application for a college place, or application confined to courses that are associated with low points rating, due to:
 - low personal aspirations and expectation of academic achievement
 - low expectations among parents
 - low expectations within schools and local communities
 - lack of information or misinformation among young people, parents and adults

- a local culture of progression to employment instead of further study
- lack of resources in schools to provide adequate backup to young people in making informed choices at crucial times in the school cycle.
- Non take up of college offers, underachievement or early drop out due to:
 - low academic achievement and failure to achieve required entry points
 - difficulty adjusting to the college environment which may present unexpected social, cultural and academic challenge,
 - inadequate career, personal and study supports to support transition to, and retention in, college
 - feeling of isolation from one's locality or friends who did not progress to college
 - excessive pressure to achieve from one's family, local community or circle of friends: the so-called "tall poppy" effect
 - high participation costs and the inadequacy of the maintenance grants to meet the real cost of participation,
 - desire (personal or family) for immediate or short term economic independence through part-time or full-time work, conflicting with study requirements of college courses and the duration of college programmes
- Poor transfer options between colleges and lack of understanding of the possibilities for this.

5.3.2 Mature Students from Disadvantaged Communities

The issues listed above can affect all students from disadvantaged communities. Mature students face additional obstacles to their participation:

- Limited range of options available to mature students, due to:
 - the low availability of college places for adults generally, placing additional pressure on those from an educationally disadvantaged background
 - the tendency for places on offer to be concentrated within a particular range of subject areas or college faculties
- Lack of or inadequate Adult Guidance Services at community level or within Adult Education Services/Centres to support adults in making informed choices about returning to education and progression to college. Such services are necessary at pre-entry stage, during participation and on completion to support progression to employment or further study.
- Inconsistent application procedures within and between colleges – sometimes changing from year to year within a college.
- The unattractiveness of the traditional models of assessment within third levels institutions, which in the majority of cases is still focused on the 'terminal written exam'. The development of portfolio building, which has particular attraction for adults, as an option for assessment has not been explored or developed across a range of subjects.
- Lack of general flexibility in models of provision
 - Poor provision of outreach that can respond flexibly to specific demands. Where outreach provision does exist, the range of course and certification options is limited. Additionally, there is insufficient co-operation between colleges to ensure wide coverage in terms of location of programmes or variety of programmes on offer

- Low investment in the use of information technology to support distance education, part-time study or outreach provision - for example, video conferencing, computer learning centres etc.
- Lack of support for part-time and modular provision, both of which are related to the development of more extensive outreach provision
- Lack of opportunity for the accreditation of prior learning which has particular value and potential for adults

These issues are of particular relevance in rural areas and areas of considerable distance from any college campus.

- Inadequate library services in many areas, especially small urban centres and rural areas, with little additional supports at college level to accommodate the needs of adult learners or part-time students.
- Lack of incentives for employers to encourage participation in further and third level education and allow employees time out or flexible hours for college attendance, study or exams.

5.4 Partnership and Community Group Responses

Partnerships and Community Groups view education as central to supporting social and economic development in disadvantaged communities. Area Action Plans (drawn up by the Partnerships and Community Groups) invariably acknowledge this belief, and contain measures designed to:

- Bring about an overall increase in attainment levels;
- Make suitable education opportunities more available and accessible;
- Make the education provision more meaningful and relevant to disadvantaged communities.

Many Partnership Plans contain actions that are explicitly aimed at increasing the rate of progression to higher education. They are designed to:

- Highlight the value of further and third level education and create a climate where further and third level education becomes a realistic goal for young people and adults;
- Increase participation rates and change participation patterns in further and third level education by individuals from disadvantaged communities and families;
- Provide guidance and study supports to individuals before selecting a programme of study and during the programme of study;
- Assist individuals with costs associated with participation in further and third level education e.g. travel, books, course fees, accommodation.

5.4.1 The “Local Development Approach”

The ‘local development’ approach to increasing participation in Third Level education is based on the capacity of Partnerships and Community Groups to: -

- Support linkage and co-operation between schools and reduce competition between schools;
- Support capacity building within schools and the community;
- Promote linkage between school and community based initiatives and Third Level institutions;
- Give direction to a district approach, providing overall co-ordination and maximise resources at local level;

- Encourage collaborative approaches at local level;
- Provide a neutral voice and encourage local ownership and involvement;
- Support the delivery of community based guidance services;
- Respond to the needs of mature students at local level.

Target Groups

The explicit target populations for Partnership actions are generally young students and adult students from disadvantaged districts and from communities with little tradition of participating in Third Level Education. Within these categories, certain groups are targeted for specific supports: -

- Social Welfare recipients, their spouses and dependants
- Minority Groups e.g. Travellers, Ex-offenders

Every Partnership company that implements actions to increase participation includes students with disabilities in its list of eligible groups for support. Most of these companies do, in practice, support small numbers of students with disabilities. However, there have been few specifically designed actions targeting this particular group.

5.5 Strategies

Actions to increase participation in Third Level education in Partnership areas generally arise out of three strategic approaches, each concentrated on one of the critical transition points:

5.5.1 Increase the rate of application from the target groups

This strategy comprises targeted access initiatives for second level students, and for adults.

Targeted Access Initiatives for Second Level Students

The approach is grounded in the understanding that what 'happens' or 'does not happen' at second level has a significant effect on progression to further or third level education. Investment at second level advocates the notion of education support as a continuum and is in line with the principle that "the earlier the intervention the better." Initiatives broadly provide for study supports, career and guidance supports and financial supports. Feedback by Partnership and Community Groups suggests that such supports are effective in encouraging, facilitating and assisting participation in further education by disadvantaged communities and individuals, including disadvantaged students with a disability.

The BITE initiative in Ballymun, which is the longest scheme in existence, indicates welcome change in patterns of progression to third level education due to such interventions. This trend is supported by reports from the Trinity Access Programme and the Clondalkin into Higher Education Access Programme (CHEAP). The CHOICES Programme in Finglas Cabra Partnership, the CHALLENGER Programme in Northside Partnership and the DIT Community Links Programme provide further evidence of successful outcomes.

Resource limitation has meant that programmes have had to be quite selective, even within areas of high disadvantage, and usually concentrate on key stages of transition such as Junior Certificate to Leaving Certificate. The school and community response has been enthusiastic and the success ascribed to the programmes has been heavily reliant on the commitment of teachers, community interests, and parents and, of course, the young people themselves. Actions that influence the perceptions of parents are considered to be a vital component of most programmes.

Key elements within the initiatives are:

Study Supports

- Supervised Study;
- Study Skills Support;
- Tuition - Group and Individual;
- Revision Programmes.

Career and Guidance Supports

- Awareness Raising (parents and young people);
- College Familiarisation (parents and young people);
- Career Path Workshops;
- Goal Setting;
- Induction to Third Level.

Financial Supports

- Bursaries and Scholarships;
- Initiatives to discourage excessive part-time work.

In the more developed programmes cross linkage between the elements underlies the strategy; for example, a scholarship as an incentive not to take up part-time work is offered alongside tuition, revision and study support.

There is at present no national programme funded under the aegis of the DES that has as its primary objective the encouragement of participation by disadvantaged students in Higher education. The existing targeted initiatives (ESLI and SSRI) are aimed at reducing early school leaving or ensuring transition from primary to second level.

RECOMMENDATION NO 65

The Action Group recommends that specific strategies should be put in place within Area Based partnerships to promote access by students in the three target groups to access higher education.

The Action Group recalls the terms of its Recommendation No 4 whereby it recommended that the existing focus of the special initiatives on trying to keep children in school only to sit the Leaving Certificate should be reviewed. The Action Group believes that the objectives must encompass the additional aims of increasing awareness of higher education options and encouraging and supporting better performance in the Leaving Certificate and transfer to higher education.

The structures already in place, including those for HSCL, SSRI and other community based initiatives, and other programmes undertaken by third-level institutions at second level, should be fully utilised to promote access opportunities, and transfer to higher education should be one of the indicators for the evaluation of SSRI.

The Action Group considers that a new initiative, clearly and easily associated with direct progression to further and third level education, is considered important in shaping the thinking within schools and communities and among parents and young people themselves.

RECOMMENDATION NO 66

The Action Group recommends that a national initiative be introduced at primary and second-level with the specific aim of encouraging progression to further and third level education by disadvantaged students.

Where a young person progresses to further or third level education and an equivalent programme exists to support participation at that level, the young person generally becomes a beneficiary of that programme.

Targeted Access Initiatives for Mature Students

Some of the strategies employed in Partnership areas to increase participation by disadvantaged younger students are equally applicable to mature students; other strategies are deployed particularly to address issues that arise for adults:

- Educational Guidance for Adults – may be delivered directly by Partnerships, through the Local Employment Services Networks, or through a local organisation on behalf of the Partnership. Availability of guidance support is still very inconsistent in availability, and in the scope and quality of the support provided. Some initiatives offer continued mentoring support in the local environment to adults while they are in college;
- Pre-college developmental programmes for adults are organised with Partnership support in some areas;
- Some Partnerships are involved in the design and organisation of local VTOS courses with an Access objective.

5.5.2 Improve the level of access

Many Partnership companies seek to realise this strategy through involvement in college-based Access programmes; there is comparatively little that a local organisation can achieve in this matter without an in-system partner. Partnership experience of working with college-based Access programmes is generally positive. Some issues are identified: -

- Many Partnership areas are remote from any college, and it is difficult to develop effective relationships;
- Access programmes affect only a “token” group of students from any particular area; school-based recruitment does not necessarily provide contact with students from the most disadvantaged areas;
- Access programmes should enable entry to the student’s college of choice.

Some Partnerships have employed specialist guidance personnel to support schools and students in negotiating entry arrangements – e.g. PLC to IOT. At the Further Education level, Partnerships have participated in the development of new courses to cater for locally identified learning needs.

To support access for adults, some Partnerships have commissioned Third Level courses for delivery on an outreach or distance education basis; others have provided the local link to enable Third Level courses to be delivered in their area – e.g. courses with a community development or youthwork focus.

5.5.3 Provide support to those who do participate in Third Level

Targeted Interventions for Further and Third Level Students provide supports for young people who progress directly to college as well as for mature students. These initiatives have grown out of the inadequacy of grant aid available to disadvantaged students, the absence of tailored supports (personal, study, career and financial) that assist participation and completion of Third Level education, and the lack of guidance services for adults wishing to return to education. It is perhaps the sensitive and flexible administration of these locally based supports, within generally agreed criteria, that has made them most effective. The interventions comprise: Financial Support Schemes and Combined Guidance and Financial Schemes. An example of a combined intervention is the Higher Education Support initiative developed by the Northside Partnership, in Dublin's north-eastern suburbs; an outline of the operation of this intervention is included in ANNEX 19.

Financial Support Schemes

Partnerships have identified that personal or family financial constraints are among the main factors preventing initial take up or completion of a college programme. Financial schemes assist individuals with participation costs associated with undertaking a programme of study. The level of support varies in terms of 'what it's for' and the amount allocated. Administration of the support is underpinned by general criteria but allows 'flexibility' according to individual needs.

Costs covered include the following: -

- Travel;
- Course and Examination Fees;
- Books, Materials & Equipment;
- Childcare;
- Accommodation & Subsistence;
- Special Tuition;
- Guidance.

Individual allocations can range from below £200 up to £2000, or slightly more in unusual cases. 28 Partnership Companies and 10 ADM Community Groups are currently offering such a service at an approximate overall annual investment of £500,000.

While financial supports are recognised as essential by many students, Partnerships can also verify that a significant number of individuals place equal importance on the availability of guidance support at pre-entry stage and during a programme of study.

5.6 Combined Guidance and Financial Support Schemes

The absence of adequate guidance supports for adults wishing to explore further and third level as an option was among the first gaps in provision identified at local level by Partnerships. This prompted the establishment of basic services to provide information and guidance sessions for adult returners. The initial focus was on supporting the individual to make informed choices to suit their needs, aspirations and abilities. Significant attention was also given to supporting course selection, application to college and identifying what additional financial supports might be required by individuals to assist participation.

On entering college, adjusting to academic challenge and cultural differences emerged as issues for many participants. Separately, these issues can be difficult but, combined with financial demands, can result in underachievement or dropout. On-going guidance and mentoring supports therefore became important in enabling some individuals meet the demands of adjusting to college life and changed

expectations within their family and community environment. The experience of Partnerships indicates that such support is especially important in the first year when personal doubts are more likely to arise and dropout can ensue. However, while frequency of provision may then be reduced its importance may not.

The need for guidance and mentoring support has proven as important to the young person, transferring directly from the Leaving Certificate or Post Leaving Certificate programme, as to the mature student.

RECOMMENDATION NO 67

The Action Group recommends that the disadvantaged area dimension must form part of the National Programme to radically increase participation in Third Level education by socio-economically disadvantaged student groups.

The Action Group also recommends that the National Office should fund encouragement and access-promoting programmes based on local school networks involving Partnership and Community Groups and college access programmes. These programmes should be integrated into a long-term strategy – at least the span of the NDP – and funding should be allocated on a multi-year basis, subject to fulfilment of performance criteria.

5.7 Elements of Strategy

In responding to the issues generated by the area dimension, learning from the experience in Partnership and Community Groups provides a basis for a strategy that will:

- Encourage greater interest in seeking entry to third level;
- Ensure that more disadvantaged students succeed in gaining entry to third level courses;
- Provide that those who take up third level places can avail of the financial and other supports they need to ensure a successful outcome to their studies.

The strategy should be realised in the following actions:

To encourage greater interest in seeking entry to Third level:

- The focus for intervention should normally be “community”, rather than “college” or “school”;
- Communities with low rates of participation should be prioritised: Partnership and Community Groups offer potential for deployment of programmes into these communities. The National Office should fund encouragement and access-promoting programmes based on local school networks involving Partnership and Community Groups and college access programmes. These programmes should be integrated into a long-term strategy – at least the span of the NDP – and funding should be allocated on a multi-year basis subject to fulfilment of performance criteria.

To ensure that more disadvantaged students succeed in gaining entry to Third Level courses:

- College-based Access Programmes should collaborate with Partnership and Community Groups in developing their programmes with schools;
- A far greater level of college outreach into disadvantaged districts is proposed – e.g. “opportunity fairs” as well as participation-encouragement programmes. These activities could

be designed, and implemented by, College-based Access Programmes in co-operation with Partnerships and local education networks;

- New and expanded models of guidance provision within school and within the community are recommended for second level students from disadvantaged communities. These should focus on greater co-operation between schools, colleges and local communities. Development on an area basis, rather than a school by school basis, offers greater potential, although the responsibility and contribution of each school and college should also be recognised.

Provide that those who take up Third level places can avail of the financial and other supports they need to ensure a successful outcome to their studies

5.8 The Millennium Fund

In launching the Action Group, the Minister for Education and Science announced the establishment of a Millennium Partnership Fund for Disadvantage with a provision of £1 million in 2001. The Minister indicated that the Fund would be administered by the DES, in conjunction with Area Partnerships, building on the experience of the Higher Education Support Scheme operated by the Northside Partnership in Dublin. This Partnership received an allocation of £75,000 for this work in 2000.

This initiative was strongly supported in submissions from A.D.M. and the Network of Education Co-ordinators in Partnership companies. The Action Group considers that the deployment of this Fund will enable the learning from the Partnership experience at local level to contribute to the total range of interventions to support participation in higher education, by responding with tailored initiatives to issues arising out of the area dimension of disadvantage. The following recommendations are made for the implementation of the Millennium Fund: -

RECOMMENDATION NO 68

Managing Agent

The management of the Millennium Fund should be the responsibility of the National Office. Pending the establishment of the Office, the Department of Education and Science should retain its responsibility for the initiative. It is important that actions implemented under the provisions of the Fund be fully integrated into the other elements of the National Access Programme.

Eligibility

The fund should be open to applications from Partnership and Community Groups (i.e., Area Partnership Companies, ADM Community Groups, LEADER groups and other community and voluntary organisations). Other organisations focussed on the needs of particular sectors among the disadvantaged target groups should also be eligible to apply – e.g., the Educational Trust that supports ex-prisoners taking up opportunities in education.

The Fund should be for initiatives designed to support students from disadvantaged target groups in participating in further or higher education courses. It is not aimed at supporting students in second level education; however, its development will assist in making second level students aware of the viability of progression to higher education as an option.

The main cost elements eligible for funding should be for supporting disadvantaged students in further and higher education, through:

- Promotion of the initiative to students;
- Financial supports to meet student participation costs;
- Provision of information, guidance and mentoring;
- Study supports;
- Delivery and Administration costs.

Application Process and Appraisal Procedure

Participation should be based on an application process. There should be an application form, and agreed criteria and procedures should be published in advance for the appraisal of all applications. Criteria for appraisal might include:

- Previous experience of operating a scheme or similar schemes;
- Delivery capacity of applicant group;
- Current financial investment in student support;
- Linkages with other agencies, College Access Programmes etc.;
- Geographical spread (urban and rural balance);
- Targeting of proposal at most disadvantaged students and areas.

Support for Participation

The National Office, as managing agent, should liaise with A.D.M. to ensure that mechanisms and support are put in place to enable those Partnerships and Community Groups who are not well placed to apply initially to build capacity and ensure widespread coverage over time.

Attention should be given to encouraging pilot work with special focus on groups that are particularly under-represented at Third Level or are affected by particular barriers to participation, such as Travellers, ex-prisoners or students from remote rural communities.

Management of the Millennium Fund at local level

The management and administration of the fund at local level should be the responsibility of the applicant group.

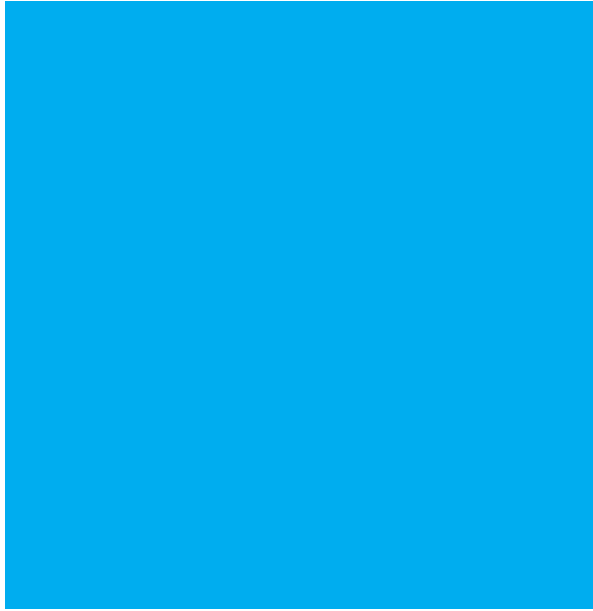
Learning Lessons & Informing Policy

In addition to normal reporting requirements, a condition of each funding allocation should be a commitment by the applicant group to co-operate in a co-ordinated process of impact assessment and identification of good practice, to inform the development of policy. This process could be strengthened through the development of formal linkages between the National Office and the Partnerships Education Co-ordinators Network.

Duration of Millennium Fund

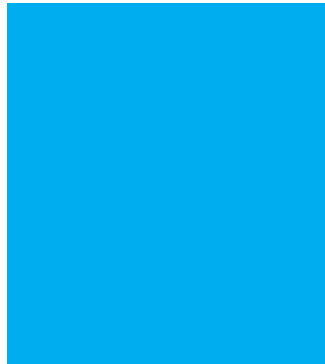
The Action Group strongly supports the immediate need for the introduction of the Millennium Fund in the short to medium term. However, the Group considers that there are too many organisations and funds engaged and becoming engaged in providing financial support for students in further and higher education. The Group considers there is a need for rationalisation of student support generally and addresses this further in chapter 6. In particular, the Action Group considers that in the context of a rationalised student support system, organisations involved in topping up State support for students in

further and higher education should be planning to disengage from this provision in the medium term and to concentrate their efforts on non-financial supports.



CHAPTER SIX

A CO-ORDINATED NATIONAL FRAMEWORK



CHAPTER SIX A CO-ORDINATED NATIONAL FRAMEWORK RESPONSE OF THE ACTION GROUP: A CO-ORDINATED NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

6.1 Introduction

The Action Group undertook a wide-ranging inquiry to identify the barriers that inhibit participation in higher education by the three target groups. It was concluded that equity in access opportunities to higher education is broadly social, cultural, geographic and economic and not just educational. Attitudinal and environmental barriers are significant. It is recognised that equity problems in higher education cannot be solved by actions taken at Third Level only, or by an exclusive focus on educational opportunities. The patterns of inequality which are manifest at the point of entry to third level are the result of a cumulative process of disadvantage which first manifest themselves much earlier in the educational cycle. The source of educational disadvantage is rooted in differential economic, social and cultural capital of families.

The inquiry also revealed a vast amount of good work that is already carried out to address the issues of under-participation in higher education. Actions are promoted or undertaken by a variety of agents, including colleges, schools, community and voluntary organisations and state agencies. This work is uncoordinated. It lacks cataloguing, and there is no structure to take responsibility for identification and dissemination of best practice. Some schools and communities suffer initiative overload while others are not affected by any intervention. On an individual level, many disadvantaged students are still unable to access Third Level places or sustain participation in college, even though they receive significant supports: the support available may be the wrong mix in their individual circumstances, or it may simply be substantial but inadequate.

The conclusion arising out of this inquiry is that a proliferation of additional interventions is unlikely to bring about any radical change in the situation unless they are deployed in a suitable structural environment that can coordinate and intensify their effect.

6.2 Background factors

The key requirement for a co-ordinated approach is suggested in the discussions and conclusions presented in a number of recent reports. These are reviewed in Chapter 1 of this report. The Skilbeck report proposes a comprehensive strategy across the broad field of equity in higher education, and develops a framework of objectives at three stages in the education process. These stages are generally in line with key transition points identified in the 1995 Report of the Steering Group on the Future of Higher Education. Osborne and Leith, in their recent report, recommend the development of a national strategy on widening access, with each intervention operating in a broad policy framework incorporating national targets. The general thrust of these reports was validated in the submissions received by the Action Group from a very wide range of organisations.

6.3 Skilbeck's 14 propositions

Professor Skilbeck concluded his report with a set of propositions of wide, general applicability across the broad field of equity in higher education. The Action Group endorses these propositions as a basis on which the National Programme should be developed. The propositions are as follows:

- Construct and implement comprehensive, coherent policies addressing the full range of higher education equity issues; Set these higher education policies in the context of the lifelong learning chain, from early childhood to mature adulthood;

- Ensure that there is appropriate and adequate legislation and regulatory procedures with firm compliance measures;
- Have well developed procedures for setting targets, implementing, regularly monitoring and evaluating equity performance;
- Use financial instruments both system-wide and within institutions to recognise and encourage good practice;
- Work closely with the school system, community and professional bodies in well co-ordinated and targeted strategies to improve opportunities for under-represented groups;
- Ensure staff, physical resources and finance are adequate for the task, appropriately deployed to meet the targets that are set and comply with legal and regulatory requirements;
- Develop curricula and procedures for teaching and learning, assessment and student progress that meet equity goals including specific 'at risk' groups;
- Make full use of incentives, staff training and other forms of encouragement and recognition to bring about a strong institution-wide commitment to equity;
- Have observatories and procedures to identify and work systematically on major barriers, bottlenecks and problem areas;
- Mobilise staff and students to raise consciousness, improve knowledge and understanding, counter prejudice and gain publicity for equity achievements;
- Strengthen research, data and information capabilities, and resources, and use them in regular reports;
- Ensure that equity policies, programmes and issues regularly feature in strategic planning and the exercise of institutional governance, management and leadership;
- Be creative, thoughtful and energetic in developing and supporting inclusive cultures in higher education institutions;
- Periodically review and evaluate equity strategies at all levels, and establish mechanisms to modify approaches appropriately in light of experience.

Framework of objectives for promoting equity in higher education

The Report also sets out a framework for promoting equity in higher education at institutional level:

6.3.1 Basic schooling: pre-school, primary and lower secondary: to

- Foster consciousness of discrimination and inequitable practice among all who have a responsibility for young children's well being, and develop competence to deal with them;
- Identify and provide support to 'at risk' or 'academically disadvantaged' students (actual and potential) and assess progress regularly;
- Take all possible steps to ensure successful learning by all students (education for all);
- Provide teachers with opportunities and incentives for inservice education and professional development.

6.3.2 Upper secondary education – general and vocational: to

- Foster consciousness of discrimination and inequitable practice and develop competence to deal with them among teachers and administrators;
- Actively foster capacity and interest of all students to continue learning;
- Provide all teachers with opportunities and incentives for inservice education and professional development;

- Achieve a better integration of programmes and requirements arising in different parts of the transition process to ensure a smooth passage; bring tertiary level academics and students/ school teachers/ administrators closer together;
- Actively encourage inclusive practice for equity groups at the pre-tertiary stage.

6.3.3 The first years of tertiary education and academic progression: to

- Foster consciousness of discrimination and inequitable practice and develop understanding and competence to deal with them, through: academic fields of study, professional development opportunities for academics and university administrators, and research programmes;
- Ensure appropriate access arrangements for under-represented groups, and bridging courses, study programmes, tuition, guidance, flexible assessment practices, welcoming entry arrangements, financial and other support to meet the needs of members of under-represented groups who may be 'at risk';
- Provide an inclusive and accessible physical environment, supportive higher education community, inclusive curricula, teaching and learning practices and institutional ethos;
- Reduce dropout and failure rates to a minimum and foster a capacity and willingness in all students to continue study;
- Establish appropriate staffing structure, roles and responsibilities to ensure equity objectives are met, including support services, monitoring and evaluation;
- Integrate policy relating to under-represented groups into all aspects of the institution; ensure their views are represented in planning and decision-making;
- Include in teacher education courses and courses for other relevant professions, specific attention to the needs of groups under-represented in higher education.

The National Office should benchmark progress having regard to these propositions.

6.4 The Steering Group on the Future of Higher Education

The 1995 Report of the Steering Group on the Future of Higher Education, under the chairmanship of Mr. Noel Lindsay, then Chairperson of the HEA, identified three key aspects of socio-economic inequality in access to and participation in higher education:

- Students from lower socio-economic groups are significantly less likely to complete second level education;
- Those that sit the Leaving Certificate tend to achieve significantly lower grades; and
- For students with modest levels of performance in the Leaving Certificate, those from higher socio-economic groups have higher transfer to higher education.

These factors are consistently confirmed in the periodic reports of Dr. Clancy, most recently in his 2000 analysis of the social class background of students in Irish colleges. The transition points identified fall within the Skilbeck framework, but are more familiar in the Irish context.

6.5 The Report by Osborne and Leith

The Report by Osborne and Leith recommends that the HEA should consult with the universities and other institutions about the organisational and structural issues necessary for the development and implementation of a National Strategy. It suggests that the appointment of a National Co-ordinator for

Widening Access would be an essential component of any framework. The National Strategy would provide a broad policy framework, incorporating national targets with institutional targets linked to these national targets. It would have clear objectives and would include appropriate indicators in order to monitor progress.

6.6 Consultation

The Action Group engaged in an extensive process of consultation, as described in Chapter 1 above. Many agencies and organisations from all levels of the education sector contributed their proposals on the issues to be addressed, and these were complemented by the perspectives of organisations associated with the particular target groups. As might be expected, the consultation produced a wide range of opinion as to the key issues and their relative priorities, and a similarly wide range of recommendations for action. Nevertheless, a broad consensus was evident that: -

- Increasing participation would require intervention at various stages in the education process;
- Interventions need to be coordinated for maximum effect;
- The potential of all relevant “sectors” – state system, primary and post-primary education, Higher Education and Community / Voluntary - should be exploited in the delivery of a coordinated strategy.

6.7 The Time is Now

The birth rate has fallen by one third between 1980 and 1994 and accordingly the number of potential entrants to third level will fall between 1999 and 2013. This process is now commencing, and by October 2002 the number of 18 year olds will have dropped by 8,500 or 12% from its peak. Between 2002 and 2007 there will have been a further decline of 12,000, another 20% drop. Thus within quite a short space of time the number of school leavers from which the third-level sector currently derives the vast bulk of its entrants will have been reduced by almost one third.

Even under stable economic conditions it is unlikely that a combination of increased participation rates, diversion of students from UK institutions, and an inflow of foreign students could be sufficient to restore within this period of seven years the resultant shortfall in the number of full-time undergraduate third-level entrants.

The Action Group considers that this provides an unprecedented opportunity for higher education institutions to diversify their intake of entrants to include much greater numbers from the three target groups.

The Action Group considers that the legal responsibility of a third-level institution to have regard to equality should be sufficient to allow the institution to put a quota in place for any under-represented group in the student population such as mature students, disadvantaged students or students with a disability. Furthermore, the Group would argue that for a third-level institution to fail to attempt to do this could in itself be challenged in law. However, the Group is also of the view that any such quotas would of course need to be put in place by the institutions, rather than imposed on them.

Given the demographic context to admission to third-level described above, with a decreasing second-level age cohort it is possible to maintain and even increase the rate of transfer from second level to third-level while actually reducing the number of places for school leavers. In other words, over the next five years it is possible to put in place quotas for the three target groups while actually increasing the

chances of any school leaver, who is not in one of the target groups, of entering higher education. In these circumstances it is difficult to envisage the grounds for any legal challenge to a quota which an institution introduces on equity grounds.

6.8 A Co-ordinated Framework

The Action Group proposes the development of a co-ordinated framework of measures to increase participation in higher education by disadvantaged groups, to include students from socio-economically disadvantaged families and communities, mature students and students with disabilities. This Framework should be fully integrated into mainstream policy. In particular, it should be established as a pillar in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, and as a specific component in the relevant sections of the National Development Plan. The Framework will provide a strategic environment in which the effect of many existing initiatives can be co-ordinated and concentrated; it will also provide a context for the development and implementation of new initiatives to address needs identified.

6.9 Seven critical stages leading to equity in access opportunities

Building on (i) the “Three critical transition points” of the Steering Group on the Future of Higher Education and (ii) Skilbeck’s “Framework of objectives for promoting equity in higher education”, the Action Group has identified seven critical stages in the education process where effective interventions are necessary in order to achieve equity in access opportunities:

- (a) Pre-school
- (b) Primary school
- (c) Lower secondary
- (d) Retention at upper secondary
- (e) Achievement in the Leaving Certificate
- (f) Entry to Higher Education
- (g) Participation in tertiary education, and progression to completion

The Co-ordinated Framework will encompass strategies to significantly alter the situation for the target groups at each of these critical stages. It is acknowledged that interventions at the earlier stages in the education process will ultimately have the greatest effect, and appropriate actions should be implemented at the earliest possible opportunity. Nevertheless, in terms of the task set for the Action Group – to radically increase participation in higher education by disadvantaged student groups in the period of the National Development Plan – Stages (d) to (g) are considered to be particularly significant.

Many agencies and organisations can contribute to the implementation of strategies at the various stages in the Framework. Generally, these can be grouped into sectors:

- Government Departments and state agencies, including the Department of Education and Science.
- Primary and Secondary Education
- Higher Education, including College Access Programmes
- Local Development / Community / Voluntary
- Business

The actions required to intervene at some of the listed “critical points” are clearly the responsibility of the Department of Education and Science – these are Pre-school, Primary School and Lower Secondary School. Existing initiatives and provision at these levels are analysed in Chapter 2. The Action Group endorses the contribution of these initiatives to the education process in disadvantaged communities, but recommends the widening of their focus to encompass the additional objective of encouraging and supporting the ambition of eventual transfer to higher education.

The remaining stages – Upper Secondary Retention, Leaving Certificate Achievement, Entry to Higher Education and Participation at Third Level – all require significant actions from the Higher Education Sector. The inquiry undertaken by the Action Group also identifies key roles at these stages for the Secondary School Sector and the Community / Voluntary Sector.

The Action Group acknowledges the difficulty of integrating the actions of so many agents across such a wide span of initiatives. There is also the critical requirement that these actions should be fully aligned with broader policies in the NDP, and focused strongly on the core Framework objective. Accordingly, it is a key recommendation of the Group that a co-ordinating body be established to implement the Framework. This body should be titled the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education. It will be referred to as the ‘National Office’ in the following sections of this report. The focus of the work of the National Office will be on the following critical stages:

- Retention at upper secondary
- Performance in the Leaving Certificate
- Transfer to higher education
- The first years of tertiary education and academic progression, through to completion

6.10 The National Office – a key recommendation to realise the Framework:

RECOMMENDATION NO 69

To realise the Framework, a single co-ordinating body is essential. It is recommended that a National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education (“the National Office”), with a dedicated staff, be established within the HEA to draw up policy proposals and to oversee the implementation of the National programme in close liaison with the Department of Education and Science and other stakeholders. This arrangement is to be put in place within three months.

The primary goal of the National Office will be to put in place and oversee an integrated national programme to bring about significant improvement in equity in access to higher education among the target groups.

The primary focus of the National Office would be on measures at third level. However, for the reasons discussed in this report, an exclusive focus at this point would not be effective. Therefore the National Office will have the role of liaising with the Department of Education and Science generally, and in particular in relation to measures at primary and secondary level. It will also co-ordinate the contribution to the Framework of actions implemented by Area Partnerships and agents in the Community and Voluntary sector.

The specific objectives would be to ensure that:

- Comprehensive, coherent policies addressing the full range of higher education equality of access issues are developed and implemented in a co-ordinated manner;
- Higher education institutions and all other groups and organisations who can help with such access are encouraged to participate in partnership in the national programme;
- Students in the target groups are appropriately supported within higher education;
- Targets are set, implemented, monitored and evaluated, at National, Regional and Institutional levels;
- Resources adequate for the task are made available and appropriately deployed.

The rationale for developing the National Office under the auspices of the HEA is compelling. HEA has a responsibility under the HEA Act to further “the development of higher education” and to promote “the attainment of equality of opportunity in higher education”. The HEA’s statutory role to assist the universities in the development of their statements of equality and the implementation of these is also set out in the Universities Act, 1997. Furthermore the HEA is required under the Act to review these plans and their implementation and to publish the outcomes of such reviews. In addition, the HEA initiated a number of targeted initiatives to address inequality of access and has been funding these since 1996. Furthermore, the HEA is at present undertaking an evaluation of these initiatives and has also undertaken an evaluation of international issues and strategies in relation to access and equity in higher education. Also, planning is underway for the designation of the institutes of technology under the HEA Act.

6.10.1 Functions of the National Office

The National Office will facilitate the achievement of the targets adopted by the Minister for Education and Science on the basis of the recommendations made by the Action Group, in partnership with the institutions and other agencies (including the Department of Education and Science, schools, students, and Partnership and Community Groups).

The specific targets proposed in the NDP will be placed in the context of the longer term goal of achieving full equity of access. Furthermore, based on the overall targets, the Office will develop appropriate annual targets.

The principal function will be to facilitate access to higher education to advise on policy development, to allocate funds, to monitor the implementation of the national programme at all levels through the centralised collection of performance indicator data. Based on the experience of the initiatives and the consultations with the stakeholders, the Office will include in their multi-annual plans recommendations on how best practice can be mainstreamed in a co-ordinated manner across the higher education sector and how systemic change can be promoted to improve access for the specific under-represented groups.

The National Office will seek to achieve acceptance at whole-community level of the value of a broader intake into third level.

The National Office will establish linkages with the Registrars of the institutions and the network of Access/Disability Officers of the institutions. The National Office will promote and facilitate linkages between the higher education institutions and with schools, Partnerships and Community Groups, the structures envisaged in the White Paper on Adult Education and other groups.

The National Office will operate the Special Fund for Students with a Disability. It will appropriately develop the scheme underpinning the fund so that it will operate on an entitlement basis by the academic year 2001/02 if feasible or by 2002/3 at the latest.

The National Office will work with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland in developing a framework for access, including recognition and transferability. In this regard, it is of note that the Qualifications Authority has a statutory responsibility to determine and publish the procedures for access, transfer and progression to be implemented by education and training institutions. Education and training institutions such as the institutes of technology, FÁS, CERT and Teagasc are required to implement these procedures. In the Act, they have a responsibility to co-operate with the Qualifications Authority and, while the universities are not required to implement the procedures for access, transfer and progression, their implementation is to be reviewed by the Qualifications Authority, in consultation with the HEA. The Action Group notes that the responsibility for linkages in terms of recognition of qualifications rests with the Qualifications Authority and that the National Office will have a key role in developing these procedures into a framework for access to higher education.

The National Office should commission and promote research in relation to access issues impacting on the students in the target groups.

The implications of “poverty proofing” in terms of policy, process, attitudes and behaviours at the point of delivery need to be clarified if the requirement is to be realised in the delivery of appropriate services to young people at risk.

RECOMMENDATION NO 70

The Action Group recommends that the National Office should ensure that the National Programme operates effectively as an integral component of the National Anti- Poverty Strategy and will report on any incoherence emerging within and across sectors.

The National Office will work in close liaison, and cooperation with, the Department of Education and Science and relevant bodies/agencies under the aegis of the Department¹² to ensure that measures taken at first and second level are geared effectively towards giving students the option of entering further and higher education. The Office will also liaise with the Department in relation to issues of physical infrastructure at all levels, including access for people with disabilities.

The National Office will produce an Annual Report which will be published and will report to the Department of Education and Science at more frequent intervals in order to meet ESF/NDP reporting requirements.

6.10.2 A National Programme within the overall framework

It is considered that the key issue to be addressed is the need for a clear national framework to be put in place within which there is potential to ensure that the range of issues in relation to access can be addressed in a coherent and effective manner. It is considered that the best way to achieve this is to have an integrated national programme to address inequality of access to higher education for each of the three target groups – disadvantaged students, students with a disability and mature students.

Such a programme should build upon, and collaborate with, the various initiatives within first and second level education to address disadvantage and the existing initiatives at third level.

¹² This would include the NEPS, the National Education Welfare Board and the Educational Disadvantage Committee

The overall objectives would be to ensure that: -

- Comprehensive, coherent policies addressing the full range of higher education equality of access issues are developed and implemented in a co-ordinated manner;
- Higher education institutions, and all other groups and organisations who can help with such access, are encouraged to participate in partnership in the national programme;
- Students within the target groups are appropriately supported within higher education;
- Targets are set, implemented, monitored and evaluated, at National, Regional and Institutional levels;
- Resources adequate for the task are made available and appropriately deployed.

Specifically the national programme would have the aims of promoting participation and attainment in higher education by students who have experienced disadvantage through:

- Promoting and supporting access through the CAO – this can be either as a standard applicant attaining the required points or as an applicant for a place within a specific quota for one of the targeted groups;
- Promoting and supporting a range of alternative access routes appropriate to the target groups and their educational needs;
- Ensuring that appropriate support services are available to such students within higher education.

6.10.3 Policy development and financial planning

The Action Group recommends that it would be the responsibility of the National Office to draw up a multi-annual plan. The plan would be drawn up following consultation with an Advisory Committee, which would be appointed by the HEA. The membership of the committee would include representatives of Third Level Institutions, National Student Organisations, the Social Partners, Partnership and Community Organisations, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, the Further Education Sector, the National Adult Learning Council and the Equality Authority. Pending the designation of the Institutes of Technology under the HEA Act, the Advisory Group considers that the Council of Directors of the Institutes of Technology would nominate a Chair for this Committee. Thereafter, an external Chair would be appointed by the HEA. In drawing up the plan, the National Office would also consult with the higher education institutions, Partnership and Community Groups, networks of Access/Disability Officers and other agencies as appropriate. The plan would be updated annually.

The plan would then be considered and amended, as appropriate, by the HEA, which would then submit the plan to the Minister for Education and Science for consideration and amendment, as appropriate, by him. The Plan would then be published.

6.10.4 Implementation

The HEA through the National Office will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the plan. This would involve seeking proposals for funding from third-level institutions, Partnership and Community Groups and the disbursement of funding to these organisations, in accordance with the plan approved by the Minister for Education and Science. More details on how this funding framework would operate are set out below.

The implementing agencies will be fully responsible for the management, including financial, of the programmes which they are implementing, including in cases where the programmes are fully or partially funded through the National Office. They will also be responsible for meeting all reporting and evaluation requirements and deadlines of the programme.

The HEA will be responsible for the compilation of all necessary reporting to the Department of Education and Science and for financial management at that level and will have full responsibility for programmes and expenditure where the HEA/National Office is the implementing agency.

A particular issue arises in relation to the interface between policies to address disadvantage at first and second levels and the policy outline to be developed at third level. There would need to be a consistency of approach in this regard and the National Office would need to liaise and co-ordinate with the Department of Education and Science in this regard on a continuing basis.

The aim would be that the initial allocation under the new programme could be made with effect from the academic year 2001/02 and that a full programme would be in place by the following academic year. It is likely that the Plan that is to be developed in 2002 will be more comprehensive than the Plan in 2001.

6.10.5 Funding Framework

As is set out above the National Office will draw up a multi-annual plan of a minimum of three years. The consultative provisions in this regard are set out above. The HEA, would then submit its plan to the Minister for Education and Science for consideration and any appropriate amendment by him. The Plan would then be published.

The HEA through the National Office will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the plan. This would involve seeking proposals for funding from third-level institutions and partnership and community groups and the disbursement of funding to these organisations, in accordance with the plan approved by the Minister for Education and Science.

The specific funding for which the Office will be responsible is:

- Funding for allocations to publicly funded third-level institutions and other organisations seeking funding such as Partnership and Community Groups – this will include NDP funding and the continuation of the funding available in the HEA's targeted access initiatives and could be added to by private contributions;

There will be two additional sources of funding for the developments, for which the Office will not have responsibility:

- Institutions'/organisations' core budgets, including in the case of third-level institutions fees, block grants and student services charge;
- Private funding raised by organisations/institutions.

Each institution/organisation would submit its policy for equality of access to and participation in higher education, and its plans for implementation of this, to the National Office. These plans would include details on the funding sources for the various activities in the plan and would seek funding from the National Office for particular aspects of this. The submission would also include a report on previous expenditure and activities in relation to access and participation.

In relation to third-level institutions, this policy would set out how the institution was managing co-ordinated change aimed at increasing participation and attainment by the three key groups of students at undergraduate level. This would include, for example, development of flexible delivery of programmes, the development of alternative entry routes, the activities of the institution in the in-career development of their staff to meet the needs of these students and plans for the development of student support services.

The National Office would determine the funding to be allocated to the institution/organisation and would allocate the funding. In so doing, the National Office would maintain close liaison with the principal funders of the institution/organisation. In this way duplication of funding will be avoided. Funding will be allocated for periods of a maximum of five years, subject to satisfactory reporting on an annual basis. A further submissions and allocation process would be undertaken on an annual basis – however, the aim would be that the majority of targeted funding would be committed on at least a three-year basis.

The development of the multi-annual plan by the National Office is a key element of the process. This multi-annual plan would, inter alia, outline what sort of proposals would be funded and the plan would be based generally on the recommendations of the Action Group, the White Paper on Adult Education, the findings of evaluations of the HEA targeted initiatives and on an understanding of best international practice.

A key issue in the development of the Plan is how learning from the initiatives taken can be co-ordinated and mainstreamed to sustain systemic change across the higher education sector in order to improve access for under-represented groups.

The National Office will need to encourage the formation of local consortia of schools, the community sector and third-level institution(s) in communities identified as having low rates of participation in third level education. Each consortium should be invited to develop a plan appropriate to the particular area, which would form a key part of the submissions received by the National Office. The National Office will play a key role in working with these organisations in the identification of partners to be involved in each district. In this regard, there will be a need to ensure that all disadvantaged schools are linked to at least one third-level institution and that disadvantaged or disabled students not in disadvantaged schools can link in to access activities. A related issue is that such students would not necessarily need to enter the particular third-level institution with which they are linked and the National Office will need to develop an approach to facilitate such entry.

Other issues that the National Office would need to consider in the development of its Plan would be as follows:

- Encouragement of third-level institutions to set aside a certain number of places in all faculties/schools/departments across the three targeted areas, with an aim to increase participation among each of the target groups;
- Nature and duration of orientation/preparatory skills programmes for students in the targeted groups;
- Appropriate nationally recognised certification of access/foundation courses, in consultation with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland;
- Consideration of the need for third-level access courses for disadvantaged students;
- Nature of linkages and co-operations between various providers of further education and training;
- Nature of linkage with and co-operation among third-level institutions, schools, Partnership and Community Groups etc. – to ensure national coverage and lack of duplication;

- Broad definitions of students who could benefit under the initiatives;
- Types of activity that should be undertaken as part of a linkage between schools, third-level institutions, community groups etc. including parents' programmes, Supervised study, Guidance counselling, Supplementary tuition, mentoring;
- Appropriate support mechanisms for students when they have entered higher education, including, mentoring, counselling and guidance programmes and appropriate supports for students with disabilities;
- Arrangements for dialogue with learners, including relevant teaching methodology, assessment procedures and continuous feedback;
- Appropriate development of non-traditional courses and course materials, e.g., flexible, part-time, open and distance learning and outreach;
- Appropriate in-career development for staff.

A key part of the reporting on the funding will be that institutions/organisations ensure that there are appropriate information flows following funding, including not only information on the students entering but also on those touched/influenced in the links with third-level institutions, schools, community groups etc. and those offered higher education places and not taking them. A key requirement of the new arrangements would be for detailed reporting in a common format from the institutions/organisations in receipt of funding on their management of the funding.

There is also an important issue to be addressed by the agencies providing block grants to third-level institutions.

RECOMMENDATION NO 71

The Action Group recommends that in addition to funding being made available by the National Office, there should be a mechanism devised by the Department of Education and Science in consultation with the HEA to provide for an additional allocation to be made to each third-level institution linked to the achievement of targets for student intake and completion among the three target groups.

The Action Group suggests that this will need to be actively considered by the Department of Education and Science and the HEA. There will be practical difficulties about how this can be implemented – for example, there will need to be mechanisms to identify the students from the targeted groups and existing funding mechanisms will need to be further developed. However, the Group considers that it is an important issue and notes that research has shown that there is a real value in rewarding third-level institutions which are successful in having a more diverse student population.

6.10.6 Funding and Administrative Arrangements

RECOMMENDATION NO 72

Based on the funding provided by the NDP (ESF co-financed), the Action Group recommends that funding would be allocated based on the following tables.

2000

Special Fund	Access for Students with Disabilities	Seed funding Fund	Other in the IoT sector for Access	£m (incl Northside partnership)	
2000	1.233	1.964	0.109	0.122	3.428

2001-2006

Financing to be administered by DES/LAs/VECs		Financing to be administered by HEA				£m
	Top up (incl. PLC)	Special Fund for Students with Disabilities	Access Fund	Millennium Fund	New Targeted Funding	Total*
2001	7.9	1.4	1.5	1.0	1.6	13.4
2002	8.2	1.4	1.5	1.0	1.6	13.7
2003	8.5	1.4	1.5	1.0	1.6	14.0
2004	9.5	2.0	1.8	1.0	2.5	16.8
2005	9.5	2.0	1.8	1.0	2.5	16.8
2006	10.0	2.0	1.8	1.0	2.0	16.8
TOTAL 2000-06						95.0

*These indicative allocations are subject to the normal annual Estimates process for Public Service provisions

In addition to the funding provided in the NDP “Third Level Access Fund” (£95 million), funding will also be available from the following sources:

- The above Table does not show funding raised by the Institutions from private sources;
- In addition to the Third Level Access Fund, the HEA Targeted Initiative funding is to be added to the financing to be administered by the HEA, adding approx. £3.4 million each year. A proportion of this assists in the funding of infrastructure to support access/disability/lifelong learning. This would need to be mainstreamed;
- In the Institute of Technology sector, in addition to other funding which has been made available to tackle the issue of access/attrition, £8 of the student services charge collected is being dedicated to projects linked to access and attrition. This amounts to approx. £360,000 per annum and is to be added. Furthermore, the Department of Education and Science provides mainstream funding for a number of foundation courses and other access initiatives;
- These figures do not include funding in respect of the Targeted Higher Education Mature Student Fund (ultimately increasing to £10m per annum) under the White Paper Learning for Life, which is to be added;
- These figures do not show DES funding for access measures taken at second level (see Chapter Two) which should be added.

RECOMMENDATION NO 73

The Action Group welcomes the commitment by Government in the NDP to significantly increase funding for targeted access measures. Given the extent of resources being recommended for the special rates of maintenance grants, the Action Group believes that the scale of the challenge faced requires significant further funding to be allocated in Autumn 2001.

In particular, the Group recommends additional funding of at least £25m. per annum for the new targeted funding (including the White Paper on Adult Education “Targeted Higher Education Mature Student Fund” and the transfer and enhancement of the existing funding for specific third level access measures aimed at second level students).

The introduction of a national programme will need the co-operation and positive involvement of all of the partners, including at first and second levels.

The setting up of a National Office with a dedicated staff to undertake the tasks set out in this paper would be a major challenge. The staff of the National Office will be appointed by the HEA. The staffing of the National Office will be a Director and at least two deputies, who will, inter alia, have specific regional responsibilities. The Director would be at a level comparable to Principal Officer level in the civil service. The initial appointment of National Director will be for up to five years and a high profile appointee with a track record of target driven achievement will be sought. It will be necessary for the staff of the Office to include those with experience of the public sector, access issues in higher education and community development.

RECOMMENDATION NO 74

The Action Group recommends that the full administrative costs for the running of the Office be additional to the funds allocated in the NDP.

6.10.7 Monitoring at Institution Level

Progress will be monitored at institutional level. Each organisation receiving funds under the initiative will make annual progress reports to the National Office in a common format which will be devised.

RECOMMENDATION NO 75

The Action Group recommends the development within institution of regular administrative reporting of progress to academic and faculty/school/Department boards and governing authorities/bodies, as appropriate, against clearly stated equity objectives. Each institution should also commission a regular periodic external evaluation of its own programmes.

The Institutions and the National Office will work in close cooperation with the Department of Education and Science to operationalise PPS and the DES Database as a tool for evaluation, including the specific requirements of this National programme. The Department of Education and Science is at present adopting the PPS Number as its key identifier for all pupils on its databases. The Action Group considers that all further and higher education institutions and funding agencies should also adopt the PPS Number as its key identifier for their clients. This can apply irrespective of the format - paper-based or computerised - of records held by the institution.

The monitoring of activities and tracking of individuals needs to be done on a common basis. This will enable the tracking of an individual student's progress from access initiatives and within institutions. All students should be tracked whether they enter via CAO or direct entry.

RECOMMENDATION NO 76

The Action Group considers that the Department of Education and Science should establish an Expert Group, representative of the education institutions, to provide protocols for 'data-sharing' within the education environment.

The Group considers that these protocols should include the development of standards of data items, minimum data items to be gathered, storage and transfer of data. They should also establish guidelines for the tracking of pupils/students, in order to quantify and identify those clients whose needs are not being met by education institutions.

6.10.8 Planning and Implementation by Higher Education Institutions

The Action Group recognises that higher education institutions will be key implementing agencies in relation to the National Programme. The Action Group considers that all the institutions have already made commitments to change and have made a contribution towards the attainment of national objectives.

A key part of the process set out above will be for higher education institutions to each submit a policy for equality of access to and participation in higher education, and its plans for implementation of this, to the National Office. These plans would include details on the funding sources for the various activities in the plan and would seek funding from the National Office for particular aspects of this. The submission would also include a report on previous expenditure and activities in relation to access and participation. This policy would set out how the institution was managing co-ordinated change aimed at increasing participation and attainment by the three key groups of students at undergraduate level. This would include, for example, development of flexible delivery of programmes, the development of alternative entry routes, the activities of the institution in the in-career development of their staff to meet the needs of these students and plans for the development of student support services.

The Action Group considers that institutional commitment needs to be demonstrated in an open and public way and that the development of a national programmes will provide an opportunity for this.

RECOMMENDATION NO 77

The Action Group recommends that third-level institutions mainstream their individual access programmes, in particular to ensure that all of their key access posts become permanent positions, and recommends that the block grants should be adjusted to facilitate this process.

The mainstreaming of funding is not the only way in which access programmes can be mainstreamed in third-level institutions.

RECOMMENDATION NO 78

The Action Group recommends that within the third-level institutions equity in access opportunities should be placed in the mainstream of policy making and internal academic and resource decisions, including decisions on the seeking and spending of private funds.

Given that there is now general acceptance of the objective of creating an inclusive student population which reflects more closely the social composition of the wider society, third-level institutions need to be encouraged to ensure that they give equal importance to increasing participation from the three target groups as to their other diverse activities. A further way that institutions can illustrate their mainstreaming of action is to ensure that places are set aside by all faculties/departments/schools for each of the three target groups of students.

The Action Group notes the progress achieved in terms of equity of access in a number of medical schools and urges the remaining medical schools to intensify their efforts in this direction. The Action Group attaches particular importance to this sector, given its practical and symbolic value.

As a further element of mainstreaming, the Action Group considers that there is potential for institutions to promote their widening access schemes as much as possible. Information could appear in Prospectuses and have dedicated pages on institutional Web sites. This is part of the need for institutions to be open about their widening of access activities.

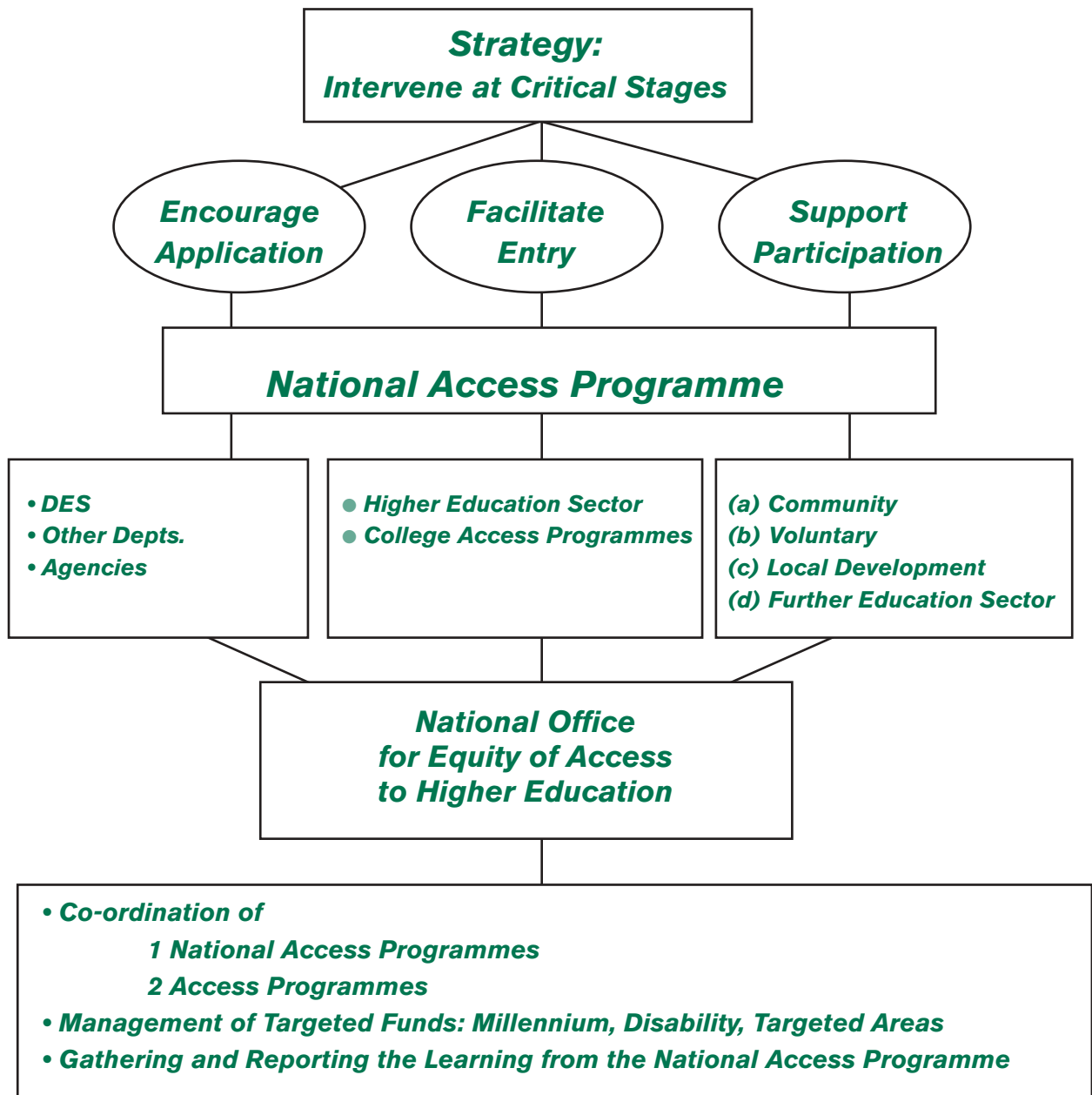
A key issue in meeting the needs of more diverse groups of learners is the need for higher education institutions to develop a greater diversity and flexibility of provision and the adoption of more flexible forms of teaching and learning, recognition of prior learning and credit transfer. This applies, in particular, for each of the three target groups. The Action Group recognises that there have been many such innovations in third-level institutions. However, the Group does consider that in some cases these have taken place at the margin of the institution and that the perception can be that the real focus of institutions is on courses for full-time school leaving students who have done well in the Leaving Certificate.

6.10.9 Evaluation

The effectiveness of the National Access Programme should be reviewed on the basis of performance and results achieved.

The institutions should put in place measures for quality assurance specific to widening access programmes. Indicators should cover the full range of activities of individual programmes e.g., 'taster' or 'fun' days for younger school students. The institutions should ensure that the necessary statistical data are available.

Co-ordinated Framework
of Measures to increase Participation in Higher Education
by Disadvantaged Groups



Co-ordinated Response - Agents

National Office

- Co-ordinate National Programme;
- Integrate College-based Access Programmes;
- Co-ordinate range of local programmes to encourage participation;
- Manage targeted Funds – Millennium, Disability, College Access/Community.

Department of Education and Science and other 'system' agents

- Review targeted interventions in early childhood, first level and second level;
- Reform system of student financial support – eligibility, level of support etc.;
- Implement recommended maintenance 'top-up';
- Policy changes re adult participation – own eligibility status for student financial support, free part-time fees for certain categories of students;
- Guidance provision for all three target groups;
- Rewards/incentives for higher education institutions to increase intake from targeted groups.

Third-Level Institutions

- Develop and implement inclusive equity of access policies for all target groups;
- Support for Third Level Students – finance, guidance and mentoring etc.;
- Local programmes to encourage participation (with Partnership and Community Groups);
- Development and implementation of alternative entry mechanisms;
- New course / programme modes for adults – part-time, distance, modular, community-based;
- Administer Fund for Students with Disabilities and Access Fund.

Partnership and Community Groups

- Implement Millennium Fund at community level – Third Level student support;
- Work with third-level institutions in developing local programmes to encourage participation.

ANNEX 1 **Terms of Reference**

To advise the Minister for Education and Science on the development of a co-ordinated framework to promote access by mature and disadvantaged students and students with disabilities to third level education, building on the experience of current initiatives, and to make findings and recommendations accordingly.

The Group will provide a report within **three months** of commencing its work, advising the Minister on the specific interventions which would be most effective in making further progress in achieving these objectives.

The Group will make recommendations in relation to the barriers to participation by mature students in higher education.

The Group will have specific regard to the objectives in this area as set out in the National Development Plan (in particular, at paragraphs 5.56 and 5.57) and in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (in particular, at Framework IV, *Post-Second Level Participation, including by Mature Students*). The Group will also have regard to the recommendations in this area made by the *Commission on the Points System*.

The Action Group will consider *inter alia*:-

- The identification and tracking of the target groups, namely, students with disabilities, students from disadvantaged backgrounds and mature “second chance” students;
- The role of the Third Level Institutions and the integration of access into the mainstream of all colleges’ operations and objectives;
- The desirability or otherwise of appointing a National Access Officer and the possible location of such an officer;
- Advising on the development of targeted interventions and actions;

Reporting systems, including target setting, performance indicators and evaluation.

The creation of this Group is in line with a commitment in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness.

ANNEX 2 Membership of Action Group on Access to Third Level Education

CHAIRMAN

Dr. Cormac Macnamara, *Former President of the Irish Medical Organisation/the Irish College of General Practitioners/the European Union of General Practitioners*

SECRETARY

Ms Thérèse Conlon, *Student Support/Third Level Access, Department of Education and Science*

Professor Pat Clancy, *University College Dublin, advised the Group*

MEMBERS

Mr Dermot Killen, *Personnel and Training Director, Smurfit Group (Employers);*

Mr Peter MacMenamin, *Deputy General Secretary, TUI (Trade Unions);*

Mr Martin Whelan, *Macra na Feirme (Farmers);*

Mr Dónall Geoghegan, *Programme Manager, National Youth Council of Ireland (Community and Voluntary Sector);*

Dr. Tommy Cooke, *Community Education Links Co-ordinator, DIT;*

Ms Maeve O'Byrne, *Access Officer, Dublin City University;*

[Ms Anne O'Brien, *Access Officer, NUI Maynooth, attended a number of the meetings in place of Ms Byrne]*

Mr Edwin Mernagh, *Education Co-ordinator, Northside Partnership;*

Professor P J Drudy, *Department of Economics, Trinity College Dublin (Conference of Heads of Irish Universities);*

Mr Brendan Goggin, *Registrar, Cork Institute of Technology (Council of Directors of Institutes of Technology);*

Mr Seán Ó Foghlú, *Head of Policy and Planning, Higher Education Authority;*

Mr Victor Black, *Principal, Blakestown Community School;*

Mr Michael Challoner, *Principal, Inchicore College of Further Education;*

Ms Caroline McGrath, *Executive Director, Association for Higher Education Access and Disability;*

Ms Berni Brady, *Director, AONTAS (The National Association of Adult Education);*

Mr Colm Jordan, *Education Officer, Union of Students in Ireland;*

Mr Brian Monaghan, *Community Worker;*

Mr Anton Carroll, *Principal, Greendale Community School;*

Mr Brian Owens, *Business Person;*

Mr Aidan O'Connor, *Department of Education and Science;*

Ms Patricia O'Connor, *Department of Education and Science.*

ANNEX 3 *Extract from Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*

FRAMEWORK IV: Post-second Level participation, including by Mature Students

- 23 Investment will be sustained and enhanced so that Ireland is well within the top quarter of OECD countries in terms of the participation of the population in post second level education and training, and in the quality of that education and training.
- 24 The Strategy will include a review of administrative, technical and management structures and guidance, student and ancillary services in the PLC sector.
- 25 Places will be provided to support access by mature students to third level education, allied with the promotion of “adult friendly” policies.
- 26 A Group will be established, with appropriate social partner involvement, to examine and report on barriers to participation by mature students in higher education. The Group will advise the Department of Education and Science on the development of a co-ordinated framework to promote access by mature and disadvantaged students to third level education, building on the experience of current initiatives.
- 27 Participation by disadvantaged groups in third level education will be encouraged through the provision of significant additional investment. Flexible entry, delivery and accreditation arrangements, linkages with second level schools, actions to promote mature student participation and outreach, community education and support programmes will form part of the approach. Access, transfer and progression will be actively promoted within the context of the National Qualifications Framework.
- 28 Additional financial supports for disadvantaged students, including disadvantaged mature students, will be put in place, targeted at those most in need.
- 29 A study will be finalised of completion rates in Universities and Institutes of Technology which will make recommendations on how best to improve participation and retention within the third level sector. This will include initiatives to encourage female take-up in non-traditional disciplines. The views of the social partners will be sought on the findings of the study.
- 30 Both the Points Commission and the Review Committee on Post-Secondary Education and Training Places noted the lack of information about demand from mature students. The HEA has been requested to undertake market research to establish the level and range of demand from mature students. In the light of the outcome of this research, measures will be designed to meet mature student demand and ensure flexible, innovative responses to mature students needs for consideration be Government. These measures will be based on the recommendations of the Points Commission and the Review Committee’s Report.
- 31 Colleges will aim to provide that, by 2005, 15% of intake each year will comprise students aged 23 or over. A cross-faculty approach will be promoted and in the light of the outcomes of the research mentioned above, individual faculty targets will be set. Increasing the mature student intake over the next 5 years, in line with the Review Committee’s recommendations, will involve increased part-time provision and other flexible options, such as distance learning opportunities.

COMMUNITY DIMENSION

32 The community dimension of education and involvement by the community in education provision will be supported through:

- development of closer linkages between education and area-based partnerships, allied with improved co-ordination and integration of education, welfare, health and justice policies, and increased opportunities for participation by the community and voluntary sector;
- enhancement of home/school/community links;
- promotion of parent participation in school decision-making, allied to strategies to support their children's learning;
- promotion of cross community linkages within school-based programmes at both primary and second-level;
- development of after-school supports in co-operation, where appropriate, with community and voluntary organisations;
- provision and expansion of youth services, especially in disadvantaged areas;
- development of the role of community education providers within the adult education sector;
- expansion and consolidation of the Women's Education Initiative, including expanded support for projects that specifically tackle women's educational disadvantage, and the creation of relevant positive action initiatives by the Department of Education and Science. This approach will also be expanded to meet the needs of other marginalised groups;
- conducting research to examine women's and men's different learning styles and needs, and the implications for provision of education and training;
- establishment of an Education Sub-Group reporting to the National Steering Committee on Violence against Women; and
- the provision of resources for development of education and training in the prison service, in addition to provision for former prisoners and their families.

ANNEX 4 **List of Parties who made Submissions to the Action Group**

Seamus O'Grady, Director, Adult & Continuing Education, NUI, Galway
 Adult Education Office, UCD
 Professor Aidan Moran
 Trinity College, Dublin
 Barry Kehoe, Director of Student Affairs, DCU
 City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee
 Clondalkin Higher Education Access Project
 Féach
 Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology
 National College of Ireland
 Higher Education Equality Unit
 Mary Lane Kelly, Limerick
 National Council for Vocational Awards
 National Women's Council of Ireland
 The Prison Education In-Service Committee
 Women's Education, Research and Resource Centre (WERRC)
 Ballymun Initiative for Third-Level Education (BITE)
 Community Development Support Programme (CDSP), Western Region Projects
 Accessing College Education (A.C.E.) Project
 National Council for Educational Awards
 Ballymun Senior Comprehensive School, Dublin
 Roslyn Park College, Dublin
 Thomas A. Madden, Course Co-Ordinator, Diploma in Arts, Drama and Theatre Studies, NUI Maynooth
 Limerick Community Based Educational Initiative Ltd (LCBEI)
 National Disability Authority
 Professor Brian McBreen
 William Crimmins
 Risteard Mac Gabhann
 St. Aidan's Community College, Dublin Hill, Cork
 Paul J. Cannon, University College Dublin
 NUI, Maynooth
 Regional Educational Guidance Service for Adults and Educational Development Centre, W.I.T.
 Wexford Area Partnership
 University College Dublin
 Dublin Corporation Housing & Community Services, Social Inclusion Unit
 Finglas Cabra Partnership
 Conference of Religious of Ireland
 Coláiste Dhúlaigh & College of Further Education
 Student Support Services Section, Donegal Institute of Technology
 People with Disability in Ireland
 Trinity College Students' Union, Dublin.

ANNEX 5 *Attendance at Focus Group Meeting*

List of those who attended Focus Group Meeting in DIT, Aungier Street on 22nd November 2000

Ayoibi, Salma	Meehan, Paula
Buckley, Trevor	Meleday, Michelle
Doherty, Denise	Monaghan, David
Fitzgerald, Amy	Mooney, Alan
Giney, John	Morrissey, Gerard
Hand, Anne-Marie	O'Connor, Antonette
Lanigan, Ann	O'Regan, Lisa
McCormack, David	O'Sullivan, Siobhan
McDermott, Roisín	Rafferty, Paul
McKenna, Mandy	Scallon, Laura

ANNEX 6 **Oral Submissions**

List of those who made Oral Submissions to the Action Group

- Prof. Bob Osborne and Ms. Helen Leith, Centre for Research on Higher Education (University of Ulster and Queen's University, Belfast).
- Prof Áine Hyland, UCC, former Chairperson of the Commission on the Points System;
- Ms. Margaret Kelly, Further Education Section, Department of Education and Science;
- Mr Sé Goulding, Department of Education and Science, (National Qualifications Act);
- Dr Helen Hazelkorn and Ms Jacqui O'Riordan, Higher Education Equality Unit;
- Dr Tony Crooks and Ms Bernie Judge, Area Development Management Limited (A.D.M.);
- Mr Paul Hannigan; Ms Ann Carpenter; Mr Maurice Doran; Mr Steven McManus; Mr Joe McGarry; Council of Directors of the Institutes of Technology;
- Mr Joe Kennedy; Mr Aidan Savage, "Stay in School" Retention Initiative (SSRI) Co-Ordinators and Colm Ó Maoláin, Assistant Chief Inspector, Department of Education and Science;
- Mr Seamus O'Grady, Ms Pat McTiernan, Ms Imelda Byrne, Mr Pat Curley; Mr James Wade; Ms Deirdre O'Connor, BMW Regional Higher Education Network;
- Dr Tom Mitchell; Mr Michael McGrath, Conference of Heads of Irish Universities (CHIU)
- Ms Katherine Meenan, Mr Ray Coughlan, Ms Miriam Broderick and Mr Eamon Tuffy, N.C.E.A.

ANNEX 7 Indicators for Socio-economic Disadvantaged Students

First Indicator for Socio-economic Disadvantaged Students: Based on Socio-Economic Groups (new categories)

Participation of Unskilled/Agricultural Workers (based on Table 3 in Clancy and Wall, 2000)

(A) National Participation Rate 1998		Target 2003	Target 2006
(.36 x .44)	.16	.22	.27
(B) Participation Rate by Region			
BMW Region (.42 x .47)	.20	.27	.33
S&E Region (.34 x .43)	.15	.21	.26
(C) Participation Rate by Gender			
Male (.34 x .41)	.14	.19	.23
Female (.38 x .48)	.18	.25	.31
(D) Participation Rate by Region and Gender			
BMW Male (.39 x .43)	.17	.23	.28
Female (.44 x .51)	.22	.30	.37
S&E Male (.32 x .40)	.13	.18	.22
Female (.35 x .47)	.16	.22	.27

Second Indicator of Socio-economic Disadvantage: Based on Social Class (new categories)
Participation Rate of Unskilled (based on Table 6 in Clancy and Wall, 2000)

(E) National Participation Rate 1998		Target 2003	Target 2006
.46 x .44 =	.20	.27	.33

(F) Participation by Region

BMW	(.52 x .47)	.24	.32	.39
S&E	(.41 x .43)	.18	.24	.29

(G) Participation Rate by Gender

Male	(.42 x .41)	.17	.23	.28
Female	(.47 x .48)	.23	.31	.38

(H) Participation Rate by Region and Gender

BMW	- Male (.42 x .43)	.18	.24	.29
	- Female (.47 x .51)	.24	.32	.39
S&E	- Male (.42 x .40)	.17	.23	.28
	- Female (.47 x .47)	.22	.30	.37

ANNEX 8 Summary of Access Programmes

**ENTRY PROCEDURES
2000-2001**

INSTITUTIONS	Direct Entry	CAO	No. of Places	Programmes		Course Reserved Places
				Faculty Reserved Places	Course Reserved Places	
DCU	✓	No	80	✓		
NUIM	✓	✓	10	None		
TCD	✓	✓	70	6 Faculties		
MATER DEI	✓		3	BA in Religious Ed		
UCD	✓	No	70	✓		
UCC	✓		50	✓		
DIT	✓	✓	18			
CIT		✓				

Courses	
UL	42
TCD	25
NUIG	20

CRITERIA
2000-2001

SCHOOL CRITERIA				STUDENT CRITERIA						
INSTITUTIONS	DES Disadvantaged List	ABP Catchment	No Selection Criteria for Schools	Financial Doc	HE Maintenance Grant	Attendance at Link School	Family Educ History	Housing	Med Card	
DCU	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
NUIM	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
TCD	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
MATER DEI	✓			✓	✓					
UCD	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
UCC	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
DIT	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
CIT	✓	✓								

Access Programmes		Access Courses	
UL	✓	✓	✓
TCD	Yes	Yes	Yes
NUIG	✓	✓	✓

SELECTION PROCEDURE
2000-2001

APPLICATION		ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS				
INSTITUTIONS	Interview	Application Form	References	Matric	Course Requirement	Minimum Academic Requirements
DCU	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 H C'3 + 3 OD 3 with Maths, Irish or English
NUIM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2H C3+ 4O or H D3
TCD	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3HC3+ 3OC3 with Maths, Eng +a foreign Lang. and minimum points threshold per Dept
MATER DEI	✓	✓			✓	6OC with English,Irish +a Language or Maths
UCD	Sometimes	✓	✓	✓	✓	2HC3 +4O or HD3
UCC	No	✓	✓	✓	✓	2HC3+4O or HD3
DIT	✓	✓	✓		✓	5OD3-Certificate level 2HC3 +4OD3 -Degree level
CIT					✓	

Access Programmes		Access Courses		
UL	Sometimes	Successful Completion of Access Course	✓	(1) 2HC3 +4OD3 with Maths, English Irish,or a Lang (2) 3HC3+3OD3with Maths, English Irish or a Lang
TCD	Yes	Successful completion of Access Course	Yes	Successful completion of Access Course
NUIG	✓	Successful Completion of Access Course	✓	2HC3+4 O or HD3or Access Course –successful completion

**ADMISSION PROCEDURE
2000-2001**

		ADMISSION						POST-ENTRY						Access Programmes		Access Courses	
INSTITUTIONS	CAO	Direct Offer Letter	Admission Office	Orientation Course	Scholarship per Annum	Academic Support	Personal Tutor	Workshop	One to One With Access Officer								
DCU		✓	✓	✓	✓£1000	✓	✓	✓	✓								
NUIM	✓	✓		✓	✓£1000		✓	✓	✓								
TCD	✓		✓	✓	✓£1000-£1500		✓	✓	✓								
MATER DEI		✓	✓	✓	✓£500		✓	✓									
UCD		✓	✓	✓	✓£1500		✓some faculties	✓	✓								
UCC		✓	✓	✓	£1000		✓	✓	✓								
DIT	✓		✓	✓	✓£1000		✓		✓								
CIT			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓								
UL		✓	✓	✓	✓Sum Varies		✓	✓	✓								
TCD		Yes		Yes	£1,200 p.a. depending on funds	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes								
NUIG		✓			✓		✓		✓								

ACCESS STRUCTURES
2000-2001

STRUCTURES										FUNDING			
INSTITUTIONS	Access Officer	FT/PT	Project Worker	FT/PT	Admin Support	FT/PT	Report To	HEA	DES	Institute	Private	Other	
DCU	✓	FT			✓	FT	Director of Student Affairs	✓		✓	✓		
NUIM	✓	FT			✓	PT	Registrar	✓		✓			
TCD	✓	FT	✓2	FT	✓1.5	FT	Director of Ed Access & CD	✓	Yes	✓	Yes		
MATER DEI	✓	PT					Board of Directors	✓					
UCD	✓	FT	2	FT	✓1	FT	Registrar	✓		✓	✓		
UCC	✓	FT			✓1	PT	Registrar	✓					
DIT	✓	FT			✓	PT	Director of Academic Affairs		✓				
CIT	✓	FT	✓	FT	✓	FT	Head of Ed Opp Dept		✓				

Access Courses												
INSTITUTIONS	Access Officer	FT/PT	Project Worker	FT/PT	Admin Support	FT/PT	Report To	HEA	DES	Institute	Private	Other
UL	✓	FT	✓	FT	✓	PT	Deputy Registrar	✓		✓	✓	
TCD	Yes	FT	Yes	FT	Yes	FT	Director of Educ Access and C.D.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
NUIG	✓	FT		FT	✓	FT	Dir of Ad.Ed.	✓		✓		

**INSTITUTIONAL CO-OP & FUTURE PLANS
2000-2001**

CROSS INSTITUTIONAL MOVEMENT		TAKE "5"	FUTURE PLANS
INSTITUTIONS			
DCU	UCD, NUJIM, TCD	✓	Project Worker. Include Refugees. Develop tracking system
NUJIM	DCU, UCD, TCD	✓	One year Access Course in Science and IT
TCD	NUJIM, DCU, UCD, DIT	✓	Peer Mentoring. Short pre-entry Orientation Course for matures. Part-time course for matures, outreach, Travellers and refugees
MATER DEI	UCD, NUJIM		
UCD	DCU, NUJIM, TCD, UCC	✓	Develop Access Summer School. Develop detailed access tracking and monitoring system
UCC	UCD		Links to PLC sector – recognition of NCVA level 2 as admission criteria
DIT		✓	2001/ 02 – 30 places. Extend to rural schools. NCVA Level 2 as admission criteria
CIT			Direct Entry
UL			Work with Early School Leaving Initiative and Primary Schools
NUIG			Develop pre-entry school links and activities

ANNEX 9 *Current Access Initiatives in the Universities*

Trinity College, Dublin

Trinity College is strongly committed to ensuring a significant increase in participation at third level of those whose social, economic and educational experiences have prevented them from realising their full potential. The College has already established a number of Trinity Access Programmes (commonly known as TAP), including a programme in second level schools, pre-university foundation courses for young adults and mature students and a system of “reserved places”. The College also facilitates and supports a “mentoring programme” to assist second level students. This is organised each year in association with St Andrew’s Resource Centre and involves several hundred Trinity College students. The Centre for Educational Access and Community Development was established to co-ordinate and expand these various access initiatives which are now central to the College’s mission. Financial support is received from the Higher Education Authority and the Department of Education and Science and the European Social Fund. Private funding is also raised.

The current initiatives are as follows:

1. The Second Level Programme

Trinity College Dublin established the Second Level Programme (formerly called the Trinity Access Project) in 1993. This programme initially involved working intensively with seven designated schools in the Dublin area. The programme now includes partnerships with eleven designated schools and further expansion is planned.

Current school partners

Assumption Secondary School, Walkinstown
 Blakestown Community School, Blanchardstown
 Greendale Community School, Kilbarrack
 James’s Street CBS
 Liberties College, Bull Alley
 Loreto College, Crumlin
 Mercy Secondary School, Drimnagh
 Mercy Secondary School, Goldenbridge
 St. Mark’s Community School, Tallaght
 St. Mary’s Holy Faith, Haddington Road
 Westland Row CBS

Note : A further sixty schools are eligible to apply for “reserved places” and for the Trinity Foundation Course for Higher Education : Young Adults

Main aims of the Second Level Programme

To increase the number of students who complete their second level studies
 To increase the number of students who proceed to third level education
 To put special supports in place which enable students to successfully complete their courses at third level
 To increase parental and family awareness of the benefits of third level education
 To promote positive community attitudes to education
 To provide research on education and disadvantage

Activities organised by the Second Level Programme

Introduction to University Programme

Incoming students from designated schools participate in a two week long induction programme which highlights the services and facilities available at Trinity College and helps to ease the transition from second to third level.

13 students in 1999

15 students in 2000

Summer School

A week long summer programme takes place each June. Students participate in drama activities, journalism, web design, science labs, language fair, sporting activities and much more.

50 students per year

300 students since 1993

Take-5 Summer Programme

In June 2000, the Centre initiated a week-long summer programme in collaboration with DIT, UCD, DCU and NUIM during which 50 students spent one day at each of the five campuses.

50 students each year from participating schools

Educational Achievement Awards

Each April, students are awarded certificates at Trinity College for the completion of educational projects in their schools.

100 students each year

650 students since 1993

Exploring Options Open Day

Students from the TAP schools are invited to an Open Day during which they learn about TCD's various programmes and application procedures. Students also receive career advice as well as educational guidance and support during this day.

200 students each year

Academic Workshops

These subject-specific workshops are designed to help students improve their results in the Leaving Certificate by offering small group tutorials. Subjects include Maths, German, Spanish and French.

165 students each year

Student Shadowing Day

A "shadowing" day takes place in the Spring giving fifth year students the opportunity to spend a day at Trinity College with an undergraduate.

50 students each year

Early Visits to Trinity College

Second and third year students are invited to visit Trinity College to participate in drama and debating activities.

50 students each year

Parents' Evening

Parents visit the college to learn about opportunities for themselves to continue education at Trinity College as well as third level opportunities for their children

50 parents each year

2. Reserved Places Programme in Trinity College

This programme offers an additional pathway to third level education for young adults whose social, economic and educational experiences have prevented them from realising their full potential. Up to 70 “reserved” places across all six faculties in Trinity College are set aside each year for students who complete the Leaving Certificate and apply to the CAO from designated schools in the Dublin area. While there is competition for these places, students can be admitted to the College with less than the points usually required to gain entry.

An application form must be completed by mid March each year. This will include a request for references and financial information. Qualifying students are called for interview in May. Students who meet the application criteria and who achieve the best results in the Leaving Certificate are awarded the places.

Students must :

meet the requirements for receipt of a local authority maintenance grant

meet Faculty requirements

meet college matriculation requirements

Six subjects must be presented in the Leaving Certificate and three of these must be at grade C or better on higher level papers.

3. The Foundation Course for Higher Education - Mature Students

Objective

Established in 1997, this full-time course prepares mature students (over twenty three years of age on 1 January of the year of application) for entry to undergraduate studies at Trinity College and other third level Colleges. Up to twenty five students are admitted each year. The course is specifically designed for mature students whose social, economic and educational experiences have prevented them from realising their full potential.

Entry Requirements

There are no standard educational entry requirements, but evidence of a particular interest in education and strong motivation are essential. Each applicant completes an application form, writes a brief essay and provides two references. They may then be called for interview. A small interview panel assesses the applications and arrange interviews with selected candidates whose previous record and motivation indicate that they are likely to complete studies at third level.

Subjects, Examinations and Certification

Students can choose from two broad subject areas : Arts and Social Sciences or Science. In addition, courses are provided on Study Skills, Educational Support and Guidance, Information Technology and Mathematics (introductory, intermediate or advanced level). Students are assessed through a combination of continual assessment during the year and final examinations in June.

On successful completion of the course students receive a Foundation Certificate for Higher Education from Trinity College.

Time Involved

The Foundation Course is full time and runs throughout the academic year (September-May). The classes are timetabled for the morning but there are also some afternoon classes. Up to 20 hours of lectures and tutorials will take place and a further 20 hours per week is expected for assignments and study outside the classroom.

Cost

There are no fees and core textbooks may be taken out on loan for the year. Students who meet with the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs criteria can retain their social welfare entitlements (Back to Education Allowance). Students on this course are not however eligible for a Local Authority Higher Education Grant.

Progression

A total of 13 from the Foundation Course registered for degree programmes in Trinity College in 1998. A total of 14 entered Trinity degree programmes in 1999, with 2 entering St Patrick's College, Drumcondra and one choosing National University of Ireland, Maynooth. In 2000 a total of 13 students entered Trinity while one went to a degree programme in Dublin City University.

4. Foundation Course for Higher Education: Young Adults*Objective*

Established in 1999, this full-time course is open to Leaving Certificate applicants (1998-2001) from designated TAP affiliated schools or schools affiliated to access programmes in DCU, UCD, DIT or NUI Maynooth. This course offers an additional pathway to third level education for young adults whose social, economic and educational experiences have prevented them from realising their full potential. Candidates who are successful on this course and fulfill Faculty requirements will be admitted to an undergraduate programme in Trinity College. The courses includes English Literature, Language and Communications, Science, Mathematics and Introduction to Computers as well as a range of specialist subjects e.g. English, History, French, Geography, Economics, Biology. Special attention is also given to study skills, educational guidance and personal development. Twenty five students are admitted each year.

Conditions for Entry

Attendance at a TAP school or school affiliated to another access programme for three years prior to entry

Eligibility for a higher education grant

Evidence of motivation

Evidence of academic ability in at least one area

Application Process

To apply for the Foundation Course an applicant must complete an application form, write a short essay about his/her experience at school and provide two references. A small interview panel assesses the candidate's previous record, motivation and the likelihood of completing studies at third level. Due to the large numbers applying for the course, it is not possible to interview everybody.

Certification

On successful completion of the course students receive a Foundation Certificate for Higher Education from Trinity College.

Progression

A total of 13 from the Foundation Course registered for a degree programme in Trinity College. One student registered in University College Dublin and one went to Griffith College.

5. Mentoring Programme

A “mentoring” programme has been run under the auspices of Trinity Students' Union and St Andrew's Resource Centre for almost twenty years. Each year several hundred students provide help and encouragement in the evenings to primary and secondary school students within the local area and further afield. This “tutorial” work takes place in a range of locations - in Trinity College itself, St Andrew's Resource Centre and in local schools.

Staff of Centre for Educational Access and Community Development

Director : part-time

Access Officer: full-time on contract

Co-ordinator of Second Level Programme : full-time on contract

Co-ordinator of Foundation Course for Higher Education :Mature Students : full-time on contract

Co-ordinator of Foundation Course for Higher Education : Young Adults : full-time on contract

Secretary : Full-time permanent

College academic staff act as co-ordinators on specialist subjects

A range of other staff are employed on a part-time basis

Steering Committee of the Centre

Director, (Chairperson of the Committee)

Senior Lecturer

Academic Secretary,

Admissions Officer,

Senior Tutor

Access Officer and Co-ordinator, Foundation Course for Young Adults

Co-ordinator of the Second Level Programme

Co-ordinator, Foundation Course for Mature Students

Chairperson of Second Level Programme

Two Science specialists

Social Sciences specialist

Arts specialist

Representatives of both Students Union and Graduate Students' Union

Secretary of the Centre

6. Programme for People with Disabilities

Introduction

Trinity College is committed to facilitating people with disabilities as an issue of basic human rights and an integral part of its commitment to equality of opportunity in higher education and a full time Disability Service Co-ordinator was appointed in June 2000.

The number of students with disabilities has risen to 128 in the Academic year 2000/2001. The Disability Service is specifically addressing service issues relating to students with disabilities.

Policy Development

A detailed proposal on an alternative admissions system for applicants with disabilities has been implemented for next academic year 2001/2002. Applicants with disabilities must satisfy both matriculation and course requirements to be considered for the course(s) of their choice, an exemption may be granted in the language requirement for matriculation for applicants who are deaf or who are dyslexic.

Current Services

Learning Support Service for Students with Learning Difficulties

This programme, run under the direction of a Chartered Psychologist from the School of Clinical Speech and Language Studies in College, is aimed at undergraduate students who may have dyslexia. It provides assessment and a range of support facilities for students with learning difficulties, and makes clear recommendations for other remedial activities.

Information Technology Support

A pilot project was undertaken in conjunction with the Information and Systems Services in 1999/2000. This involved the employment of an information technology technician with responsibilities for students with disabilities on a part-time basis. The main responsibilities of this person were: providing assistance to students in the installation of assistive technology, trouble shooting, purchase of specialised equipment, supporting examination provision for students, updating information on products available and training students in the use of equipment.

Library Service

The Library service is committed to the provision of services to students with disabilities. Service provided include: Reader service, designated computer space for assistive technology, scanning and braille service, extended loan service, assistance with photocopying and a staff member with a responsibility for students with disabilities.

Examination Supports

An Examination Policy and Guidelines for Students with Disability have been developed by the Examination Office and the Disability Service. These outline the procedures and accommodations available to students with disabilities.

Universal Design

The College is committed in principle to the concept of Universal Design in all its new buildings and also to improving the quality of existing buildings. With the older, historic buildings in College there are issues of heritage and preservation which conflict with these ideas and progress is likely to be slow. In addition to the Disability Officer, a small specialist team has been assembled to press for the resolution of these issues. The Universal Design committee (a sub-committee of the Disability Service Committee) examines all retrofit works and new buildings before drawings are signed off by the Site and Facilities Committee.

Educational Support Worker Service

Students who have a disability or learning difficulty (including dyslexia) often require support whilst studying. This can take various forms depending upon the requirements of the individual. Examples include reading support for visually impaired students; note-taking in lectures for students who are deaf, hard of hearing or have difficulties with writing; providing assistance in workshops and laboratories for students who otherwise have difficulties participating in practical sessions of this nature.

To help disabled students at Trinity College to arrange support quickly and conveniently, a register of 'educational support workers' has been established. These include:

- Note Taker for Students with Disabilities
- Educational Sign Language interpreter (ISL)
- Readers for students with disabilities
- Audio typist for students with disabilities
- Transcription worker for students with disabilities
- Laboratory/Classroom Assistant for students with disabilities

Funding

Trinity College received £181,000 from HEA Special Initiative Funding to continue or develop the following services in 2000/2001:

Continuation of existing services

Development of the disability service

Continued funding and development of Learning support service for students with learning difficulties

Disability proofing the Careers Service

Funding Counselling Service to Identify academic supports required for students with mental health difficulties to continue their education

New Initiatives in 2000/2001:

Development of an Assistive Technology and Information Centre

Accessible information and communication is an essential and everyday concern for many people with a disability. It is a particular issue in third-level education, where access to texts, library books, newspaper and magazine articles, videos and lectures is vital for learning and research. The importance of having a centre at the University specialising in accessible information and communication for students, staff and the local community cannot be emphasised enough, and will serve to promote equality of opportunity and disability awareness in all areas of university life. The Assistive Technology and Information Centre will house the latest assistive technology, software and equipment for transforming information into accessible formats. Staff will be based there to carry out this work and to provide assistance to any resource room user. The equipment purchased will provide a pool, items of which can be booked out for use in other areas if more convenient, with staff support provided. The centre may be used by students for meetings, individual work and as a base for extra tuition.

An Information Technology specialist will be based in the centre to re-format information and assist with the use of equipment. The centre will be an information resource (web based), with notice boards and up to date information posted from a wide range of organisations re: latest technology, information, societies, careers, and equal opportunities. Dis-Inform and an electronic mail discussion list will be developed, which will be open to anyone with access to e-mail. This electronic information site is an information resource and discussion forum for those with an interest in disability issues within the third-level sector.

A Web chat room for deaf students to communicate with others, live, on issues related to their studies.

Initiate and enhance research with other departments on assistive technology advances.

Assessment of students needs, in relation to assistive technology requirements.

Staff : Full-time Disability Officer on contract.

7.General Mature Student Programme

The College has been admitting mature students (those over 23 years of age), both full-time and part-time, for many years. Students make application and are selected after an interview. No particular qualifications are expected, but applicants are expected to illustrate some previous serious interest and motivation in pursuing third level education. A Mature Student Officer is employed with the remit to encourage the participation and achievement of mature students in Trinity College. In order to do so

four key focus areas have been identified: recruitment, retention, completion and progression. A range of services are being developed to facilitate each of these four areas.

New Entrants Welcome Programmes

Three separate programmes are organised for (a) Science and Engineering students (b) BESS students and (c) Arts students. Groups (a) and (b) were offered Mathematics classes along with the other activities such as College Tour, Library, meetings with Senior Fresh students and Departmental Staff. During Michaelmas Term 2000, a total of 91 students were invited to attend and 64 attended. An evaluation was carried out at the close of the programmes.

Drop in Advice Service

There is an open door policy whereby students can drop in and seek advice. Advice sought is very varied and can be financial, personal or academic. Where necessary the academic assistance is arranged for the students. However, while the new service is provided, the principal philosophy underpinning this and all other activities is to ensure that the mature students are aware and make full use of existing College services e.g. the Tutor and Counselling service.

Making the Application Process Easier

The main aim here is to facilitate the decision making process prior to application thereby ensuring that the applicants are fully aware of the extent of the commitment involved in taking up undergraduate studies. Particular attention is to be paid to the financial implications. There is a Mature Student stand at the College Open Day, along with talks on the Application Process for Mature Students. Information leaflets on "Course Choices" and the "Financial Implications of Returning to College" are being developed. The Mature Student Officer will also address VTOS and Access classes.

Research: Student Tracking

Information and analysis will be carried out into the attrition and completion rates of mature students. An evaluation of the category of student applying to Trinity College and the reasons for the success of some and failure of others will also be examined.

Areas Requiring Attention

Financial Support:

This is particularly acute for those students who begin college with limited resources and those who are primary carers.

Academic Support:

Because of the gap in their formal education, be it a time factor or poor provision, mature students require academic support. This is particularly true when it comes to mathematics, science and essay writing. This support can take the form of a brief individual intervention (3-4 classes) or ongoing classes. To be effective these classes should be available on request.

Awareness

Awareness of the needs and requirements of Adults Learners needs to be heightened within the third level sector.

Research

A programme of research into the present provision for mature students in third level and how this can be built on should be carried out. It is possible that the proposed HEA research mentioned in the White Paper could form the basis of this work. But in the meantime there is a need for research to be carried

out in the individual institutions. This should look at the profile of mature students and why large sectors of society are not returning to education.

Application and Recruitment

Application: A more central, objective application process should be developed for mature students.

Science and Technology:

Measures must be taken to address the low number of mature students in the science and technology areas.

Overall Finances

Finances to meet the proposed targets set must be put in place from the onset. The provision of adequate finances should be coupled with ongoing evaluation.

Staff : Mature Student Officer, Part-time contract.

National University of Ireland, Maynooth

1. Philosophy

The Access Programme is driven by a commitment to equality of educational access for all. The programme aims to address the financial, social, cultural and educational barriers facing students from socio-economically disadvantaged areas from accessing third level education.

The NUI Maynooth Access Programme is informed by the principle of subsidiarity: of working in partnership with parents, schools, area-based partnerships, community groups, guidance counsellors and home-school-liaison officers and the staff, students and graduates of the institution along with other third level institutions. The aim is to supplement rather than supplant.

Target Schools

The Access Programme is aimed at school leavers from designated disadvantaged secondary schools in two Area-Partnerships in Dublin, Clondalkin and Blanchardstown. The Access Programme has been extended geographically to Co. Donegal and is open to all schools in the country. This encompasses the complex issue of rural disadvantage. The Donegal area is covered by one Partnership and two local Development Companies. There are currently 6 schools in the Dublin Area and all the schools in Co Donegal are affiliated to the Programme.

The NUI Maynooth Access Programme now works closely with the NEW ERA Programme in UCD and the ACE Programme in Tallaght to facilitate Access students whose first preference is NUI Maynooth.

There are also close links established with the Trinity Foundation Course for young Adults. This offers an Access Progression route to NUI Maynooth for students who have attended this one-year Access course successfully. There is also an informal student system in place between other Access programmes as required. This number is open to review on an ongoing basis.

2. Core Elements of the Access Programme

Access Students

Seven places were offered to students from the six second level schools on the NUI Maynooth Access Programme for the 1999-2000 academic year. One student from Co Donegal joined the programme. A

student from a disadvantaged area in Athy, Co Kildare, and who has a hearing impairment, also joined the programme. The tenth student came as a result of links with the DCU North Dublin Access Programme.

All ten students attended a three week orientation programme before registration. The aims of the orientation programme are:

- To prepare students academically and socially for undergraduate life;
- To provide students with study and personal skills;
- To establish a relationship with the Access Officer;
- To identify the supports available to Access Students on entry to NUI Maynooth;
- To familiarise students with the NUI Maynooth Campus.

The students' area of study are divided between the Faculty of Arts and Science as follows:

Science: 4
Arts: 6

The second year cohort acted as Peer Support to the 1999/2000 intake.

As in the previous year students received academic tutorial support where necessary. One second year student studying Finance with French is currently on a scholarship to France.

Throughout the year the Access Officer met with the students individually and as a group. The first year group meetings focussed on issues such as note-taking, study skills and essay writing while the second years identified concerns about subject choices for their degrees and career opportunities.

School Support Activities:

School visits are carried out by the Access Officer accompanied by Access students where possible. The School Liaison Officer also visited the Access schools. All of the Access schools availed of the support of the Access Office to visit the campus on two Open Days. Other trips were organised for specific groups as required, a number of parents groups visited the campus, met the Access Officer who made a brief presentation on Access and a question and answer session followed. These sessions were aimed at third year and transition year students who will be making important subject choices for senior cycle.

Parents of the current Access students also visited the campus to view the facilities and meet the Access Officer. The purpose of these visits is to break down barriers and establish a relationship for parents with the University.

The Mentoring Programme continued in 2000 with support from the Students' Union and a successful Shadowing Day was held. The mentoring and shadowing programmes are focussed at present on St. Kevin's Community College, Clondalkin. The relationship between the school students and mentors is beginning to create a more positive attitude to education among the school students and their families.

This year the Access Office sponsored prizes for Third Year Students of Science, Mathematics and Languages in St. Kevin's. A Special Award ceremony was held in NUI Maynooth on May 9th for the students and their parents.

St. Kevin's does not offer Science currently at senior cycle to its students. The Access Officer in conjunction with the Experimental Physics Department organised for a group of St. Kevin's Transition

Year students to do some experimental work in the laboratories on a weekly basis. For the next academic year it is proposed that these students take Physics at senior cycle, the school will provide the theoretical content and the students will come to NUI Maynooth for the practical laboratory work.

3. Inter-institutional Initiatives

The “Take 5” project is an innovative inter-institutional initiative for Transition Year students attending Access schools in the Dublin area affiliated to DCU, NUI Maynooth, UCD, TCD, and DIT Access Programmes

Target Group

Transition Year students in schools affiliated to the access initiatives co-ordinated by the five third-level institutions named above. In cases where schools do not run a Transition Year, Fifth Year students will be targeted. Such students should fit the profile of the general access initiative in terms of their socio-economic status. The programme will be free of charge and students will be provided with lunch each day and bus tickets.

Aims of the Programme

- To give Transition Year/Fifth Year students a sense of the choices available to them;
- To give Transition Year students an introduction to the campus environment of the participating third level institutions;
- To bridge the gap between second level and third level;
- To foster future links with Transition Year students for their senior cycle;
- To begin to work together as third level institutions on co-ordinated access strategies.

Numbers

For the pilot programme there will be one student from each school in the Dublin area (it is estimated that there are approximately 50 schools in total)

Format of the Project

The students spend a day on campus in each institution. Before the week, students from the schools linked to particular colleges will meet in their link college for an orientation meeting. The programme of activities for the five days are designed with the target age group in mind and the emphasis will be on fun, group work and participatory learning. Some elements of the programme are common to all institutions, such as a Campus Tour with a Treasure Hunt, IT and a sporting activity; other elements will be specific to the particular institution. The overall programme is co-ordinated to ensure that students are exposed to a range of subjects.

Supervision

There will be one current access student from each access programme acting as group leader (five in total). These five leaders will take part in a training session, and will work under the supervision of the Take 5 Co-ordinator and the five Access Officers of the participating institutions.

4. Access Made Accessible (AMA)

The AMA has continued its role in meeting with the Department of Education and Science in relation to emerging issues in the area of access. The Higher Education Grant and the issue of fees for repeat Access students are two areas of particular concern.

Millennium Access Conference

A Vision of Higher Education: Challenges for the Millennium

The Access Officer was involved along with her colleagues in DCU, WIT and the HEEU in organising this important education conference held in Dublin Castle on 24th May 2000. The focus of the conference was on key issues now facing the education sector, principally on the issues and challenges relating to widening participation in higher education and on the role of academia in facilitating learners, including new types of learners and new arrangements for learning. The conference provided a timely focus on the challenges facing higher education. NUI Maynooth, DCU, WIT, the HEEU, and the HEA and the Department of Education and Science supported the conference.

5. Future Plans

- To develop the "Take 5" initiative;
- To extend the Access Programme to two specific disadvantaged schools in Co Kildare in Newbridge and Athy;
- To establish a stronger Access liaison with Co Donegal schools, its Area Based Partnership and Local Development Companies;
- To develop projects to encourage more interest in Science among Access schools.
- To develop supports at pre-entry and post-entry level for students with refugee status in Hartstown Community School.
- To establish links with Action South Kildare in developing strategies for the education of asylum seekers based in Kildare town.

6. Disability Report

The number of students with disabilities has increased and the group includes one with a severe hearing impairment and one serious visual impairment. All the students settled well into NUI Maynooth and the supports they identified have been put in place to meet their specific individual needs. This has involved the support of all of the University Departments, academic, administrative, buildings, security, medical centre, student centre and the student union working in tandem with the Access Officer.

The Access Officer has been invited by AHEAD to sit on the advisory committee on Admission Policy and Students with Disabilities in Higher Education.

The Access Officer organised a Learning Style Colloquium for academic staff in NUI Maynooth. The purpose of the Colloquium was to alert academic staff to the variety of different learning styles among the student body in general and to emphasise that those with disabilities often have unique learning styles related to their particular needs.

Each academic Department has agreed to a follow-on workshop with the Access Officer. The workshops will focus on what support each Department will offer students with particular needs in the area of learning, note taking, assignments and examinations. A number of workshops have already taken place and it is hoped that each Department will have nominated a liaison officer to work with the Access Officer. It is also hoped that these Departments will identify their strategies in relation to students with specific needs. It is hoped to have another conference next year to develop the ideas from the Colloquium.

The work currently being carried out with students with specific Learning Difficulties involves a project worker supporting the students in devising learning strategies. The students involved have a range of

learning disabilities ranging from dyslexia to Aspergers Syndrome. Their needs are diverse and complex. As well as academic tutorial support, these students require long term strategies to aid them in their life long learning and in the world of work.

The students themselves have formed a support group for those with Learning Difficulties and they hope to formalise this group as a Student Society in the academic year 2000/2001.

Many of these students require counselling and this is a project to be developed in the future.

The Access Officer has been in constant consultation with the Buildings Officer and Health and Safety Officer on an agreed programme of work. This work includes upgrading and refurbishment of buildings on campus to bring them to a suitable standard for students with disabilities.

7. The Target Schools

Deansrath Community College, Clondalkin
St Kevin's Community College, Clondalkin
Collinstown Park Community College, Clondalkin
Blakestown Community School, Blanchardstown
Riversdale Community College, Corduff, Blanchardstown
Hartstown Community School, Blanchardstown

All the schools in Co. Donegal

Participating Schools in the ACE Programme in Tallaght via the NEW ERA Programme in UCD; -
Jobstown Community College
Killinarden Community School
St. Aidan's Community School, Brookfield

Only students attending one of the above schools for the three years prior to their Leaving Certificate would be eligible for admission under the initiative.

Staff : Access Officer, full-time on contract and full-time Secretary

National University of Ireland, University College, Cork

1. Background

The academic year 2000/01 sees University College Cork enter the fifth year of its Access Programme for School Leavers from Socio-Economic Disadvantaged Backgrounds. The Programme started in 1996 as a direct response to the perceived problem of continuing inequality in access to, and participation in, higher education relative to socio-economic background, which was highlighted in the HEA Report of the Steering Committee on the Future Development of Higher Education.

Prior to the setting up of its own programme, University College Cork studied the pilot programmes which had already been established between third-level institutions and second-level schools to improve access to Higher Education for disadvantaged groups, such as the BITE programme at DCU and TAP programme at TCD. It has sought to develop in Cork a model involving all city-based secondary schools designated by the Department of Education and Science as disadvantaged.

A central emphasis is the principle of subsidiarity - using the energies and good will of all agencies and existing resources (schools, area based partnerships, community organisations, home-school liaison officers, guidance counsellors, the staff, students and graduates of the University and voluntary groups).

This unique initiative serves to promote greater interaction between UCC and Cork City secondary schools which meet the Department of Education or VEC criteria for schools serving disadvantaged communities.

2. Schools Involved

The schools include two community colleges, one community school and six secondary schools, ranging in size from four hundred to eight hundred pupils. Five schools are based in the city's Northside and four in the Southside. All schools serve the city's most deprived communities, ranging from Knocknaheeny in the North to Mahon in the South. From September 2000 the programme also involves 8 disadvantaged rural Cork secondary schools with direct entry for students from these schools in 2001. A "cluster" based approach is being adopted.

Obviously some elements of the programme on offer to the city schools will be available to those based in the County Awards Scheme, Easter School, Computer Courses, parents programme etc. but the Supplementary teaching element may not prove feasible. It might be possible to replace this with supervised homework sessions run by a member of staff and funded by UCC.

The programme also has links with two PLC colleges - St. John's Central College and Colaiste Stiofan Naofa - both of whose students are linked to the Access Programme. For the first time this year, students may be considered for a UCC place by direct entry, on the grounds of NCVA Level 2 qualifications.

3. Aims

The programme seeks to target the most able students within the schools and to provide motivational, educational and financial assistance to them through their secondary schooling to enhance their ability to compete for third level places. The programme also recognises the need to influence the educational aspirations and achievements of a wider circle of students in the schools, and the necessity to seek to influence the educational ethos of the whole school. The overall aim will be to work with the school and its staff, parents, community organisations, the Cork City Partnership, students and staff of UCC, to break the cycle of disadvantage and marginalisation which can persist in families and communities for generations.

4. Direct Entry

Students in any of the link schools, who meet certain financial and other criteria, may apply for one of the 50 ex-quota places in UCC by direct entry. During the 1999/2000 academic year the university's Academic Board amended the required financial criteria from eligibility for a Medical Card to eligibility for the local authority maintenance grant. This was considered to be a truer definition of disadvantage.

They are not required to apply through the CAO system, although s/he is quite free, and may be well advised, to do so. Where the situation arises that a student is NOT offered his/her first choice on the CAO, but rather a lower preference, they are NOT eliminated for consideration for their direct entry place.

5. Administration

A dedicated Access Officer, working within the Admissions Office, in partnership with a representative from each of the schools, has managed the Programme since November 1999. Prior to November 1999, the programme was the responsibility of the University's Deputy Admissions Officer.

Management of the programme lies within the Registrar's Department, with a reporting mechanism to the Academic Board for decisions on entry requirement modifications. Decisions on direct entry admissions are made by the Access Admissions Board in light of the guidelines outlined previously.

The Access Officer now also manages the Student Assistance/Access Fund which provides £130,000 for disadvantaged students each year for two years.

6. Links with Other Universities

The Access Officer attends regular meetings of the networking group of University Access Officers, the AMA (Access Made Accessible). This forum provides the opportunity to compare programme elements and promote best practice.

7. Programme Structure

The Access Programme is structured on four levels.

Level 1 – Second Level Support

This comprises of initiatives which support and encourage second-level students in the linked schools to complete their education and consider entry to UCC. These include:

- University Visits
- Supplementary Teaching
- Computer Courses
- Drama Project
- Easter School
- Special Awards
- Programme for Parents
- School Visits
- Internet Links with UCC

Activities and Outcomes

University Visits

All Transition Year pupils from the schools are invited each year to the University during first term. The students from each school attend for one half-day, with two schools attending at any one time. The programme begins with a presentation in the Aula Maxima outlining degree courses on offer, career opportunities and student facilities. This is followed by a tour of the Campus, giving pupils an opportunity to chat informally with their guide, ending with refreshments in the Student Restaurant. All schools availed of this opportunity this year.

Supplementary Teaching

All of the schools have identified the need for supplementary teaching to overcome the lack of access to grinds for disadvantaged students.

Student volunteers from the University (Higher Diploma in Education and other post-graduate programmes) provide supplementary teaching in the schools throughout the year. The full range of school subjects is covered, and the students teach pupils on an individual basis and/or in small groups while liaising closely with the relevant subject teacher.

The scheme has grown in popularity over the years and each year has seen a significant increase in demand from pupils and schools for supplementary teaching. To the end of April 2000, UCC had funded over 600 extra teaching hours to the 9 schools in the programme.

Computer Courses

The Computer Centre at UCC provides a series of one-week Computer Programmes for pupils from the schools. These run over the summer period for a total of eight weeks beginning in June and catering for twenty-five pupils each week. The courses are held in the Computer Training Centre in UCC. Topics covered include word-processing, Excel, Access, Power Point, Internet etc.

The objective of the courses is to develop awareness among interested students of the potential use of computers and to encourage them to pursue that interest, if possible, by following a third level course of study. The courses are not limited to a particular year group in the schools, but are open to all.

Drama Project

A drama company made up of two MA drama students has undertaken either 10 or 20-week drama projects in 7 of the 9 link schools. The aim of the project is to provide the students with some basic drama processes which will improve their creative, social and intellectual skills. The 190 students who participated in the programme attended a one-day drama workshop both in the main campus and in the Granary Theatre over two days.

Easter School

An Easter School was held during the Easter vacation for pupils entering fifth year. 96 students from the schools attended UCC for one week (April 3rd - 7th) allowing them an insight into University life and also providing them with training in study skills, realistic goal setting etc. The School also allowed pupils to participate in sporting, social and cultural events.

Groups will make subsequent return visits to UCC during their fifth and sixth years, not only to maintain their links with UCC, but also to further develop friendships made, and to enhance their group identity.

Special Awards

A Special Awards Scheme is an integral part of the programme. It is directed at pupils in every year except Leaving and Junior Certificate, and is intended to reward endeavour and achievement. Schools have highlighted the need to encourage pupils as early as first year, and hence the involvement with younger pupils. Pupils in the schools are invited to submit a project/essay for consideration. Six of the eight schools participated in 1996/97, seven of the nine in 1997/98 and all nine in 1998/1999 and 1999/2000.

Eighty-seven pupils from the schools received an award in 1996/97, over two hundred in 1998/99, and almost three hundred in 1998/1999 with all students, teachers and parents invited to attend a Prize Giving Ceremony in May.

Programme for Parents

It is necessary to include parents in any programme of intervention with schools and pupils. While raising pupils expectations, there must also be a parallel exposure to the possibilities and opportunities

available through third level, for parents. Several schools availed of the opportunity to bring small groups of parents to the University. An outline of courses is given, followed by a tour of the Campus and refreshments in the Staff Dining Room.

School Visits

A programme of school visits is ongoing in all the schools. These visits are intended to provide information on UCC courses, facilities, careers etc. to both Leaving Certificate and Transition Year students. Where possible, students from the schools attending UCC are also invited to address the pupils. Individual Faculties have also visited the schools.

During the academic year all schools have been visited either for 5th and 6th year talks, career days, parent meetings, award functions etc.

Internet Links with UCC

In 1997/98, to further develop the links with UCC's Computer Centre, two computers and one printer were installed in each of the nine schools, linked to the Internet and with the Microsoft Office package supplied by UCC. The students are able to access UCC's homepage and follow events at the University via the Internet.

Level 2 – Admissions Procedure

This consists of the process of selecting students on the basis of certain criteria determining eligibility for a direct entry place.

In assessing the suitability of any student for a direct entry place the following criteria will apply:

The student must satisfy the minimum entry requirements for the relevant degree programme but not the points requirements

- (b) NCVA Level 2 qualifications can be accepted as an alternative to matriculation through the Leaving Certificate
- (c) The student must come from a disadvantaged background in one of our link schools and be eligible for a Local Authority Grant and/or Medical Card.
- (d) The Principal of his/her school must nominate the student as having the motivation and ability to complete the chosen degree programme.

The process of assessment by UCC involves consideration of the applicant's CAO application (if one was made), Leaving Certificate results as well as overall school record and other supportive information provided by the School Principal. The student and the school principal may be interviewed if necessary or desirable.

A decision on the acceptance of a student is made by an Access Admissions Board consisting of the Registrar, the Professor of Education and Professor of Applied Social Studies and is subject to the agreement of the Dean of the relevant Faculty.

Level 3 – Support at University

Additional support, financial and otherwise, is provided for students after they have entered UCC.

All Access students for admission will have to attend a compulsory orientation week prior to registration as a mechanism to facilitate students who have been offered a direct entry place. This will take the form of a week-long orientation course in September, attendance at which would be a compulsory part of a direct entry place. The week will provide an opportunity for students to develop essential learning skills, to address study-related and personal needs, and to familiarise themselves with the geography of the campus and how the University is structured. Sports and other recreational activities will also be included. Apart from the individual benefit to the students, the other direct result of the week will be that the foundation of a solid relationship between the students and the Access Officer would have been facilitated. The week will obviously not be possible without the co-operation of academic and administrative departments in the planning and running of component modules.

A major obstacle to students from disadvantaged backgrounds in accepting a place at third level is a financial one. The present local authority grants are deemed inadequate to maintain a student and the University provides grants to cover the cost of books, field trips etc.

The Access Officer acts as a mentor for Access students, particularly during first year, and has met each student individually as often as necessary. On the first day of the students' Easter Break, the Access Programme ran an exam revision tutorial for first year students in conjunction with the Student Counselling Centre and Exams/Records.

As part of normal University life, students will also be assigned an academic tutor as a source of advice and support. This initiative is particularly important during first year as once students have successfully completed their first year the retention rate increases significantly.

As part of the support mechanisms the school representative from each of the schools will provide additional support, if necessary.

Level 4 – Evaluation

Evaluation is a very important element of the programme. The progress of students from the schools involved is being tracked beginning with the base line of those who entered in 1996. The follow-up of students will continue over several years to measure the impact of the project.

To this end the Access Officer is being provided with training on the Brio software package to generate these reports from the data within ITS.

8. Further Proposals

Supplementary teaching

It is proposed to provide tutors providing supplementary teaching with training on the operation of the Access Programme, child protection guidelines and small unit teaching methods in conjunction with the Education Department.

Extend to Cork rural schools

Following an initial round of consultative meetings with the rural designated schools in Cork, programme support for these schools will begin in September 2000. Students in these schools will be eligible for admission under the Access Programme in October 2001.

9. Proposals for 2001/02

Increase ex-quota places to 75

In order to move closer to the Points Commission recommendation of 5% of student intake and the University's Strategic Plan in relation to Access Students, it is proposed to increase the number of ex-quota places to 75 in order to allow for applications from the rural schools while still accommodating students from the existing city based link schools.

Expand Staff numbers

The above expansion in both student numbers and programme depth would necessitate the recruitment of at least one extra staff member in this year to the Access Programme to co-ordinate specific areas. The issues of staff numbers would have to remain under constant review.

10. Proposals for 2002/03

Increase ex-quota places to 100

Again, to move closer to the Points Commission recommendation of 5% of student intake and the University's Strategic Plan in relation to Access Students it is proposed to increase the number of ex-quota places to 100.

Extend to Munster based Secondary schools

It is proposed to extend the Programme, during this year, to other designated secondary schools in the Munster area of which there are 33. The programme for the other county schools could be developed on a County Cluster basis with an appropriate support structure.

11. Proposals for 2003/4

Increase ex-quota places to 125

Again, to help achieve the Points Commission recommendation of 5% of student intake, it is proposed to increase the number of ex-quota places to 125.

Extend to all Munster based Secondary schools

It is proposed to extend the Programme, during this year, to individual disadvantaged students in all secondary schools in the Munster area based on the Combat Poverty Agency Adult Dependent formula as attached. No extra supports would be offered to these schools apart from the opportunity to apply for an Access Place.

The proposals outlined for 2000-2004 should:

- See the programme extended to all designated Secondary schools in Munster with appropriate programme support (with the exception of Limerick and Clare);
- See the programme extended to all other Munster Secondary schools with no programme support;
- Have increased the ex-quota places to 125;

- Have extended the support elements within the programme itself;
- Allow for greater communication between UCC and Cork Communities.

The Programme would then operate on a two-tiered approach. Firstly, it would continue to provide direct entry opportunities as well as extra resources and supports to the Department of Education and Science designated disadvantaged secondary schools in Munster, tailored to their distance from the University and, secondly, it would open up the opportunity to disadvantaged students in the Province in non-designated schools to apply by direct entry but offer no additional resources or programme support to their schools.

12. UCC – Linked Schools

North Presentation Secondary School, Farranree
 St. Vincent's Secondary School, St. Mary's Road
 Mayfield Community School, Mayfield
 Ursuline Convent, Blackrock (catchment area - Mahon)
 Presentation Secondary School, Ballyphehane
 Deerpark CBS, Ballyphehane
 Nagle Community College, Mahon
 Terence McSwiney Community College, Knocknaheeny
 North Monastery, Cathedral Road

Clusters

City Cluster:	The 9 existing Schools
North Cork Cluster:	Colaiste Treasa, Kanturk Boherbue Comprehensive School, Mallow Mannix College, Charleville
East Cork Cluster:	Cobh Community College St. Coleman's College, Midleton,
West Cork Cluster:	Kinsale Community School Mount St. Michael, Rosscarbery Scoil Phobail Bheara, Castletownbere

Dublin City University : The North Dublin Access Programme

1. Introduction

DCU's direct participation in the management and organisation of the very successful BITE programme (Ballymun Initiative for Third Level Education) since early 1990 has been well documented and commended. DCU has also operated a Direct Entry Scheme for school-leavers since 1990. Under this Scheme, up to five pupils from the Ballymun Comprehensive School have been offered direct entry if they satisfied the following criteria: matriculation and programme requirements, four grade Cs at higher level, an aptitude test, an interview and a means test. In addition to a place on the degree of their choice, they were awarded a scholarship of £750 per year.

Up to 1996 efforts were concentrated on the areas of Ballymun and the north inner city. However, in 1996 DCU launched the North Dublin Access Programme (NDAP). The NDAP involves a network of approximately sixteen schools situated within the vicinity of the following areas: Coolock/Darndale, Finglas/Cabra and Ballymun. Although the primary objective is to increase the third-level participation rate of those leaving participating schools, another important aspect of the programme is raising the level of self-esteem of the students and promoting positive educational experiences.

From the experience since 1996 DCU has learned that it is possible to increase the numbers accessing third level through direct intervention with target schools. DCU has also found that students accessing third level under such programmes do as well as, if not better than students entering through the conventional pathways. Thirdly, DCU has learned that it is possible to bring the university, school and broader community together in an effective way to pursue access goals.

The experience also suggests that changing attitudes and levelling the educational playing pitch is a time consuming and labour intensive business. If access for socio-economically-disadvantaged students is to be the priority that the Government has made it, then quantifiable targets and quotas are needed.

DCU also needs to move forward to co-operate with other third level institutions in a coherent manner without compromising the existing relationships built up with schools and communities.

2. Target Schools

DCU are targeting all schools which satisfy the following criteria:

- Be a designated school within the Department of Education scheme for disadvantaged schools;
- Be within the designated areas of the following Area Partnerships; Finglas/Cabra, Ballymun and Northside;
- Not have selective entry for students;
- Have little or no tradition of progression to higher education ;
- Are not a participant in an access programme of another university or third-level college;
- Preferably, have data available for the last few years on both attrition rates and the first destination of Leaving Certificate students.

There are currently 16 schools participating in the programme.

3. Programme Elements

The NDA School Programme which is made up of an outreach programme of activities including the following:

Student Shadowing Scheme. This involves Fifth Year students shadowing a First Year DCU student for a day.

Tuition Scheme. This involves DCU Undergraduates giving grinds in selected subjects to Junior Certificate students in participating schools.

Achievement Awards Scheme for second level schools to recognise achievement and to reward hard work .

Easter Revision Course for NDA Direct Entry Applicants offering a choice of Leaving Certificate subjects on campus for one week.

Discover DCU Pilot Programme for potential third level applicants and their parents.

Information Sessions and Visits to the University for students and parents in participating schools arranged on an ad hoc basis.

Take 5 Programme for Transition Year students in partnership with Access Services in Trinity College, NUI Maynooth, UCD and DIT.

Summer Camp places for First Year students in participating schools.

A Direct Entry Policy targeting students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds who have the ability to benefit from higher education but who, for reasons of disadvantage, did not achieve their potential at second level, and accordingly, were unable to compete on an equal footing with other candidates for admission to Higher Education. At present DCU makes up to 5% of First Year places available each year to eligible school-leavers from NDA schools, with a quota of up to 10% on any one programme. Applications are also considered from students attending schools linked to other university access programmes, and recommendations are being made to Academic Council to consider applications from students anywhere in the Republic.

The NDA Summer School is a two-week full-time course on campus in DCU in September for students who have been accepted on the Direct Entry Programme. The aims of the Summer School are to prepare students academically and socially for undergraduate life and to equip them with study and personal skills.

Undergraduate Support in the form of a top-up scholarship of £1,000 per annum for students who gain entry to DCU through the NDA Programme, and academic support in the early stages if necessary. There is also a Peer Mentoring Programme for students post entry.

4. Direct Entry Scheme

With regard to the affirmative action debate, the DCU position has been that Leaving Certificate points cannot be taken as the sole criterion of an applicant's academic ability or as the sole predictor of third-level success. This principle is well established in the case of mature applicants and applicants with disabilities, and DCU has extended it to include those who are severely disadvantaged in the socio-economic sense.

Students wishing to apply to the University through the Direct Entry Scheme are asked to attend an interview, participate in the DCU Summer School, complete a financial statement and produce academic records and references. Students will be selected on the basis of their academic performance, level of motivation and degree of disadvantage.

The criteria for Direct Entry is as follows:

- Successful completion of the NDA Summer School;
- A high level of motivation;
- Successfully perform at interview;
- Socio-economically disadvantaged;
- Minimum entry requirements of the University and any specific programme requirements;
- At least 4 Cs in Higher Level subjects in the Leaving Certificate Examination, and in certain circumstances students obtaining 3 Cs in Higher Level subjects will be considered.

5. Direct Entry Summer School

Students who are accepted on the Direct Entry Scheme are required to attend the NDA Summer School which is a two week full-time course run on the Dublin City University campus in early September. The aims of the Summer School are:

- To provide an additional opportunity for school-leavers to demonstrate potential to succeed on their chosen degree course should the student not meet the points requirements;
- To prepare students academically and socially for undergraduate life;
- To equip students with study and personal skills.

The content, format and delivery of the Summer School is designed by a Teaching Advisory Group made up of representatives from the participating schools, the community and the academic and administrative staff of the University. There has been much support from the entire university community for the programme since the first Summer School took place in September 1997.

6. Management Structure of the North Dublin Access Programme

A Steering Committee which includes some of the following people who meet 5/6 times per year:

- Registrar of DCU;
- Director of Student Affairs, DCU;
- Admissions Officer, DCU;
- Student Affairs Personnel;
- Education Co-ordinators from the three Area Partnerships;
- Teachers (Principal, Career Guidance, Home-School Liaison);
- Academics from DCU and St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra;
- Community Representative;
- Local Business Person;
- Access Officer.

**7. Participation and Retention to Date
Numbers of Students taking part in North Dublin Access Programme Initiatives:**

Year	Direct Entry Scheme	Student Shadowing	Student Tuition		Achievement Awards	Summer Camp Places	Discover DCU	Take 5	Easter Revision Course	Total
			Semester 1	Semester 2						
1997	19	Scheme not yet in operation	Scheme not yet in operation	Scheme not yet in operation	47	Scheme not yet in operation	Scheme not yet in operation	Scheme not yet in operation	Scheme not yet in operation	66
1998	21	55	Approx. 130	Approx. 200	150	24	Scheme not yet in operation	Scheme not yet in operation	Scheme not yet in operation	580
1999	40	150	Approx. 250	Approx. 100	251	30	Scheme not yet in operation	Scheme not yet in operation	85	906
2000	29	150	Approx. 100	Not yet available	257	34	48	15	96	729

8. List of Schools that are being Targeted under the North Dublin Access Programme

1. Finglas/Cabra Area Partnership
Colaiste Eoin
Patrician College
St. Michael's, Holy Faith
St. Declan's
St. Dominic's, Dominican College
Mater Christi
Colaiste Eanna
Beneavin De La Salle College
2. Northside Area Partnership
The Donahies
Colaiste Dhulaigh
Mercy College
Belcamp College
St. Peters, Killester
Chanel College
St. Mary's SS, Killester
3. Ballymun Area Partnership
Ballymun Senior Comprehensive School

University of Limerick

1. Students from Disadvantaged backgrounds

Students from the following schools have participated in a number of on campus activities designed to give disadvantaged students from the schools an idea of what college life is like:

Limerick City

St Enda's, Kilmallock Road
CBS, Sexton Street
Presentation, Sexton Street
St. Nessian's, Moylish Park
Ard Scoil Mhuire, Corbally
Scoil Carmel, O'Connell Avenue
Crescent Comprehensive, Dooradoyle
Edmund Rice, Shelbourne Road

Limerick County

Community College, Dromcollogher
John the Baptist Community School, Hospital
Abbeyfeale Vocational School

In the 1999/2000 academic year a series of orientation days and careers days were organized, in addition to a week long summer school. Student participation in these events is set out below:

1999/2000

Orientation Days	263 students
Summer School	36 students
Careers Days	32 students

Faculty, staff and UL students' participation in these events contributed substantially to their success. Twenty-one orientation days have so far been planned for 2000/2001.

The University continues to support the Limerick Community Based Education Initiative (LCBEI). Supervised study, language and revision tutorials, first year computer classes and first year reading tutorials are offered to students in the Southill parish of Limerick with the assistance of the University's Access Office, the Students Union of the University of Limerick and Thomond Rotary Club.

A one semester-long Access Course was mounted in February, 1999. Eight students who participated in this course have proceeded to enroll in University of Limerick Undergraduate Degree programmes. A similar Access Course is being offered in February, 2001.

A three week intensive Access Course and a one academic year-long Access Course for mature disadvantaged students were designed, and validated by the University's Academic Council in the last academic year. These courses are being offered in 2000/2001, in addition to the one semester Access Course referred to in the previous paragraph.

In addition to the Access Courses the following new initiatives are planned for implementation in the current academic year:

- A Citywise Southill project which will provide Saturday morning clubs for 10-12 year olds from Southill;
- University Clubs and Societies - various clubs and societies are getting involved in on-campus events for disadvantaged students, including the Waterpolo Club and the Mountain Biking Club;
- 'Playing for Success' - it is planned to start this project in the second semester, in collaboration with the Limerick Football Club (who are working with Glentoran FC and Drogheda FC) and the UL Sports Department. This type of project was developed in Britain with Premier and First Division Soccer Teams, combining educational and sporting activities for targeted students (aged 10-12 years) two afternoons/evenings a week;
- This project is being developed in Rosbrien and St. Munchin's parish, Limerick City, in conjunction with the Early School Leaving Initiative. It will involve targeted 9-15 year olds taking part in the "Playing for Success Programme".

2. Mature Students

The University is in the process of forming an educational support unit for all mature students. This will provide practical advice as well as educational supports. This initiative is in its initial stages and involves the provision of a variety of extra tutorials in subjects in which mature students traditionally experience difficulties, e.g. maths (technical, science and business), computers, languages, physics and economics.

Having recently established and resourced a Department of Lifelong Learning and a Dean of Teaching and Learning Office, the University anticipates substantial additional activity in the area of adult education and additional provision of teaching and learning resources to the University's students, including mature students.

The University's Access Office is staffed by an Access Officer (who gives particular attention to mature students), a second level Access Co-ordinator, and an Access Secretary.

3. Students with Disabilities

The University has a full-time Disability Liaison Officer and is in the process of recruiting an Assistive Technology Officer.

More than 110 students identified themselves as disabled in the 1999/2000 academic year. The range of disability is very wide and there is an increasing incidence of dyslexia. The Disability Liaison Officer (DLO) meets with all disabled applicants seeking a University place, and liaises with and advises Admissions in relation to each case.

Each disabled student receives individual attention from the Disability Liaison Officer. Once the student's needs are established the DLO liaises with academic staff (to facilitate use of a radio-aid and provision of lecture notes in the case of, for example, a hearing impaired student), Student Services (for class scheduling and examinations management), Co-operative Education (for work placement) etc.

A Resource Centre for disabled students is being created in the University's Library. The centre will house specialist hardware and software suited to the needs of the University's disabled students. This facility will also be available to disabled people in the community.

Personnel in the Library, in the Information Technology Division and Cooperative Placement Division have been assigned to address the needs of disabled students.

The DLO assists disabled students in the preparation of applications for funding support from the Department of Education & Science, etc. An awareness raising programme (involving briefings on the implications of recent legislation, work-shops for faculty and staff and Open Days for potential disabled applicants to third-level have been arranged/planned to take place.).

An on-demand transport service for people with disabilities was recently introduced on campus. With this new service students simply call a mobile phone number giving details of where they are and where they want to get to. A wheelchair accessible bus responds to requests between the hours of 8.00am and 6.30pm each weekday.

University College Dublin

1. Development of Programmes

The New Equal Right to Access (ERA) programme seeks to address the inequalities in gaining access to higher education highlighted by research in UCD in 1994. The New ERA initiative adopts a holistic approach, which focuses on the student in the context of family, community, school and university.

The principal aim of New ERA is to encourage and facilitate increased participation in higher education by students who do not, for a variety of economic or social reasons, view going to university as an attractive and attainable option. The emphasis within the programme is on promoting positive perceptions of higher education among students, parents and teachers in disadvantaged communities, on supporting students in gaining access to higher education generally, and enabling those who enter UCD to successfully complete courses undertaken.

The University is committed at the highest level to the goal of equality of access. The involvement of senior staff on the programme's Steering Committee, which reports directly to the Registrar, is evidence of this commitment. The range of external links used in developing the initiative include Institutes of Technology, community groups, Area Partnership Boards and VECs, in addition to parents and staff from targeted schools. UCD was instrumental in establishing a forum for discussion and co-operation for access co-ordination from other higher education institutions.

The New ERA Office employs four full-time members of staff. These include a co-ordinator, who has been in place since the launch of the initiative, two project officers who were both employed in 2000 (January and August) and an administrator.

Current Provision

- Through an **Outreach Programme**, the New ERA Office has active links with a total of 30 schools in 10 different communities. 20 of these schools are based in the Greater Dublin Area with a remaining 10 based in rural communities. The Outreach Programme, which is the specific responsibility of a full-time member of staff, incorporates careers information workshops, direct financial support to pupils for attendance at educational courses, institutional visits by parents, teachers and pupils, student shadowing and voluntary student tutoring scheme. An additional feature of the outreach programme is the Discovering University Course – a one-week university-based summer school for pre- and post- Junior Certificate students, managed jointly by UCD and the National College of Ireland.
- A **Direct Entry Scheme** targeted at school leavers who might not achieve their educational potential at school because of socio-economic disadvantage. 70 additional places (distributed across all faculties on a pro-rata basis) are available for school leavers from link schools annually. Selection is judged primarily on a means tested basis but prospective students are also expected to demonstrate a high level of motivation and to meet specified academic requirements set by each faculty. They must also successfully complete the New ERA Orientation Programme;
- New ERA **Orientation Programme** – all successful applicants attend a two-week, full-time orientation programme where they have the opportunity to familiarise themselves with UCD as well as develop learning and study skills appropriate to higher education;
- **Undergraduate Support** is financial, academic and personal. All students entering UCD through the Direct Entry route, as well as a number of CAO entrants (from schools nationwide) who satisfy the socio-economic criteria of the programme, receive financial support in the form of a top-up maintenance grant funded by private fund-raising. Academic support is provided through additional tutorials and academic "mentoring". Faculty based group meetings are also facilitated by New ERA staff, whereby First Year students are encouraged to meet with a member of staff fortnightly to review progress, maintain contacts and receive support. New ERA staff play a key role in providing a link between school and university and maintains personal contact with students throughout their time in UCD. Although all staff members have on-going contact with students, an individual staff member takes overall responsibility for developing internal support structures within the University.

Programme Outcomes

Numbers of pupils participating in various aspects of the programme have increased from 1380 in 1997/1998 to an estimated 2860 in 1999/2000.

Numbers of students entering the institution as a result of the New ERA initiative are as follows: -

	Direct Entry	CAO	Total
1997/98	7	3	10
1998/99	27	6	33
1999/00	29	11	40
2000/01	41	20	61

Systems are in place to track students from participation in school based programmes through application, progress through university and eventual outcome. Those who do not complete their studies are also monitored. It is university policy to preserve the anonymity of students on the New ERA programme. Internal evaluation of all aspects of the initiative is ongoing.

Criteria used in evaluation

- Participation rates of pupils in programme activities;
- Attitudinal changes to participation in higher education as expressed by pupils, parents and teachers in post-evaluation forms;
- Heightened awareness of higher education options;
- Numbers of students entering higher education institutions from target schools;
- Level of demand for participation in the New ERA initiative;
- Levels of successful participation by New ERA students in UCD;
- Level of awareness of the initiative within the UCD community.

Future Developments

- The university has piloted a programme, which sponsors pupils from a selected school on other (non-UCD) summer courses, e.g. languages and music programmes. In 2000/01 New ERA will extend this sponsorship to a number of pupils from all schools for a variety of different supplementary educational activities throughout the year;
- **Summer Schools** – New ERA plans to pilot two new Summer Schools in June 2001 – a Fifth Year School and a Pre-Junior Certificate School. The Fifth Year School will target students at the end of their Fifth Year in school and will offer them intensive academic preparation for Leaving Certificate as well as career guidance and study skills. The programme will be based in the University over a three-week period (part-time) and it is hoped that those attending will be better placed to compete for College places the following year. The pre-Junior Certificate School will be a weeklong programme of exploration, challenge and fun based in a University environment. Participants will get exposure to a variety of different university options along with cultural, social and sporting experiences;
- **Primary School Initiative** – In Summer 2000 a group of Primary School pupils spent one day in UCD, visiting various Departments in the University, utilising the facilities and hearing about what goes on at third level. The pupils came from a feeder school of a designated link school of the programme. It is planned to extend this initiative to a number of other primary schools so as to begin the process of raising awareness about options at third level as early as possible in target communities;
- **Achievement Award Scheme** – In Spring 2001 an Achievements Award Scheme will be introduced to Transition Year students in all linked schools. The Award Scheme will recognise and reward achievements, special abilities and efforts of students in all target schools. The Scheme will culminate in an Award Ceremony in UCD for students, their parents and teachers;

- **Transfer of Students across Institutions** – UCD has set as one of its priorities for 2000/01 full co-operation and pro-active support of all efforts and initiatives which will facilitate the transfer of eligible students between third level institutions. UCD will participate in the **Common Application Procedure** currently being agreed by a number of institutions for entry in 2001. The University also intends to open up their Summer Schools to students linked to other third level institutions;
- **Access Conference** – In March/April 2001 UCD will host a conference on access by students from lower socio-economic groups. The conference will be aimed at UCD staff, second level teachers, parents and community leaders, other third level institutions and DES/HEA officials. Conference themes will be confirmed in due course;

2. The Access Programme for Students with a Disability

The Access Programme for students with a disability was set up in 1988, when UCD was the first third level institution in Ireland to appoint an Access Officer. The service has grown and evolved to meet the changing needs of students with a disability accessing third level education in Ireland today. The Access Officer co-ordinates the services and works in co-operation with all College Departments to include the needs of students with a disability in the provision of all services within the University. He is available to students and to staff, to provide and receive information and advice on disability issues.

Mission Statement

The UCD Access programme for students with a disability is committed to providing an *Equal Opportunities Learning Environment*. The key objective of the Access Programme is to empower students with a disability to allow them full participation in University education, academically and socially.

Services

Relative to the International situation, there is need for a lot more progress and development. At present UCD is developing a 5-year plan, which will be based on interviews, surveys and questionnaires.

There is a wide range of services provided by the Access Programme directly to students with a disability in the University, some of which include;

- Evaluation of Students Needs;
- Library Assistance;
- Assistive Technology, provision of and training
- Books on Tape;
- One to One Reader Service;
- Braille Service;
- Funding of Supports for Students;
- Information and Advice;
- Advocacy on behalf of students with a disability.

Some of the other functions of the Access Programme are: -

- Staff & Student Awareness on Disability Issues;
- Liaising with University Student Support Services;

- Liaising with University Departments;
- Liaising with University Faculties on Supports for Students;
- Development of Disability Policy within the University.

Currently there are 175 students with a wide range of disabilities, registered with the access office. The breakdown of Students with a Disability Registered with the Access Programme is as follows;

Disability	Number of	Percent of Total
Physical	37	21%
Hearing	10	6%
Visual	14	8%
Learning	64	37%
Significant Ongoing Illness	37	21%
Miscellaneous	13	7%

3. Access for Mature Students

Return to Learning Courses

As part of its continuing efforts to address the issue of access to Third Level Education by mature students, the UCD Adult Education Office has developed two Return to Learning courses:

Certificate in Foundation Level Studies – **Humanities**
 Certificate in Foundation Level Studies – **Commerce**.

It is intended to introduce a Certificate in Foundation Level Studies - **Science** in the near future.

These courses, based in Belfield and at outreach locations in the greater Dublin area (Ballymun and Baldoyle) are part-time, 20 weeks in duration and are designed for adults who would like a prior experience of what is involved in a degree course at a third level institution. It will provide experience of certain subjects as well as practice in the skills necessary for studying on a degree course. Admission to these courses is by interview and assessment of a piece of written work. Students completing the course and the necessary assessment will receive an NUI Foundation Certificate.

There were 87 students enrolled on the Return to Learning Course for 1999/00, 22 of whom were sponsored (fees waived due to low incomes - under £11,000 a year). Of this figure, 32 students progressed onto Higher Education (5 of whom were sponsored). For the 2000/01 academic session, 90 students have enrolled in the Return to Learning Courses and they are being actively encouraged to continue their educational development.

The Adult Education Office offers many other courses leading to an NUI Certificate and these courses also assist the adult learner in developing an interest in pursuing an interest to go on to Third Level Education.

Role of the Mature Students Officer

To develop a sense of continuity for the adult learner returning to education, UCD has appointed a

Mature Students Officer who works alongside the Adult Education Office and the Admissions Officer, Deans and Registrar to co-ordinate the development of policies and procedures for the admission of non-standard applicants. This comes about as a result of the growing recognition of the need to address the issue of equality of access to Third Level Education and recent initiatives at Government level.

An aspect of the role of the Mature Student Officer is to actively seek ways to promote UCD as a place open to Mature Students. A prospective mature student can now get information on courses in one of three ways:

1. Come in to meet the Mature Students Officer who will give the most up-to-date information on degree programmes available, individual course requirements and details of how/when to apply. They will also receive information on courses and qualifications that would improve their chances of getting a place in UCD. The Mature Student Officer has lists of all possible courses available in the Dublin area approved by the NUI and NCEA. This level of personal contact with the university can be extremely encouraging for a potential applicant and its effectiveness will be monitored.
2. Obtain a copy of "Applying on Grounds of Mature Years" giving information to anyone enquiring about applying to UCD. Its primary function will be to promote the range of full-time degree options but will also cover all courses available to adults i.e. courses run by the Adult Education Office and University Industry Programme. This brochure is being mailed to colleges/schools running Return to Learning/NCEA courses as well as to local education initiatives through community groups in the Greater Dublin Area.
3. There is a web-page on the UCD Web-site specifically designed for Mature Students. This is in progress of being refined and will contain links to the relevant Faculties/degree programmes.

Application procedures for non-standard candidates vary from University to University. Mature student applicants for UCD must apply through the CAO – in most cases the deadline is 1st February in the year of entry but some degree programmes will accept late applicants up to 1st May. Decisions are made in May/June and offers go out to successful candidates in Round 0. The competition to get a place in UCD as a Mature Student is very high. For the academic session 2000/01, 852 applicants applied on grounds of Mature Years. Of this figure, 275 places were offered; 138 places were accepted and 11 places were deferred. Unsuccessful MY candidates tend to be very disappointed in their failure to gain a place and many seek follow-up advice on how to improve their chances the following year. They have given very careful consideration to their decision to return to learning and they will receive feedback and support from the Mature Students Officer where possible.

Another important factor is that of monitoring the Mature Student's progression through their certificate/diploma/degree programme. The Mature Students Officer will continue the follow-up work carried out by the Admissions Officer and provide data on success rates and also identify reasons for failure.

The BA Modular Arts Degree in UCD is the preferred option for many Mature Students who chose to combine academic study with full-time work. As it is classed as a part-time degree course, the BA Modular student is not entitled to free tuition. The fees for 2000/01 are £814 per subject (students can take two subjects per year over four years - £1,628 per year). This is a major barrier to participation in Third Level education for Mature Students who may view the BA Modular Degree as an opportunity

to improve career prospects and enhance their personal life-long learning experience. Funding for the BA Modular Degree would have an immediate impact on accessibility to Third Level education to many who may otherwise be unable to continue their education.

NUI, GALWAY

1. Introduction

The college, as part of its desire to meet the targets of the Steering Committee on Higher Education, is committed to wide initiatives relating to Access. The programme is sensitive to the particular difficulties associated with disadvantage in a widely dispersed rural community and to the needs of the Irish speaking community.

Mission Statement

“to create a supportive environment (academic or other) where students who experience a socio-economic disadvantage prepare themselves to meet the challenge of their chosen degree programme at NUI, Galway”.

Aim of Access Programme

“to provide access opportunities to NUI, Galway for socio-economically disadvantaged people in the Western Region (extended from the pilot scheme) which will enable them to compete on an equal footing with those students who entered NUI, Galway through the normal entry channels”.

2. Objective of Access Programme

- To provide Access Courses;
- To expose Access students to taster courses relevant to their interests and their future subject choice which will enable them to make subject choices at NUI, Galway which are related to their ability. (For example: making students aware of the special difficulties and demands involved in choosing language courses);
- To ensure that the academic strengths and weaknesses of Access students are recognised and appropriate supports are given to them by the programme;
- To ensure that Access students acquire the necessary writing and study skills which will enable them to maximise their full academic potential at NUI, Galway;
- To create an understanding amongst Access students regarding the discipline necessary to manage academic life at NUI, Galway;
- To ensure that Access students have a working knowledge of information technology;
- To increase awareness of the needs being met by the Programme (internally in the institution by speaking to Heads of Departments and Faculty advisors within NUI, Galway);
- To raise awareness in recognising disadvantaged communities regarding the opportunities available through the Access Programme in NUI, Galway. This is achieved by speaking directly to the target groups through personal contact, the use of radio, community newsletter, unemployment centres, voluntary community groups, single parent groups, adult education classes, community workers, social workers, teachers and any other source which is known to exist on the ground.

3. School-Leavers

Student Recruitment

- Information sessions with school, community organisations, statutory organisations and area based partnerships. On-going with an information day in early spring;
- Advertising in local and regional papers (after the Leaving Certificate results).

Target Schools

- (155 schools) In Galway schools and all schools in Connacht and also Donegal and Clare. The University's policy is to reach individual disadvantaged students.

Student Selection

- This is based on an interview, school references and the financial circumstances of the family.

Access Course

- The course content consists of a number of core modules, including Study Skills, Writing and Communication Skills, Information Technology and Educational Guidance, as well as introductory modules in a number of specific disciplines; these are selected from: Social & Political Studies; Philosophy, Gaeilge, English, History, Mathematics, Science, Economics & Psychology.
- Students also participate in the University's 'Wellness Programme'.

Access Course Supports

- Personal;
- Academic;
- Financial;
- Accommodation (for students not living in Galway City);
- Students Services Supports:
 - Careers and Appointments Officer (integral part of the Access Course)
 - Students Counselor
 - Chaplains
 - Student Health Unit
 - Sports facilities
 - Student Union
 - Clubs and Societies

Entry to University

Participants who successfully complete an Access Course are recommended for matriculation and are then eligible for direct entry to full-time University degree courses in the faculties of Arts, Commerce, Science, Engineering and Law. The criteria for successful completion of the Access Courses involve adequate attendance and satisfactory performance in all elements of the courses.

4. Access Courses : Mature Students

(University based, Outreach Centre)

Student Recruitment

Information sessions with community organisations, further education colleges, VTOS, areas based partnerships, statutory organisations.

Advertising in local and regional papers.

Student Selection

This is based on an interview, references and the financial circumstances of the applicant. They will have had to leave school early because of socio-economic disadvantage or be currently disadvantaged.

Access Course **as above.**

Access Course Supports **as above.**

Entry to University **as above.**

5. Foundation Course in Science, Technology and Engineering

The course is designed for people who have been out of the formal education system for some time and who now wish to enter 3rd Level studies in Science, Engineering or Technology.

The course will:

- Provide the participants with an opportunity to experience the satisfaction that can be gained from learning in an academic environment;
- Enhance participants' knowledge to the level expected of an undergraduate student;
- Build up the participants' confidence in their academic ability;
- Equip the participants with skills to benefit from, and participate in, a 3rd level educational course.

There are no specific entry requirements but Leaving Certificate standard would be desirable. The application process consists of completion of an application form.

This is a part-time intensive introductory course running over the academic year. The course will run for 20 weeks and there will be occasional Saturday laboratory sessions.

The subjects are:

- Physics
- Chemistry
- Biology
- Mathematics; This course is also valuable for applicants aspiring to degree courses in Commerce.

The aim is to foster confidence and enthusiasm for each subject in the students and for the course to introduce conceptual frameworks and the language of each subject.

This course is a recognised entry requirement for the full-time Science, Engineering and Technology courses at GMIT and NUI, Galway. Participants gain entry to both institutions through the normal C.A.O. mature students route.

6. “Breaking the Barriers”

The model adopted by NUI Galway in providing initiatives which influence the educational aspiration of students and helps those through their second level schooling draws from the research available and from programmes already established between third-level institutions and second level schools to improve access to Higher Education for disadvantaged groups.

As NUI, Galway is reaching an urban and widely dispersed rural area, the strategy for this pilot initiative is to have a ‘cluster based approach’ targeting schools in a Gaeltacht area (2 schools bi-lingual), rural areas (5 schools) and urban areas (4 schools) in Galway City and towns. It is estimated that three out of every five disadvantaged students come from rural areas with populations of 10,000 or less. However, the majority of the 211 second level schools designated as disadvantaged by the Department of Education and Science are located in urban areas. For this reason the schools targeted do not all have designated disadvantaged status. Elements of this phase are:

- University visits;
- Programme for parents;
- Supplementary teaching;
- Student shadowing.

The overall aim is to work with the schools and its staff, parents, community organisation, Galway City Partnerships, Cumus Teo, Galway Rural Development Company, students and staff of NUI, Galway and to break the cycle of disadvantage and marginalisation which can persist in families and communities for generations, by enhancing the ability of the target student to compete for third level places.

7. Access Route to NUI, Galway (Direct Entry)

NUMBERS ADMITTED

	1998 1st Year	1999 1st Year	2000 1st Year
ACCESS YEAR 1	11		
ACCESS YEAR 2		33	
ACCESS YEAR 3			36
		TOTAL	80

**FOUNDATION COURSE ROUTE TO NUI GALWAY
(Science/Engineering/I/T.)
(C.A.O. Route)**

NUMBERS ADMITTED

	1999 1st Year	2000 1st Year
FOUNDATION 1	12	
FOUNDATION 2		11
	TOTAL	23

NUI, Galway Access Programme 2000/2001

Number of Access Participants and Full-Time Undergraduates

TITLE OF ACCESS COURSE	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
1. Mature Access Course Galway	22
2. Mature Access Course Carna	14
3. School-Leavers Access Course	21
4. GMIT/NUI, Galway Joint Foundation Course in Science & Engineering	37
5. First Year Undergraduate (includes repeat 1st Year), Access	42
6. Second Year Undergraduates, Access	31
7. Third Year Undergraduates, Access	6
8. First Year Joint Foundation	14
9. Second Year Joint Foundation	7
10. Ennis – Part B.A. Degree	9
TOTAL	203

ANNEX 10 Access Initiatives in the IOT Sector

Survey on Current Actions related to Access to Third Level Education in Institutes of Technology

1. Preamble

This report is based on a survey carried out in October / November 2000 of Access activities in institutes in the Technological sector, excluding DIT. It refers in total to thirteen different Institutes of Technology. The majority of these were established in the early 1970s as Regional Technical Colleges under Vocational Education Committees. Legislative changes during the 1990s provided for their operation as statutorily independent colleges and they were designated as Institutes of Technology in 1997.

The importance of this sector of education is reflected in the types of courses conducted which are, in the main, applied in nature, and which have contributed significantly to the industrial and technological development of the country. Qualifications are provided at a variety of levels, including certificate, diploma, degree and post-graduate, as well as craft level. The Institutes have well developed structures for progression through the different levels of qualifications.

The information contained in the document represents a range of activities carried out by many of the Institutes of Technology, some of which conduct almost all of these activities, while some others conduct a limited amount.

The general position for admissions to the full-time third level courses in the Institutes can be seen from the table below.

Acceptances for entry to third-level education for the academic year 2000/01 are:

	IT Sector	University Sector	Other	TOTAL
Certificate/Diploma	16483	-	251	16734
Degree	3106	15701	1974	20781
Totals	19589	15701	2225	37515
Per Cent	52.2%	41.8%	5.9%	

The table shows the significant proportion of third-level admissions undertaken by the Institutes of Technology, amounting to 52.2%.

2. Access Policy

All Institutes have either adopted a positive Access Policy, or have such a policy actively under consideration. The Policy could be best described in the words of one Institute as follows:

... .. the Institute recognizes that comprehensive equality of access and participation is essential to its efficiency and effectiveness as a provider of education. The Institute is aware of the social, economic, physical and cultural barriers which people often face in their attempts to access third level education.

In some Institutes, access is being actively promoted to target groups over recent years with varying degrees of success.

3. Access Officer Posts

Access Officers have been appointed already in some Institutes and are being recruited in the others. In each case, the Access Officer, reporting to the Registrar of the Institute, will be expected to be proactive in the application of the policy.

4. Enrolment under Access Policy

Current enrolments and activities are shown on the Table at the end of this annex on the IoT sector.

A significant aspect of the access policies of institutes has been to enable persons in the target groups to compete for places as standard applicants and it has not been possible because of this to establish the exact numbers who have benefited from the programmes which operated.

5. Targets

The Access Programme states that the target sections for potential students are:

- Disadvantaged
- Disabled
- Mature

Institutes have also identified other categories that would need support under an Access Policy. It may be possible that these others could be classified under "Disadvantaged". These other categories are:

- Ethnic Minority
- Female

6. Current Actions

Current actions to improve participation by the targeted groups are undertaken by all Institutes, albeit it in an uneven manner. They range of actions are shown on the accompanying table at the end of this document. The actions can be divided into five broad areas:

- Reserved Places (or Quotas)
- Educational Activities
- Pre-Course Support Systems
- On-Course Support Systems
- Activities Aimed at Second Level
- Activities Aimed at Primary Level
- Area Partnerships

Reserved Places (or Quotas)

A small number of places on the mainstream full-time courses are reserved for the targeted people. The current targets are:

- Mature persons (Age at least 23 years)
- NCVA qualified applicants

The experience of the Institutes with mature applicants has been mixed, in that many applicants for technology courses do not have an adequate numerate preparation, applicants for other types of course can perform satisfactorily without numerate skills. Generally, mature students perform satisfactorily during their courses, and there is the occasional, exceptionally good performer.

The experience with NCVA applicants has been satisfactory, depending on the match between courses, and on mathematical skills. However, the numbers progressing have never achieved the original targets, primarily, it is believed, because the NCVA courses are meeting their main objective of preparing participants for employment.

Educational Activities

A number of courses can be classified under the current Access Programme operated by many of the Institutes. These courses are:

- Accelerated Technician Programme
- ACCS Part-time with Local Industry
- ACCS Part-time Evening

Accelerated Technician Programme

This Programme was initiated under the Skills Shortage Initiative, and is realised as a sandwich course consisting of three consecutive six-month periods - the first at the Institute, the second in structured employment and the third at the Institute.

While the programme is aimed mainly at mature people and at those seeking second-chance education, up to half of the enrolment would not be in the mature category.

Many of the Institutes are conducting courses under this Programme.

ACCS Part-time with Local Industry

Many of the Institutes conduct these courses in close collaboration and association with local industry and business to provide an avenue of self-improvement for employees. Qualifications under the NCEA ACCS scheme are acquired by the students. The courses can be by day-release and/or evening.

A student can take Certificate to Diploma to Degree qualifications by this route.

An important aspect of these courses is that they can, where necessary, be a continuation of the full-time courses leading to a fulfillment of qualifications. Thus, a student can qualify to Certificate by full-time day course and continue, part-time, to Diploma and to Degree levels.

ACCS Part-time Evening

Many of the Institutes conduct courses in the evenings to provide either a first chance for participants to obtain higher education qualifications for the first time or, in other cases, to provide opportunities for the upgrading of existing qualifications and expertise. Participation can either be on a personal basis, or with encouragement by industry and business for employees. Qualifications under the NCEA ACCS scheme are acquired by the students.

Again, with these courses, students can take the full route from Certificate to Diploma to Degree.

Pre-Course Support Systems

All of the Institutes carry out liaison with second-level schools, and some of the Institutes have special

programmes aimed at disadvantaged schools. Some have programmes aimed specifically at mature persons. These programmes can be classified under four main headings:

- Educational Guidance Service for Adults
- Foundation Studies for Higher Education
- Entering Third-Level
- Accreditation of Prior Experience and Learning

Educational Guidance Service for Adults

Lack of information and educational guidance for adults is an on-going problem for those aspiring to further education. Recognising these difficulties, some Institutes operate a guidance and advisory service for mature potential students through which information, advice and guidance on securing entry to higher education is provided.

Foundation Studies for Higher Education

This full academic year course provides mature students with the necessary knowledge, skills and confidence to pursue higher education in non-traditional areas such as engineering, applied science and technology. Participants attend classes from 9.30 - 1.30 Monday to Friday, with additional tutorial support as appropriate. They receive 20 hours of lectures and practicals per week, in mathematics, chemistry, physics, communications, information technology and engineering "taster" modules.

Entering Third-Level

At present the Educational Opportunities Centre (EOC) at Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) is involved in a working group with second-level Home School Liaison Co-ordinators and parents to pilot an induction project for students who have applied for or accepted courses at CIT. When a student is registered on a course there is a need for support in financial, personal and academic matters. CIT, in conjunction with the schools, will host induction programmes for both parents and students around these issues.

Currently CIT is not offering direct entry places. The EOC is researching the possibilities of piloting a small number of these places for the next academic year 2001/02. This pilot will consist of a process of selecting students on the basis of certain criteria determining eligibility for a direct entry place. Applicants who meet certain financial and other criteria may apply for one of the direct entry places in CIT.

Dundalk Institute of Technology conducts similar activities.

Accreditation of Prior Experience and Learning

This scheme, conducted in all Institutes, avails of the NCEA procedures whereby the prior experience and learning acquired by an applicant are measured against the learning outcomes of individual subject of a course. The procedure requires that the applicant produces an extensive portfolio guided by a mentor from the Institute. The portfolio is then assessed and, if adequate, an exemption from examination in the subject(s) is granted. This academic year, up to 150 such applicants are being processed at CIT, spread over a range of disciplines such as, electronic, electrical, civil, mechanical engineering, biological science, applied physics, community education and development, business studies and nautical studies.

The scheme is variously known as:

Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning	- APEL
Accreditation of Prior Learning	- APL
Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning	- APCL

All three designations include the “certificated” aspect in the procedure.

Cork Institute of Technology, under its DEIS Department, employs a Lecturer in Educational Development who specialises in APL mentoring and who manages the APL procedures.

On-Course Support Systems

This section concentrates on students who have registered for courses in the Institutes. Students who have entered an Institute through direct-entry places, are identified to the Access Officer (and in the case of CIT, the Retention Officer) who is charged with their induction and orientation to the Institute. These students will be able to link with the existing support structures within the Institute and their progress will be continuously monitored. Supports include:

- Induction / Orientation Programme
- Counselling
- Tutorials
- Mature Student Network
- Flexible Class Timetables
- Medical
- Chaplaincy

Induction / Orientation Programme

All first year classes are given an induction over a number of weeks. Topics covered include study skills, alcohol/drug awareness, peer support, building class spirit, sports and recreation, financial management, and the third-level experience. These sessions are delivered mainly by internal staff and students, such as student advisory services, students services officer, students union, societies officer, and lecturers. Special attention is paid to students entering through special access avenues.

Counselling

While counselling is available for all students, non-standard students such as those from the Access Programme, both seek and require more counselling than standard students. This places heavy demands on staff because the non-standard student problems range over general insecurity, finances, relationships, academic, psychological, time scheduling, etc. The counselling operates as a drop-in service, where students can come and discuss any problems that they may be having of any nature, where they might need some extra support.

Tutorials

All Institutes provide tutorials to varying degrees for non-standard students where and when required. It is the experience of the Institutes that these tutorials are an essential supplementary ingredient in support of the direct academic experience for the non-standard students. Identified problem areas such as mathematics, computing, physics, economics, etc., receive extra support. Some Institutes operate a dedicated tutorial centre.

Mature Student Network

Recognising that the problems for mature students require as much innovative effort as possible, at least one Institute has established a Mature Student Network, with staff involvement, to provide on-going support. The Network also provides a forum for mature students to share experiences and to draw support from each other, across a range of courses. Sessions such as study skills, stress management, making the most of the scientific calculator, etc have been organised in the past. Student suggestions and ideas are taken into account in determining the range of activities.

Flexible Class Timetables

Flexible course structures, timetables and accessible progression routes enable students, otherwise excluded by family commitments and/or financial constraints, to participate in mainstream third level education. Special arrangements to ensure adequate academic, financial and personal supports are also required.

At least one Institute implements flexibly appropriate timetables for courses.

Medical

A substantial on-campus medical service is an essential support for students, and more especially for the targeted groups of disadvantaged, disabled and mature. All Institutes operate a medical service to one degree or another, with doctor and /or nurse on campus for at least some portion of the day, or with an arrangement with a local hospital.

Chaplaincy

A Chaplaincy system operates in most Institutes. This system is comprised of a religious chaplain and/or lay chaplain, in most Institutes supported by a team of sabbatical students, to give support to students with personal, philosophical and psychological difficulties and issues. While the unit may suggest a denominational ethos, this is not strictly the case; all students, of whatever religion, or none, are welcome and do use the service. In some Institutes more than one religion provides the chaplaincy service.

Activities Aimed at Second Level

Summer Courses

Some Institutes conduct short summer courses for second level pupils to introduce them to a range of science and technology disciplines, so as to prepare them to make an informed selection of Leaving Certificate subjects to be studied, to indicate to them the types of subjects studied at third level in preparation for certain careers and to give some indication of what lies ahead in those careers.

Transition Year Five-Day Courses

At least one Institute conducts a Five-Day Transition Year Course for pupils to provide them with the opportunity to explore career options in the area of science and technology by participating in the on-campus "Explore Technology" programme. The objective of the course is to encourage students to seriously consider pursuing higher education in a technological area by having them participate on a five-day programme of activities. Activities include sample lectures and practicals from across the range of third-level courses in science and technology available at the Institute. These sessions are interspersed with educational guidance and introductions to role models.

Liaison via the Parent-Teacher Forum

At least one Institute maintains liaison with second-level schools through the parent-teacher forum. This is carried via two methods viz., information stands on Institute open days and information mornings in each of the schools. Having relevant educational information at these mornings provides an ideal opportunity for parents to find out more about third-level technological education in familiar surroundings.

Role-Model Seminars

Some Institutes conduct role model seminars. These seminars are an ideal opportunity for senior-cycle second-level pupils to meet third level students and working scientists, technologists and engineers. The

seminars introduce a wide variety of educational and choices careers. Speakers at these seminars have included a wide range of professional career scientists, engineers and technologists, both male and female, together with students from a variety of disciplines. The seminars focus on the particular experiences of the speakers. The seminars are open to all senior-cycle students (transition, 5th and 6th years). Interested parents and teachers are also invited. Two different types of role-model seminars have been conducted over recent years: SET-GO (Science, Engineering, Technology - Great Opportunities) aimed at male and female pupils, and WOW (Wider Options for Women) aimed at female pupils.

Student Shadowing

No matter how well one describes what it is like to be a student at third-level, nothing can take the place of actually experiencing it. That's the idea behind the Student Shadowing initiative. This action provides a more "hands-on" experience and a taste of college life for prospective students. Second-level pupils accompany third-level students to lectures, practicals and meet with their friends on campus.

Workshops

"What is it all about?" Workshops

Recognising that many senior-cycle pupils are unsure if they would like to go to college or if they do, what course they would like to study, some Institutes organise workshops to enlighten pupils. The objective is to encourage students to seriously consider pursuing higher education, by introducing them to several departments at the Institute. Workshops include meeting lecturers and students, tours of the college and the facilities, hands-on experience and practicals over the range of disciplines of the Institute.

1st Year Workshops

At least one Institute hosts a number of workshops for 1st year pupils. The workshops have a "Focus on your Future" theme, where pupils are given the opportunity to explore changes that have taken place over recent years, to look to the future and to try to project where they see themselves. The Institute organises a competition and sponsors achievement awards for the pupils who participate. The awards ceremony is held at the Institute with parents, teachers and pupils invited to attend.

Technology Days

At least two Institute conduct focused Technology Days for transition-year pupils from second-level schools. These pupils spend a whole day on campus, using and learning about a specific technology. During a Technology Day, 20 pupils actively participate in specially-arranged hands-on practicals. These Days provide second-level pupils with an opportunity to further explore their options in third level.

Throughout the day pupils meet with the head of the department, lecturers, technicians and students. They are also given the opportunity to examine Diploma and final Degree projects. These days are currently being expanded to include more than the current two disciplines.

Supplementary Tuition

At least one Institute provides supplementary tuition to second-level pupils, who may lag behind their peers in certain subjects for a variety of reasons. The Institute recognises this need and organises training for groups of Institute student-volunteers on tutorial skills for tutoring second-level pupils. The students come from a variety of departments within the Institute, and in addition to helping the second-level pupils with their schoolwork, they also act as role-models, giving an insight into what it is like being a third-level student and attending college.

Activities Aimed at Primary Level

At least one Institute conducts a programme aimed at removing the perceived mystique and barriers to participation in third-level education and creating an awareness in parents of the advantages to be gained from realising the children's full potential. Parents, primary pupils and their teachers participate in the programme from which they say that they have achieved an insight to the system. The programme items below are devised and organised by the Educational Opportunities Centre at Cork Institute of Technology. These activities are continually evaluated with each of the schools involved and feedback to date has been very positive.

Exploring an Institute of Technology – 6th Class and Parents

This programme introduces pupils in primary school and their parents to the idea of higher education. The Institute recognises the importance of parental involvement and under this approach parents can participate in some meaningful learning for themselves and enjoy some time with their children. Each school attends the Institute for a one-day session. During the day students and parents get an opportunity to tour the Institute and get hands-on experience of some courses, from exploring a science laboratory to "surfing the net". At the end of the day pupils receive certificates of participation and both pupils and parents take part in a competition based on what they have learned throughout the day.

Exploring Education through Art

As part of this programme the EOC sponsors a lecturer from the Crawford College of Art & Design to carry out a series of three workshops over six weeks in the classrooms at the primary schools. The art lecturer works in conjunction with the teachers in the schools and has a theme "Opportunity to Dream". The teachers introduce the theme to the pupils and carry out the work through the interim periods, with specific activities/tasks related to dreaming. The project stimulates the pupils' imagination and introduces the idea of dreaming to the students. It relates creative activity to learning about life and education. When the project is finished in each of the schools, CIT hosts an exhibition of the work produced from the project for both parents and pupils. This is an ideal opportunity to tour CIT and see their work as part of a real exhibition which is attended by both pupils and teachers. Students receive certificates and "Art Packs" for participating in the programme.

Parent Information Mornings

The EOC recognises the importance of parents and teachers as centres of influence in making career choices. The Centre hosts information workshops during which participants have an opportunity to meet with lecturers and tour the college campus. The objective is to familiarise parents with the options available at the Institute and to explore some of the challenging employment opportunities available for graduates in the future. During a morning, parents meet up to four lecturers at the Institute, take a guided tour of the facilities and get an opportunity to ask questions. The session starts at 10 o'clock with an informal chat over coffee and finishes with a light lunch around 1.30pm. These mornings are usually organised in conjunction with the Home School Liaison Co-ordinator in each school.

Area Partnerships

Cork Institute of Technology works in close association with the Cork City Partnership in responding to the needs of the socially and economically disadvantaged. The Partnership is comprised of voluntary bodies and community associations from the disadvantaged areas, FAS, UCC and CIT.

The Educational Opportunities Centre at CIT works closely with the Partnership in identifying schools to be targeted under "Activities Aimed at Primary Level", and "Activities Aimed at Second Level".

Tralee Institute of Technology operates the Partnership for Adult & Continuing Education (PACE)* aimed at encouraging unemployed, long-term unemployed and financially disadvantaged persons to participate in the Institute's Continuing Professional and Personal Development programme (CPPD).

*It is not stated whether this is under the Area Partnerships scheme or not.

	Athlone	Blanchardstown	Cork	Dundalk	Galway-Mayo	Letterkenny	Limerick	Sligo	Tralee	Waterford
1 Mission / Policy	In Progress	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	In Progress	Underway		Yes	Yes
2 Access Officer	Imminent	Imminent	Yes Acting	Yes	Yes	Pending	Service given	Imminent	Imminent	Yes
3 Annual Intake FT Annual Intake PT	3109 870				4,300 ongoing	1991 452	3500 1600	3000 230		5800 4900
4 Action 1 Reserved Places: a. Disadvantaged b. Disabled c. Mature (Aged 23 years +) d. Ethnic Minority e. Female Participation	NA 11 38 (10%) NA NA	7 (8) 3 (4) 13 (16)	21 5% min		10%	- 7 244 - -	NA 96 120 ??? 6 50%	All of these admitted under AQA as normal process	5% Min. Yes Yes Yes 6	11 6 63 (200) 6
5 Action 2 a. AT Programme b. ACCS Local Industry c. ACCS PT Evening	39 0 103	64 60 116	110 3000 incl both	100	80 8 100	90 20 -	111	Yes 12 130	100 35 Yes	300 400
6 Student Support a. Mentoring b. Counselling c. Tutorials d. Medical e. Chaplaincy d. Careers' Service	No Yes Yes Yes Yes -		Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes		Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes Yes Free Yes	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes	A Little Yes A Little Yes Yes Yes
7 Mature Persons' Support Advisory Workshops Childcare Support, etc			Yes 250					Yes Yes		Yes Yes

	Athlone	Blanchardstown	Cork	Dundalk	Galway-Mayo	Letterkenny	Limerick	Sligo	Tralee	Waterford
8 Aimed at Second Level										
a. Foundation Courses	Yes		Yes 50	Yes	Yes	Pending	-	Yes	Yes	-
b. Summer Courses	No		-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
c. Seminars	Yes		Yes 180	Yes	Yes	-	-	Yes	Yes	Yes
d. Workshops	No		Yes 180	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
e. Shadowing			Yes 16	Yes	Yes					
f. Attendance at 2nd Level Parent-Teacher meetings			Yes	Yes						
g. Supplementary tuition to 2nd Level students			Yes 500							
h. Parent Information Morning			Yes 200						Yes	
i. Technology Days										
9 Aimed at Primary Level										
a. Foundation Courses	No						-			-
b. Summer Courses	No						-			Yes
c. Seminars	No						Yes	None aimed at primary level		-
d. Workshops	No						-		Yes	-
e. Shadowing	No									
f. Attendance at 1st Level Parent-Teacher meetings	No		320							
g. Other Activities			110							
10 Aimed at Industry Formal Liaison			Yes	Yes						

Activities in Tallaght, Carlow and Dun Laoire are not included in the above.

ANNEX 11 *DIT Response to Educational Disadvantage*

THE DUBLIN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY RESPONSE TO EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE IN DUBLIN'S INNER CITY

The DIT appointed a Community Education links Coordinator in September 1996. The role of the "Links" coordinator is to identify, develop and coordinate the various initiatives of DIT in regard to disadvantaged communities and also aid in the formulation of future policy in this regard. It was felt that because DIT Colleges are located within Dublin's inner city which has the least representation nationally in third level (<5.0%), that the initial focus of DIT strategies should be in this particular area. In this context the Community Links Programme was developed.

The Community Links Programme is composed of the following initiatives:

(a) Supervised Study Programmes

These programmes involve both disadvantaged primary and secondary school pupils and are organised by the staff and students of the participating colleges. DIT students and staff undertake supervised study on a weekly basis with groups of pupils from the participating schools. In regard to the primary schools (Whitefriar Street, Francis Street) the students/staff participate in the programmes on site within the school itself. The secondary school programmes (Kings Inn School, Warrenmount School, James Street, Larkin Community College) involve the 5th and 6th year pupils and take place within DIT (Bolton Street, Aungier Street, Kevin Street and Cathal Brugha Street). At the beginning of the term the educational needs of these students are identified and each student is then linked with a "mentor" who gives the tuition on a one to one basis. Because these programmes take place within DIT Colleges they help in the removal of educational barriers, develop a familiarity with third level and supply role models, information and guidance for these pupils.

For the pupils in these programmes there are also study incentive schemes involving book tokens, silver medals and Gaeltacht Scholarships which are funded by DIT. The total number of pupils catered for is approximately 150 per year.

This year (2000/01) the programme is being extended to the other Colleges.

(b) Educational Awareness/Programmes

This programme involves the participation of staff/students of DIT and disadvantaged schools in inner city Dublin. These schools have very high levels of early school leavers and extremely low third level participation rates. Interventional strategies have been developed with respect to:

- (a) increasing the awareness of the benefits of education (2nd/3rd level);
- (b) removal of the misconceived notions of third level;

The programme involves visits by mainly junior cycle students to DIT colleges, demonstrating interesting aspects of courses and research that the pupils can relate to (Holograms, Satellite Tracking Systems, Computer Aided Design etc.). These visits are facilitated by young undergraduates with whom the pupils can readily identify.

The senior cycle student visits include exposure to information technology/internet etc., and induction day attendance and liaison with DIT staff regarding courses and careers.

A DIT Student Awareness Group has now been formed which travels around the inner city schools to speak to pupils about third level education. These are young first or second year students who chat informally to these pupils about their own experiences and have as their philosophy that "Third level education is no big deal" and "If I can do it so can you". It has been found that the pupils relate to the young students very well and the feedback has been very positive.

Discussions also take place between staff of DIT and the parents of these pupils to discuss with them the importance and accessibility of education, the value of education with respect to employment opportunities and to overcome the mystique of the educational system. Currently, additional inner city schools are requesting involvement in this programme.

(c) Computers/Equipment

The DIT also acts as a material or human resource for local disadvantaged communities. In this context a policy decision has been made with respect to redundant working equipment such as computers, microscopes, audio visual equipment etc being distributed to disadvantaged groups, or schools most in need, and that have a limited capacity to fundraise themselves. Currently approximately 80 - 100 computers have been distributed to the inner city disadvantaged primary and secondary schools/community groups that require them (10 primary schools and 10 secondary schools, 3 community groups, the Gateway Project etc). A technical support group for these schools etc. has been formed by computer science students of DIT. These students locate, collate, commission and trouble shoot any problems (hardware/software) that may arise. In addition DIT runs training programmes for the teachers of these inner city schools and the participants of the Community Projects. So far we have placed 3-4 computers in each school with appropriate training for 70 teachers. From this, a support group has been formed by the Primary teachers themselves. Our objective is to upgrade each school, both primary and secondary, to 10 computers and to establish one school in each sector as a resource/training centre.

A new project has been developed and implemented called "Dublin Inner-city Schools Computerisation" or **D.I.S.C.** with The National Centre for Technology in Education, Siemens, and the Dublin Inner City Partnership. Its aim is to upgrade 20 inner city disadvantaged primary and secondary schools to full high specification multi-media computer capacity with the establishment of 2 schools as resource centres, teacher training, educational software development / evaluation and with ongoing advice and support (software / technical) from a full time coordinator. Total funding for this project is approximately one million pounds and involves approximately 4,500 pupils and 400 teachers. The 20 schools are now almost fully equipped, 4 resource / training centres have been established and 360 teachers have completed phase 1 and 2 training.

(d) Studentships

DIT is very conscious of the fact that the Higher Education Grant does not fully meet the needs of third level students who are financially disadvantaged. Therefore in 1996/97 DIT awarded eleven studentships of £1,500 per annum to financially disadvantaged pupils, of inner city schools, who had attained a place in DIT. The studentships are co-funded by the Dublin Inner City Partnership and there are, in total, 35 students on this programme. This initiative is of great benefit to those students in terms of their ability to remain in college, particularly in their first year. The students are also supported in regard to study/personal/academic problems that may arise.

(e) Youthstart - "Pathways Through Education Project".

Partnership 2000 highlights the necessity of the "mainstreaming of good practice from Youthstart as appropriate and the deepening of business education linkages". Youthstart is a strand of the Employment initiative of the Community Programme of the European Social Fund. This initiative targets groups that face specific difficulties in the employment market. In the past DIT has had informal links with the Dublin Schools Business Partnership of the Dublin chamber of Commerce. These links have now been consolidated in a joint application for funding under this programme. The project is entitled "**Pathways through Education**". The focus is to increase the participation and awareness of inner city pupils with regard to education by addressing the underlying key issues of self-esteem, confidence and motivation using a multistranded approach. Intervention programmes are designed, developed and implemented within the mainstream classroom setting in three inner city disadvantaged status schools. The other strands of the project include interventions involving parents and teachers in an attempt to develop a holistic approach to educational disadvantage. The number of pupils involved is 190 per year. During the course of the project a full evaluation of the process, interventions and outcomes was carried out. It is currently continuing using local funding, ie the schools themselves, Marks and Spencers and DIT.

(f) Direct Entry Programmes to DIT

DIT is currently putting in place a direct entry programme in regard to disadvantaged student entry to DIT. The Directorate, Academic Council and Governing Body have adopted the report entitled "Access to Education in the Dublin Institute of Technology for those who are Socio - Economically Disadvantaged". An access officer has been recruited to develop this programme. The name of this new programme is L.E.A.P (Lifelong Educational Access Programme). In the academic year 1999/2000, DIT registered, as a pilot, 6 socio-economically disadvantaged students using a direct entry mechanism. This year the goal is 20 pupils using a direct entry mechanism.

(g) Community Involvement

Staff in DIT, Aungier Street have provided a course to train 16 women participants of the New Opportunities for Women (NOW) Gateway project in Manor Street in computer skills. Currently 3 women from this project are enrolled in a Desktop Publishing course provided by the Department of Computing, Bolton Street.

In 1996/97, with the aid of European funding under the New Opportunities for Women (NOW) initiative, the DIT in Mountjoy Square developed and piloted a Women's Community Development Studies through the medium of Art course. In November 1997 the course was validated by DIT. The following December, 16 mature women from the local community graduated with a DIT certificate. This certificate is now included in DIT's portfolio of courses.

In the academic year 1998/99, the Department of Transport Engineering, Bolton Street provided a training course in Basic Engineering Skills for 10 young people from the local Hardwick Street area. The main aim of the project is to re-engage young people in education and, in so doing, develop their self-esteem and confidence. The project is called Mechanical Abilities Training and Enterprise Services (MATES). It is a local Community initiative, with other partners being Dublin Corporation and the Garda Siochana.

ANNEX 12 *Detail of the Proposed Scheme*

Detail of the Proposed Scheme – Eligibility Criteria for Special Rate of Maintenance Grant

- For each academic year, the student must be a maintenance grant holder under the Department of Education and Science schemes of student support AND
- Total Reckonable income, as determined in accordance with the schemes of maintenance grants, must not exceed £6,150.09 (net of standard exclusions and CDAs) AND
- The parents or guardians of the student must have been in receipt of any social welfare weekly social insurance or social assistance payment, FIS or any of the programmes listed below for at least twelve months. Any combination of the payments counts for this purpose AND
- The parents or guardians of the student must currently
 - (a) Be in receipt of one of the social assistance payments with full-rate CDA listed below; OR
 - (b) Be in receipt of one of the social insurance payments with full-rate CDA listed below; OR
 - (c) Be in receipt of payments under one of the following schemes with full-rate CDA or equivalent payment:
 - FIS
 - Community Employment
 - VTOS
 - FÁS Training programmes
 - Back to Work Allowance
 - Back to Education Allowance
 - (d) Be in receipt of payments under one of the following schemes and must be able to demonstrate entitlement to payments equivalent to full-rate CDA:
 - Part time job incentive scheme
 - Job start
 - Job Initiative
 - Other specified programmes

In all cases the CDA entitlement, or equivalent, must relate to the student in question.

Students reaching the age of 22 while in full time Third Level/PLC education

In the case of students who had commenced their studies while still qualifying for CDA at the full-rate, such students will continue to be eligible for the special rate of maintenance grant after the age of 22 for so long as they continue to be eligible for the maintenance grant.

Students aged between 18 and 21

Students in receipt of social welfare in their own right in this age group (who cannot qualify for the Back To Education Allowance - BTEA) are eligible under the scheme of special rate of maintenance grants.

LIST OF ELIGIBLE PAYMENTS

1. Social Assistance Payments with Full Rate CDAs

Blind persons pension
Carer's Allowance
Disability Allowance
Lone Parents' allowance
OAP (non-contributory)
One parent family payment
Pre-retirement allowance
Unemployment Assistance
Farm Assist

2. Orphans (non-contributory) pension [Note: payable generally and therefore there is no CDA component]

Social Insurance Payments with full-rate CDAs
Deserted Wife's Benefit
Disablement Pension
Invalidity pension
Occupational Injuries Death Benefit (pension for a widow or widower)
Occupational Injuries Death Benefit (Orphan's pension)
Old Age Contributory Pension
Orphan's Contributory Allowance
Widow's/Widower's (Contributory) Pension and Retirement Pension
Carer's Benefit (introduced from October 2000).

3. Family Income Supplement (FIS)

4. Community Employment (Persons in receipt of CDA at full rate)

5. VTOS (Persons retaining the equivalent value of full rate CDAs)

6. FÁS Training programmes, including Apprentices. Persons retaining the equivalent value of Full rate CDAs. (Persons must demonstrate that they had an entitlement to payment of or equivalent to Full-Rate CDA prior to progressing on to the programme).

7. Back to work Allowance (Persons in receipt of CDA at full rate)

8. Back to Education Allowance (Persons in receipt of CDA at full rate)

9. Part time job incentive scheme (must demonstrate entitlement to payment equivalent to Full-Rate CDA)

10. Job Start (must demonstrate entitlement to payment equivalent to Full-Rate CDA)

11. Others

The parents/guardians of the student who are currently: -

- Participants on a training course approved by a Government Department, State Agency or Area Partnership and who were in receipt of an eligible payment prior to progressing to the programme;

- In receipt of payments under the CERT Elementary Training Programme equivalent to a social welfare payment with full-rate CDA. Persons must demonstrate that they had an entitlement to payment of or equivalent to Full-Rate CDA prior to progressing on to the programme.
- Grant aided employees in social economy enterprises who meet the normal eligibility criteria.
- In receipt of payments under the FIT (Fastrack to IT) initiative equivalent to a social welfare payment with full-rate CDA. [NOTE Such participants should already be included under the VTOS or FAS categories]
- In receipt of payments under the Senior Traveller Training Centre programmes.

ANNEX 13 Income Profile of Maintenance Grant Holders

The Department of Education and Science undertook a survey of the income profile of eligible first time applicants (2000/01) for maintenance grants¹³ among all Local Authorities and Vocational Education Committees. The results obtained are summarised as follows:

Reckonable income bands	Number of eligible first time applicants (including mature students)	Number of eligible first time applicants where total Reckonable income includes income from social welfare ¹⁴
£0 - £5,000	1354	922 (13%)
£5,001- £10,000	4246	3198 (44%)
£10,001 - £15,000	3547	1778 (25%)
£15,001- £20,200	4132	1209 (17%)
£20,201- £25,500	533	110 (1%)
TOTALS	13812	7217 (100%)

On the basis of an estimated total number of grant holders in 1999/2000, 52,210, the above results may be extrapolated for the full grant holding student population through a conversion factor of 3.78 (52,210/13,812).¹⁵

Using the same conversion factor, the estimated total number of grant holders with social welfare payments would be 27,280 (7,217*3.78). However this could understate the true total as it may not include grant holders whose parents/guardians are in receipt of any of the following payments, which are excluded from the calculation of Reckonable income, and who are not in receipt of any other social welfare payment: -

- Family Income supplement
- One parent Family Payment
- Carer's allowance

Based on the estimated number of students attending Third Level/PLC, and in respect of whom the full rate Child Dependant Allowance (CDA) is payable, up to a further 3,800 maintenance Grant holding students could have parents/guardians who are in receipt of income from the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs.

Therefore, of the total number of grant holders (52,210), up to 31,000 could potentially be in receipt of either some social welfare payment or payments from the specified programmes.

Also, these estimates do not necessarily capture students whose parents/guardians are on schemes such as Community Employment, VTOS or Back to Work (estimated number 1,260). This would give a total of some 32,260 grant holders where the parents or guardians are in receipt of social welfare or payments relating to social programmes.

¹³ Postal survey

¹⁴ Reckonable income for the 2000/01 academic year is income for the year ended 5 April 2000. The following Social Welfare and Health Board Payments are excluded from the calculation of reckonable income: Child Benefit, Family Income Supplement, Disability Allowance (where paid to the candidate), Blind Pension (where paid to the candidate), Means Tested One Parent Family Payments, Orphan's Pensions, Back to Education Allowance, Foster Care Allowance, Domiciliary Care Allowance and Carer's Allowance;

¹⁵ This conversion factor extrapolates data for the grantholding student population and compensates for incomplete processing of applications across all Local Authorities and VECs and the lack of returns from four Local Authorities and from four VECs.

ANNEX 14 USI commissioned survey**Non Adjacent Grant (attending college 15 miles or more from normal residence)**

	Yearly	Weekly (36 week year)
Cost of living away from home (Dublin)	£4,642.29	£128.95
Alcohol and cigarette expenditure	£736.74	£20.47
Full Maintenance Non- Adjacent Rate	£1,775.00	£49.31
Proposed Grant Increase	£2,130.55	£59.18
Proposed new Grant	£3,905.55	£108.48

Adjacent Grant (attending college 15 miles or less from normal residence)

	Yearly	Weekly (36 week year)
Cost of living at home (Dublin)	£2,149.92	£59.72
Alcohol and cigarette expenditure	£746.01	£20.72
Full Maintenance Adjacent Rate	£710.00	£19.72
Proposed Grant Increase	£693.91	£19.28
Proposed new Grant	£1,403.91	£39.00

ANNEX 15 *Detail of Proposal*

Detail of Proposal (based on an income limit of £ 6,150.09)

Non Adjacent rate: £3,000 - £1,775 = £1,225 (increase of £225 already announced)

Adjacent rate: £1,200 - £710 = £ 490 (increase of £290 already announced)

Average Cost

Average cost (based on mix of Non-adjacent and Adjacent) **£1,225*80% + £490 * 20% = £1,078**

Estimated Number of Grant holders: 5,904

Add:

- Estimated number of students where parents receive a social welfare payment excluded from the calculation of Reckonable Income $3,790 * 22\% = 830$;
- Employment schemes $1260 * 22\% = 275$

Potential number of eligible students: 7,000

The payment of a top-up amounting to $£1,078 * 7,000$ would cost up to £ 7.5 million per annum immediately, increasing to £ 9.5m over the period 2000-06. [NB Separate proposals are made in relation to mature students].

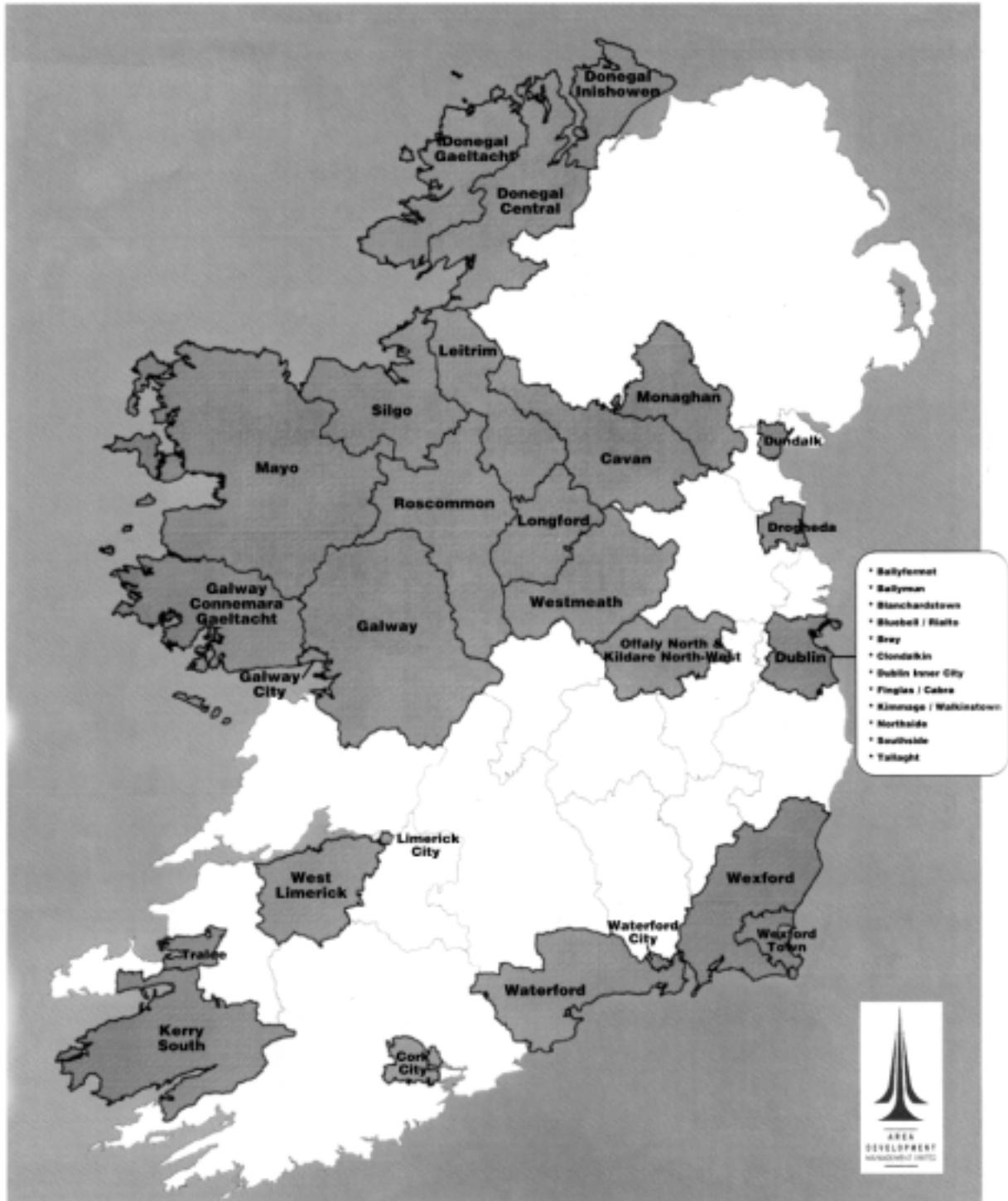
ANNEX 16 ***Evaluation by Higher Education Institutions***

Possible Criteria for Evaluation by Higher Education Institutions

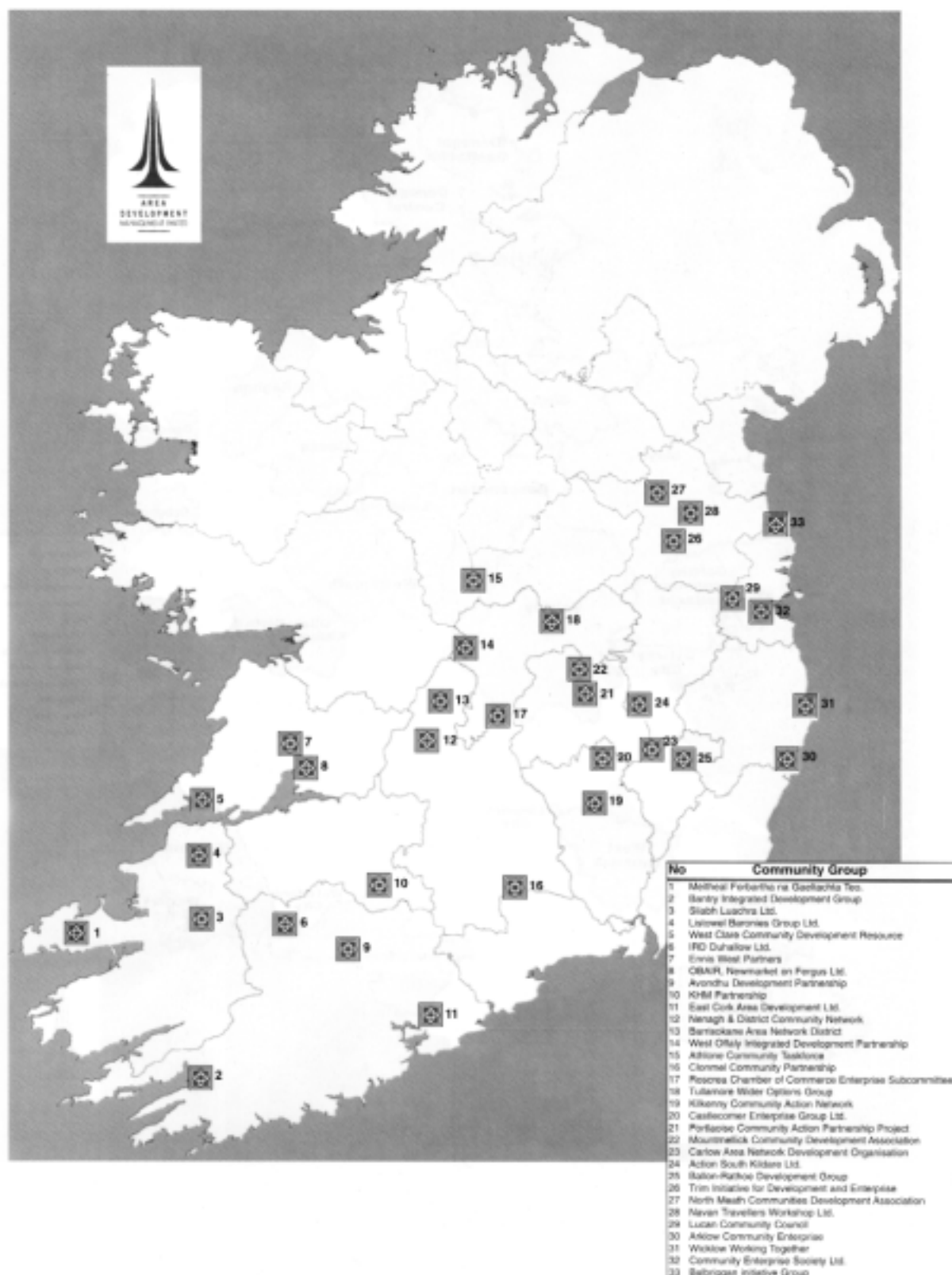
- Policy and procedures include mechanisms for “disability proofing” i.e. consideration is given to the accessibility of the policy, provision or practice to students with disabilities.
- An access audit has been conducted and a programme of remedial action is in place to ensure full accessibility of the physical environment to students with disabilities. All new buildings adhere to universal design principles.
- Promotional and course material, including information on policy and provision related to disability, are available in accessible formats.
- Any alternative entry procedures for mature students, socio-economically disadvantaged students etc, include a provision for providing reasonable accommodation to students with disabilities.
- Procedures are in place to work with students with disabilities in identifying any support needs they may have in undertaking a course of study and in participating fully in the academic and social life of the institution.
- The arrangements for enrolment, registration and orientation of new students include provision for accommodating the needs of students with disabilities.
- Programme specifications do not include any unnecessary barriers to students with disabilities, and procedures are in place for reviewing the accessibility, to students with disabilities, of new and revised course outlines.
- The delivery of the programme takes into account the needs of students with disabilities and, where appropriate, is adapted to accommodate the needs of an individual student with a disability.
- Students with disabilities have equal access to the full range of support services which are available to all students. In particular, policy and provision is in place to ensure that students with disabilities have equal access to the career services, work placement programmes and student exchange programmes.
- Assessment and examination policies provide students with disabilities with the same opportunity as their peers to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes.
- Induction and other relevant training programmes for all staff include disability awareness training and training on specific services and support for students with disabilities.
- There are sufficient support staff, with appropriate skills and expertise, to provide specialist advice and support to students with disabilities and to the staff who work with them.
- Internal communication systems ensure that appropriate staff receive information about the particular needs of students with disabilities in a clear, appropriate and timely way.
- The institution has a clearly defined policy on the confidentiality and disclosure of information relating to a person’s disability, which is communicated to applicants, students and staff.
- Information regarding disciplinary and complaint procedures are available in accessible formats and communicated to students with disabilities.
- The institution has in place a policy and procedures to deal with complaints arising directly or indirectly from a student’s disability.
- Institutional information systems monitor applications, admissions, academic progress and the nature of disability of students.
- The institution has in place a system for monitoring the effectiveness of provision for students with disabilities, to evaluate progress and identify opportunities for enhancement.

ANNEX 17 Partnerships and Community Groups

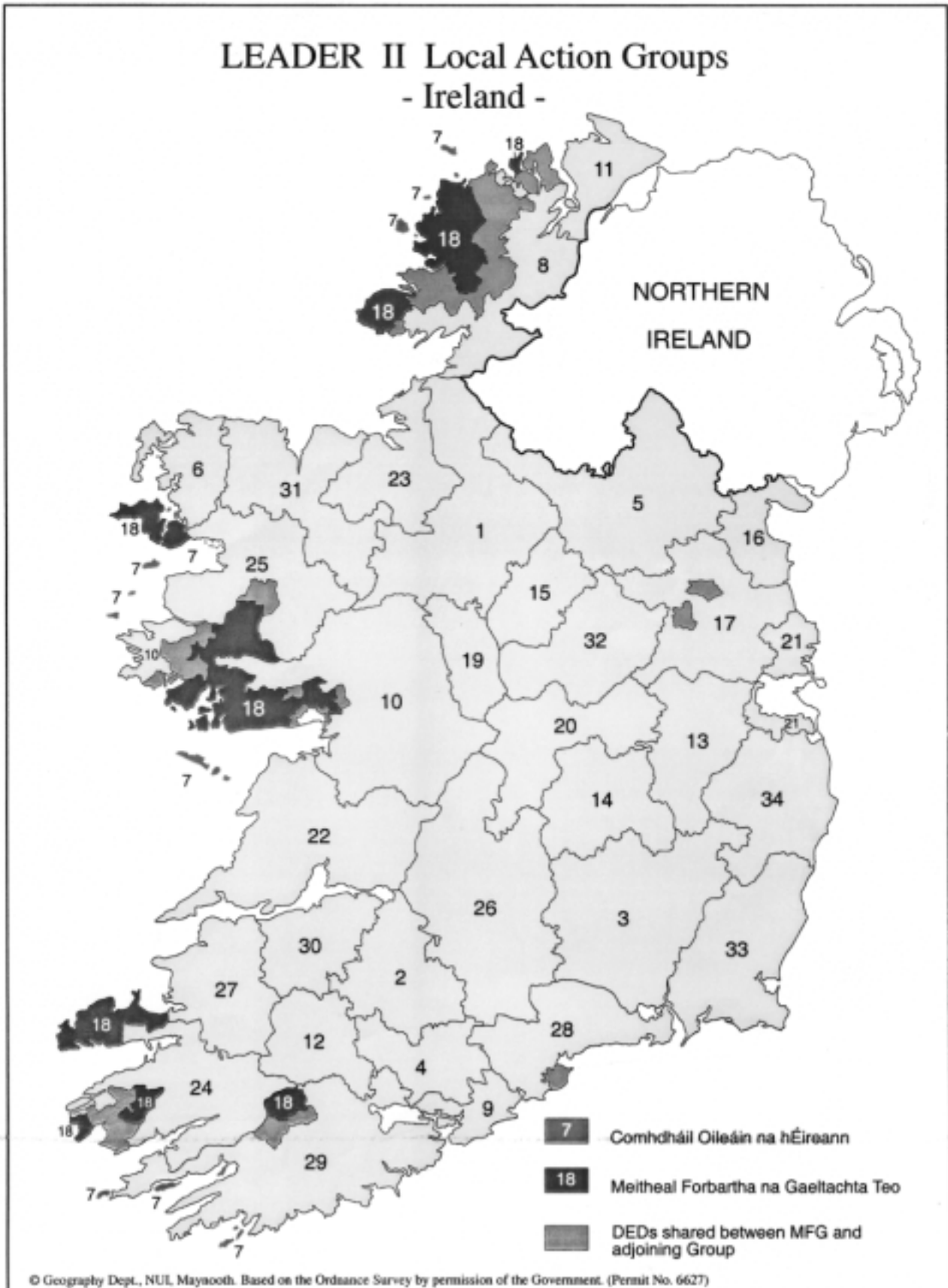
Partnership Companies in Designated Disadvantaged Areas



ADM Funded Community Groups in Non-Disadvantaged Areas



ANNEX 18 LEADER Groups



ANNEX 19 Northside Partnership – Higher Education Support

The Higher Education Support (HES) project is an initiative of the Northside Partnership. It supports young people and adults from the Partnership area in participating in higher / further education courses. The Northside Partnership is a not-for-profit limited company; it operates in a designated area on the North-eastern fringe of Dublin city. The business of the company is social inclusion.

1. Rationale

The Northside Partnership developed the HES project as part of its core agenda of enabling people to move from welfare dependency and unemployment to economic independence and the world of work. Statistical data indicated a comparatively low level of participation in higher education by the population in the Partnership area as a whole. In some districts, the participation rate was among the lowest in the country: e.g. 7% in Dublin 17, compared with 54% in Dublin 6. This statistical analysis was confirmed by local information: some primary schools contained many classes where no child had a family member who had participated in higher education. In addition, the Partnership's work in the field of localised employment services brought to light many cases of individuals who had taken up higher education opportunities, but had been unable to complete their studies for want of financial and other support.

The Partnership set out to change this situation, using a 'push and pull' strategy. Projects were designed to promote and support enhanced achievement by young people from the most disadvantaged districts, with the long-term objective of increasing the rate of participation in learning beyond the Leaving Certificate. At the same time, the company set out to support the small cohort of students from these districts who did take up higher and further education places, to ensure that as far as possible their experience would be positive and successful. Apart from the obvious benefit to the individual student, this action was intended from the outset to provide a 'following wave' effect in key neighbourhoods by generating a corps of role models that would encourage younger students to think of higher education as a natural progression. The Higher Education Support project was devised to meet this objective.

2. 1995-99.

HES has assisted over 500 students since it began in 1995. A preliminary pilot action in 1994-95 supported 37 students. By 1999 the project was supporting an average of 150 students in each academic year, with an annual budget of £60,000. The project was fully funded by the Partnership until late 1999, when it was allocated funding by the Department of Education and Science.

3. Operation of the H.E.S. initiative.

The initiative was originally designed as a purely financial intervention, but experience over the years indicates that the guidance and mentoring provided to participating students has been crucial in many cases. In its first year the project was operated by a part-time co-ordinator; since then, the operation of HES has been part of the role of the Partnership's Adult Guidance Counsellor.

Students apply for HES on an annual basis. A simple application form is used to screen out applicants who are not eligible for support (see Target Group below, and sample form in appendices). Accepted applicants are contacted by phone or letter, and invited to meet the Guidance Counsellor to discuss their situation: at this meeting, eligibility is confirmed, and a support package is negotiated that will make a real contribution to maintaining the student in college. Contact is maintained with the students to ensure that the arrangement made is satisfactory in practice, and the system can respond to changing circumstances as they arise.

The HES project is run from the main Partnership offices in Coolock Development Centre.

3.1 Target Group.

HES supports students who are:

- from the Northside Partnership area: this includes Coolock, Kilmore, Darndale, Priorswood, Kilbarrack, Edenmore, Donaghmede, Harmonstown, Baldoyle, Artane, Donnycarney and Raheny.
- from families depending on welfare support (any category, including FIS) or who have a medical card.
- participating in a full-time Third level or PLC course in a recognised college (courses in private colleges are not eligible).

There is no means testing mechanism, as welfare / medical card status can be verified from simple documentation. As a general rule, all students supported under this initiative are also receiving grants under one or other of the statutory schemes.

1999-2000 HES Student Group by gender and target category

male	female	TOTAL	Mature Students	Young Disadvant.	Disability
69	73	142	42	100	2*

- two students were registered disabled, one mature and one young disadvantaged

1999-2000 HES Student Group by Welfare Category

Unemployment Assistance	23
Unemployment Benefit	12
Lone Parent Allowances	20
Old Age Pension	4
Back to Work Allowance	4
Widows Pension	9
Disability Benefit	7
Invalidity Pension	10
BTEA / TLA	42*
Pre-Retirement Pension	2
Total	142

* These represent the mature student cohort. In all other cases the welfare status is that of the student's parent. VTOS students are not supported.

3.2 Financial Support

HES is not a grant scheme. It supports students individually, and the support offered is tailored to meet the needs of the particular situation – in terms of the amount involved, and also in the way in which the support is delivered. Each support package is tailored to the needs of the individual student, to make the most effective possible contribution. Key variables include

- distance from college - are there transport costs? Is accommodation involved?
- subject area – costs of books and equipment vary widely
- fees or 'course charges' – particularly in PLC courses
- intensity of course schedule - feasibility of engaging in part-time work?
- family circumstances – childcare needs? Is any support available at home, e.g. study space?

No direct money payment is made to students, and there is no standard allocation. Instead, arrangements are made to subsidise the expenses of travel, fees, books and equipment, specific add-on tuition items, and accommodation in the case of those studying outside Dublin. These arrangements are time-consuming to operate, involving monthly distribution of travel vouchers, setting up credit with book and equipment suppliers, dealing with receipts and invoices: apart from the guidance counsellor time, a considerable administrative load arises out of the project. This approach was originally developed to ensure compliance with E.U. accounting requirements. However, experience indicates that this is an effective way of ensuring that little or no funding is wasted; also, the 1996 evaluation revealed that students appreciated receiving support in this way as grant money is often diverted into family finances.

Financial support can vary from £150 to £1,000 per individual.

3.3 Guidance and Mentoring.

This aspect of the HES initiative was made possible because of the deployment of the Partnership's Adult Guidance Counsellor to implement the project. There is no doubt that money is the key issue for most of our students. Nevertheless, in each year, several cases have arisen where a student's participation in college is threatened by circumstances other than money shortages:

- Personal problems – e.g. loss of confidence, or panic in new and unfamiliar situations; loneliness at college for want of a peer group; study difficulties, often related to wrong course choice; opposition from family, friends or neighbours (wasting her time, should get a job etc.); personal crises such as bereavements, illness of close relative.
- System problems – e.g. difficulties with grant or welfare providers, college administrative problems.

Issues such as these arise for all students, and some are not particularly related to disadvantage: but many 'ordinary' students get the support they need to get over crises from family or friends, or through privately sourced support. None of these options are open to the student from a disadvantaged community, and it often happens that a minor problem escalates into a crisis because small-scale support was not available at a crucial moment. The Guidance Counsellor is available to intervene in such cases. Active advocacy is sometimes used to deal with practical matters and the support network of the Counsellor is a vital element in this. However, in general the approach taken is not to try to solve every problem, but to empower the student to make appropriate decisions so that they can maintain their studies.

In a more positive role, the Counsellor maintains regular contact with the student group to offer encouragement and disseminate useful information. Students' special achievements are recognised and celebrated. HES students are assisted to contact other Northside students in their colleges, to build peer networks. Where necessary, HES students are introduced to the college Access Officers, Student Advisers, Counsellors and/or other student support services. The company's employment networks are used to source suitable summer work opportunities and high-quality work experience.

4. Evaluating the Higher Education Support initiative.

The project was independently evaluated in 1996, and the report was published as “Higher Education – Dream or Reality” (research and report by Dr. Phyllis Murphy). The report suggests a very high level of satisfaction with the support provided, and strong indication by the student group that this support was crucial to their survival in their courses. Recommendations for minor improvements were taken on board, and incorporated into the project in latter years. The operational model for the project is now generally stable. Internal appraisal of the project indicates positive and negative features:

Positive

- Professional, customer-oriented delivery;
- Students can be supported in any college, on any course;
- Integrated financial, career guidance and mentoring supports;
- Very tight financial control, and lean administrative system;
- Good investment: the project is targeted precisely, and the non-grant nature of the financial support ensures that money spent contributes to the project objective;
- Excellent cost-per-student ratio.

Integration of the project with other Northside Partnership services – benefits to target group

Negative

- Costly in terms of professional resource (Guidance Counsellor);
- Constraints of Partnership financial controls – some supports are difficult to arrange;
- Time-consuming: management of non-grant financial support, and mentoring support;
- Inefficient “recruitment” process – it is difficult to reach all of the students who could benefit from the project.

In terms of the original broader objective of increasing participation in higher education, there are consistent indications from local schools that the positive effect of local role models is encouraging students to apply in greater numbers. Progress is best illustrated in real changes:

- A student supported by the project has now qualified as a Primary teacher and has taken up a post in a local school: the first teacher from the area to teach there;
- In 1994, there were almost no students attending college from a large estate in Dublin 17. In 2000 there are queues of students for the early bus, departing to ten different colleges.

KEY FEATURES

- **Professional – the service is delivered by an expert, with extensive networks;**
- **Individually-tailored, flexible support packages – not another grant;**
- **Locally accessible.**

