PATHWAYS TO EDUCATION
CONNECTIONS CONFERENCE 2010

A JOINT ACCESS INITIATIVE OF UCC AND CIT

CONNECTIONS
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Access: Are we making the Right Connections?

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Access: Are we making the Right Connections?

PROCEEDINGS FROM THE PATHWAYS TO EDUCATION ACCESS CONFERENCE

EDITORS: MARTIN FLYNN, DR. DENIS STAUNTON AND DEIRDRE CREEDON.

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Access: Are we making the Right Connections?
Proceedings of the Pathways to Education Connections Conference April 28-29, 2010

Pathways to Education is a partnership and joint access initiative between UCC and CIT. It has the specific aim of widening participation and increasing access to higher education. It builds upon the work already undertaken by the Access offices of UCC and CIT and work carried out in the wider body of each institution. It is supported by the Higher Education Authority under the Strategic Innovation Fund – Cycle 2.

The Pathways to Education Steering Group consists of:

Con O'Brien, Vice President for the Student Experience, UCC

Dr. Barry O'Connor, Registrar & Vice President for Academic Affairs, CIT

Dr. Denis Staunton, Director of Access, UCC (retired Oct 2010)

Mary O'Grady, Head of Disability Support Service and Disability Support Officer, UCC (replaced Dr. Staunton in Nov 2010)

Ed Riordan, Deputy Registrar & Head of Academic Quality, CIT

Eileen Hogan, College Lecturer, School of Applied Social Science, UCC

Deirdre Creedon, Access Officer, CIT

For further information on the other activities undertaken by Pathways to Education, please visit: http://www.pathwayscork.ie

FOREWORD

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The theme of the Pathways to Education Access Conference "Access: Are we making the Right Connections?" was well chosen and reflected the need to evaluate the progress we have made in promoting equity of access and widening participation in further and higher education.

There are numerous challenges that face Higher Education over the next number of years including achieving the National targets set by the HEA in relationto Access students and in turn achieving Institutional targets set out in the Strategic Plans of the various universities and institutes across Ireland.

The changed economic times have caused us all to reflect on the access activities carried out in differing contexts and settings and this conference provided a perfect opportunity for the delegates to reflect, observe and evaluate the outcomes and successes from this body of engagement and activity.

The proceedings of the conference comprised keynote presentations from Liz Thomas, Stuart Billingham, Marion Coy, Aine Hyland, Bahram Bekhradnia and Peter Brown. The presentation of forty-two papers in twenty workshops over the two days involved over sixty people from a diverse range of backgrounds and higher education institutions nationally and internationally.

We are grateful to all who attended and participated in the conference and for sharing their experiences, best practice and successful outcomes.

I hope this publication captures the range and width of Access work undertaken across the country and the invaluable contribution it makes to the continuing debate on further widening participation and opening up access routes into our third level institutions.

CON O'BRIEN

VICE PRESIDENT OF THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK

Access is a vital part of the continuum that is education, and such access must be assured and nurtured at all stages in the continuum of Lifelong Learning. It is as much about supporting education and education providers as it is about removing the many obstacles which may block the pathway into, or back to, education for aspiring learners.

One of the key planks of the Higher Education Authority's Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) was the support of the secondment of 'mainstream' academics and practioners to participate in SIF projects. The objective here was firstly to encourage innovation among the Third Level community and, subsequently, the integration of this innovative thought and action into mainstream activity during the lifetime of the project and, more importantly, as the direct project funding comes to an end. This mainstreaming objective is well met by the SIF Pathways.

The formal complement of Access staff in the respective Third Level institutions across the sector is extremely small, when compared, for example, to staffing levels in other support / Student Experience services. This dearth of dedicated resources is put into sharp relief when considered in the context of the national targets which are set out for Access to Education. The support of HEA SIF funding goes someway towards redressing this balance by these twin objectives of innovative thinking on Access and ultimate mainstreaming of same. Access can be advanced and sustained effectively only through the strong engagement of academic staff.

The Pathways Conference is a major milestone both for the SIF programme and for Access to Education in Ireland. It brings together the many practitioners in the Irish Third Level sector, along with noted international experts in the field. This confluence of experience and skills facilitates the definition of the problem along with the potential best practice solutions.

DR BARRY O'CONNOR

REGISTRAR & VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS
CORK INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

EQUITY IN A TIME OF CRISIS – CHOICES AND CHALLENGES

Contributor: Marion Coy, President*, Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology

*Retired November 2010

During the last twenty years, the Economist magazine, has on a numbers of occasions, done features on Ireland's transformation. We were at one point, 'the poorest of the rich nations'[1] and as the Celtic Tiger prowled and preened, the Economist returned to reflect on 'the luck of the Irish'[2]. The past is indeed a foreign land as we now ruefully analyse the boom and the bust. All has changed and even our racehorses – the image used by the Economist to reflect on our luck – have more sober names. 'Beef or Salmon' 'Bertie's Dream' and 'Forpaddy-theplaster' are fading from memory and we now have a racehorse called 'Quantitative Easing' and many variations on Nama! So as we contemplate and review our irrational exuberance as a nation, perhaps we should also take stock of what value we attach to equity. In legal terms, 'equity' refers to principles of justice and fair conduct and when we use the term in finance, we are referring to the assets/wealth of an entity. Those who use the phrase 'Ireland Inc' are usually interested in equity as measurable wealth and assets and are defining Ireland by reference to just one dimension of national profile and well-being. The social dimension of equity is most often concerned with interrelationships and the perception of fairness in the position and treatment of individuals or cohorts relative to others. All three dimensions, the legal, financial and social, present choices and challenges to those involved in higher education, indeed in all levels of education.

In examining the current approaches to equity in Irish education, it may be useful to consider three interrelated questions posed by the American philosopher Henry G. Frankfurt. Frankfurt, asked the following: 'What to believe? How to behave? What to care about?'[3]. We assert beliefs but the congruence of our behaviours with our beliefs is the true measure of what we really care about. We can assert a national value as equitable treatment of all in relation to access to higher education and the treatment of those who access that education in a manner that allows all to benefit equitably. In examining the pattern of participation in Irish higher education over the last twenty years – our behaviour – it becomes clear very quickly that all socio-economic groups do not benefit equally. Indeed, the pattern of participation would suggest that 'the rising tide does not lift all boats' and that our behaviour – national policies and practises – benefits

middle and higher socio-economic participation. So what, if we follow Frankfurt's questions, does this suggest that we care about? As we face increasingly difficult economic challenges, is our behaviour going to modify in a direction which impacts negatively on participation in higher education for all those capable of benefiting from it? Let me add here however, that the disconnect between assertion and behaviour is not simply an Irish phenomenon. In the US, the UK and Australia, to use just three examples, the same behaviour is present. Indeed, Julia Gillard, the Australian Prime Minister, has remarked that fifteen years of labour policy which explicitly promotes equity has had no real impact on disadvantage. As we face hard choices in hard times, perhaps we should reflect on the laconic observation of the French philosopher and historian Alexis de Tocqueville that 'you can have equality or equality of opportunity; you cannot have both'. Lemass's 'rising tide' assertion has not converted to desired outcomes.

Particularly at this time, we should consider lessons that are to be learned from our own behaviour in relation to equity in one of the most appalling chapters of national policy. The Ryan Report[4] on systemic abuse of children in Ireland provides a shocking evidence base for how we behaved in hard times. The section of that report which deals with the financing of the institutions outlines collusion between state and religious institutions, driven very strongly by a firm eye on the money involved. Values were forgotten and 'value' prevailed. We ran poor places for poor people and were more concerned with spend than with lives. Yeats's predictions about the absence of values in the new Irish State were confirmed in institution after institution as those charged with upholding values counted the half pence. And while we may now assert that we live in different times and that we have escaped from this shameful chapter of our history, I am not convinced that the 'old failures' will not come back to haunt us, simply repackaged for a post Celtic Tiger Age. We were very good at asserting belief and behaving very differently in the past. Has this changed?

So when we now consider our declared beliefs, is there any more evidence of an alignment between professed belief and what we really care about? The recent ESRI/HEA Report *'Hidden Disadvantage? A Study of the Low Participation in Higher Education by the*

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1 Economist, 1988.

2 Economist, 2004.

3 Frankfurt, H.G., 1998. The Importance of What We Care About. Cambridge University Press.

4 Justice Sean Ryan, 2009. Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse

Non-Manual Group'[5] provides evidence that we have not managed to convert professed belief into effective action. Acknowledging our shortcomings may help in developing more effective action in the future. We may be able to learn also from the interventions and observations of others. In the University of Chicago, the President Bob Zimmer has redirected resources in order to see if the University – which has an education department – can translate theory into practice by becoming directly involved in a number of primary schools in disadvantaged areas. His intervention, targeted at primary school level, is directly aligned with the finding of international research on addressing disadvantage: early intervention gives the best results. If we want to consider other thinking on how to address disadvantage and inequity, we should examine the impact of the work of Larry Rosenstock in the US on interventions with disadvantaged children. In particular we should look at his approach to the creation of culture as cultural change is likely to stick while structural change may only tinker with the real issues. Coming from a very different mind-set are the reflections of Will Wright, the games developer, on the issues of cognition, learning and collaboration as evidenced in the world of on-line gaming.

Addressing issues of equity requires that we are open to new thinking and that we be prepared to prioritize resources in new directions. What we care about is reflected in what actions we prioritize and how we direct funding in pursuit of these priorities.

As we consider the disconnect between behaviour and professed belief, it may also be timely to try to imagine how future generations will see our actions and inactions. Disadvantage manifests itself in social and economic domains and we should also attend to the inter-generational issues now confronting us. We have great challenges and not all of them are matters of money. In many ways today's students are growing up both faster and slower than earlier generations. We are prolonging dependency and simultaneously eliminating opportunities for responsible mature decision-making among students. We face particular issues on the performance and achievement of young males. For both males and females we need to reflect on whether we are dodging issues of equity through the creation of 'available disorders' and the medical labelling of some of the impacts of social inequity. Perhaps too often the response of higher education to the issues of inequity is to focus on boutique solutions developed within the academy. The issues are broader and deeper and will not be redressed by current thinking and approaches.

Perhaps higher education leaders should also make more robust challenges to the complacency, elitism and indeed the antipathy and prejudice of the type displayed by Peter Sutherland in his comment on the Institutes of Technology in recent months. Higher education needs a system of multi-dimensional institutions to cater for the needs of a complex society. More than one model of higher education provision is required. When we imagine the future of higher education and chart a pathway towards that desired future, we need to test our assertions against the evidence provided by our behaviour. Then we might begin to clarify what we really care about.

5   McCoy, S., D. Byrne, P.J. O'Connell, E. Kelly, 2010. Hidden Disadvantage? A Study on the Low Participation in Higher Education by the Non-Manual Group. HEA

AN ENGAGING PARTNERSHIP TO IMPROVE STUDENT RETENTION AND SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Contributor: Liz Thomas (Higher Education Academy and Edge Hill University, UK)

Abstract

Improving the retention and success of students in higher education (HE) is an internationally recognised challenge. This paper draws on international literature, and an on-going programme in England to argue that institutions need to focus on enhancing students' engagement in HE to improve retention and success. The emerging model indicates that institutions should develop and promote opportunities for engagement to all students, throughout the student lifecycle, across the institution's academic, social and professional service domains. However, the embedding of opportunities for engagement with peers and professional services into the academic sphere is important for students with limited opportunities for other forms of engagement. Institutions also need to work with students and staff to develop their capacity to engage with each other. It is important that opportunities that HEIs offer to facilitate student engagement are informed by key principles and aim to achieve common outcomes, rather than the choice of specific activity.

Introduction

This short paper is based on the premise that as part of the 'access agenda' higher education institutions (HEIs) should be concerned not just with enabling students from under-represented and equality groups to gain entry to higher education (HE) but also to enable students to be successful, because in the words of Vincent Tinto (2008), access without support is not opportunity (see also Bamber and Tett 2001, p.15). Indeed, this understanding is embedded in the definition of access in the Irish context:

"The concept of 'access' is understood to encompass not only entry to higher education, but also retention and successful completion". (National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013, p14).

This position therefore begs the question of how institutions can improve the retention and success of students in HE – which is of course a matter of international concern (van Stolk et al 2007). Drawing on literature from the UK, US and Australia, and a three-year programme of work which is currently in progress in England, this paper argues that HEIs should proactively promote student engagement as a means to improve student retention and success in HE.

What works? Student Retention and Success Programme

This three-year programme, which is funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), aims to generate robust evidence about the most effective strategies to ensure high continuation and completion rates within higher education. Primary data collection is through seven funded projects involving 22 HEIs in England and beyond. The support and co-ordination team – which I am the director of – has worked with project teams to influence and guide the process of data collection and analysis, and is responsible for the programme-level meta-analysis of project findings. This is being done through the development and refinement of a conceptual model of student retention. The initial model (Thomas et al 2009) was informed by literature from the UK. This has been revised and updated in response to feedback from practitioners, researchers and experts across the HE sector, and by drawing on US literature and emerging empirical data (Thomas and May forthcoming). Further details of the programme are available from: www.actiononaccess.org/retention

Developing a Model: Student Engagement to Improve Student Retention and Success

The following discussion draws on literature and emerging empirical data to propose a model for enhancing student retention and success, which puts student engagement at the heart of the process. Engagement opportunities enable students to construct or form an appropriate identity to be successful in HE. This is particularly important in the context of student diversity: there are increasing numbers of students studying locally and remaining in the family home, studying part-time and/or in the workplace and/or who have increased reliance on part-time employment. These students spend less time on campus and have multiple roles or identifies (e.g. parent, carer, employee, employer, student etc), which either co-exist or compete. The institution can provide engagement opportunities and capacity building to help students to construct or form an appropriate, complementary student identity to be part of the higher education community and ultimately be successful in HE and beyond.

1. ENGAGEMENT THROUGHOUT THE INSTITUTION AND ACROSS THE STUDENT LIFECYCLE

In the UK there is a growing body of evidence relating to student retention and success. Research exploring the reasons for student withdrawal tends to conclude that there is rarely a single reason why students leave. In most cases, the picture is complex and students leave as a result of a combination of inter-related factors which may include: poor preparation for higher education; weak institutional and/or course match, resulting in poor fit / lack of commitment; unsatisfactory academic experience; lack of social integration; financial issues; and personal circumstances (Jones 2008). Thus, the UK literature suggests that the following types of intervention support student retention and success: pre-entry information, preparation and admission; induction and transition support; curriculum development; social engagement; student support, including financial support; and use of data and monitoring. At a strategic level Yorke and Longden (2008) suggest that an institutional commitment to student learning, and hence to student engagement; proactive management of student transition; curriculum issues such as treating learning as an academic and social milieu; and choosing curricular structures that increase the chances of student success contribute to good student retention.

Research about student persistence has a long and distinguished history in the US (see Troxel 2010). In summary, earlier US research suggested student retention was affected by: '(a) student background variables, (b) interaction by students within the institution, (c) the influence of environmental variables (finances, family support), (d) the presence of attitudinal variables (a subjective evaluation of the perceived quality in self-satisfaction with the institution), and (e) student intention, such as transfer and degree attainment' (Metz, 2002, p. 8).

More recently in the US George Kuh and colleagues have focused on the concept of student engagement in relation to student persistence and success (see Kuh et al 2005). Kuh (2009, p683) has defined student engagement as "the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities (Kuh, 2001, 2003, 2009)." Indeed, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in the US and the Australian Survey of Student Engagement examine students' participation in educationally purposeful activities. Krause (2011 forthcoming) extends the notion of academic engagement by arguing that "learning occurs in a range of settings, both within and beyond the formal curriculum.

It involves developing connections within the university as well as building on prior learning, along with learning that takes place in the workplace and community settings". It is thus widely accepted that engagement in the academic sphere is central to effective learning, which contributes to persistence and academic success.

The emerging evidence from the What works? programme is pointing to the importance of collaborative, student-centred learning and teaching strategies (see Crosling et al 2008). These facilitate staff and student interaction, which enables students to develop academically and staff to develop a better understanding of their students. These learning approaches also promote peer interaction and the development of long lasting friendships.

Engagement however can take place beyond the academic domain, in other spheres of the institution, and can have a positive impact on students' retention and success too. Vincent Tinto's influential work points to the importance not just of academic interaction, but also of social engagement, (Tinto 1993) and this is supported by my own institutional research in the UK (Thomas 2002, see also Wilcox et al 2005), where students commented:

I've got a lot of really good friends here. I think that's one of the major things for most people that'll keep them here…That's what kept me here". (p345)

There's a real community because you can sit there and in your group of friends there'll be somebody who knows that group of friends and somebody who knows that group of friends . . You rely on your friends more than anything at university to get you through the hard times, to help you out and to be there to have fun with". (p347).

The emerging empirical evidence reinforces the vital role of friendship to many students, especially when they face difficulties. But it is also clear that the academic sphere can play a central role in facilitating students to develop these friendships, especially for those who spend less time on campus because they live at home and/or have work and family commitments. In addition technology has been successfully used to facilitate social networking between students, especially those who are not based on campus - both pre- and post-entry.

UK universities provide a range of 'professional services' which are designed to attract and recruit students to the institution, provide pastoral support, and develop academic, personal and professional capacities, and these services are also sites where students can

interact with each other and institutional staff and develop and nurture their student and graduate identities. The programme evidence suggests that professional services make an important contribution to the development of students' knowledge, confidence and identity as successful HE learners, both pre- and post entry. This includes for example enabling students to make informed choices about institutions, subjects and courses, and to have realistic expectations of HE study. Many professional services however, are most effective when they are delivered via the academic sphere, rather than relying on students accessing these students autonomously, due to constraints of time on campus. This is exemplified in relation to employability: increasingly institutions are embedding activities designed to increase graduate employability into the core curriculum in partnership with careers professionals, rather delivering services separately through a central careers centre (see Thomas et al 2010). In the pre-entry arena, we know that aspiration raising and the provision of information, advice and guidance about HE is most effective when it is aligned to students' school/college learning (Action on Access 2008).

DIAGRAM 1: INSTITUTIONAL SPHERES OF ENGAGEMENT

The need to engage students in the academic, social and professional services spheres is shown in Diagram 1. Academic engagement is related to 'effective learning', and may be synonymous with, or necessary for 'deep' (as opposed to surface) learning (Ramsden 2003, p97). Social engagement can be seen to create a sense of belonging and offer informal support. Engagement with professional services can develop students' capacities to access and succeed in HE and beyond. However, the academic sphere is a key site for enabling and promoting engagement not just in academic matters, but also with peers and professional services. Furthermore, as has been indicated in the discussion above, engagement should take place throughout the student lifecycle. It begins early with institutional outreach interventions and extends throughout the process of preparing for and entering HE, time spent in HE and includes progression beyond HE into employment or further learning. This is summarised in Diagram 2 below.

DIAGRAM 2: THE STUDENT LIFECYCLE
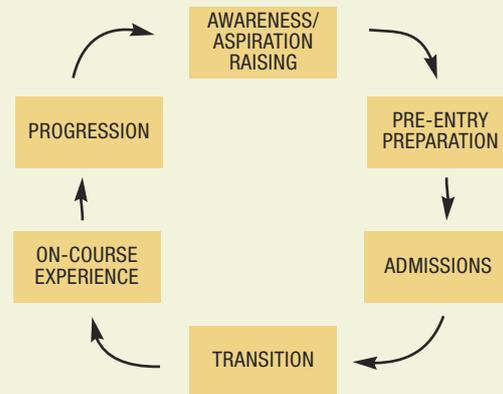
2. A PARTNERSHIP: DEVELOPING STUDENTS' AND STAFF CAPACITY TO ENGAGE

Through the empirical work it is apparent that institutions should work with students to develop their capacity to engage effectively in their HE experience. This includes developing students' knowledge and understanding about the benefits of engaging across the different institutional spheres, and expanding their skills to do so. Project research with part-time, mature and local students has identified a highly instrumental approach to HE, which corresponds with a devaluing of social aspects of an HE experience, reflected in comments about 'not needing more friends'. Various other studies suggest that students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds are less likely to engage with student services (Dodgson and Bolam 2002) and with careers services (Hills 2003). While individuals will need different levels of engagement in the different spheres to achieve success in their own terms, "for the majority…the most important support seemed to derive from a special sense of community…from reciprocal acts of recognition and confirmation" (Perry, 1999, 238). This implies that students need to be educated about the value of widespread engagement in their HE experience, and encouraged and facilitated to engage in appropriate opportunities, and given the necessary skills. This may for example include the provision of capacity building modules in the core academic curriculum, or via the induction process.

Institutions must also be aware of the heterogeneity of the student body, and thus the need to engage in different ways. This requires institutions to provide a

range of opportunities for engagement across the institution. This includes recognising that there are differing degrees of engagement which students feel comfortable with, different levels within the institution where students may prefer to engage (e.g. module, course, department, faculty, institution) and a range of sites of engagement, as discussed above. A uniform approach to encouraging engagement may create pressure for conformation, and result in alienation and disengagement (Mann 2005).

Developing engagement opportunities throughout the institution and across the student lifecycle requires all staff to be involved – it is not a task which can be left to a few committed individuals. The notion of engagement should be embedded into the institutional vision and reflected in key policy documents, and this must be actively endorsed by senior managers. Thus, the institution must consider how policies and procedures can ensure staff responsibility, accountability, development, and recognition and reward are in place in relation to engagement to enable all staff to fulfil their obligations. This may include reviewing staff recruitment (e.g. to ensure that responsibility for providing opportunities for engagement are embedded into job descriptions and selection processes); updating induction and training for new staff and continuing professional development; the provision of resources, guidance and other support; ensuring that institutional procedures require staff to engage with students (e.g. through validation processes) and that staff performance and impact are monitored and reviewed (e.g. through the annual review process); and providing mechanisms to recognise and reward staff who excel at engaging students and offer them appropriate progression opportunities. In the empirical research, some staff report that colleagues undertaking research and publication receive much greater recognition and reward within the institution that those who make efforts to improve the student experience.

3. MANAGING ENGAGEMENT: INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

At the senior level the institution must take responsibility for managing and promoting student engagement to enhance retention and success. This includes building engagement into the corporate mission, vision and plan and aligning institutional policies towards this priority; providing leadership which explicitly values student engagement throughout the whole institution and across the student lifecycle and promotes whole staff responsibility for engagement; and the development of a

co-ordinated, evidence-informed strategy with explicit indicators and measures of success. In summary, managing engagement involves:

- Provision of a range of opportunities for engagement of different types, at different levels, across the institution in different sites, throughout the student lifecycle.

- Developing students to recognise the importance of engagement and to have the capacity to engage in a range of opportunities.

- Developing staff responsibility for and capacity to provide effective engagement opportunities.
  - Taking responsibility for engagement, including monitoring engagement and acting when there are indicators of lower levels of engagement.
  - Creating a partnership between students and institutions towards a shared outcome of successful learners and graduates.

DIAGRAM 3: STUDENT ENGAGEMENT TO IMPROVE STUDENT RETENTION AND SUCCESS
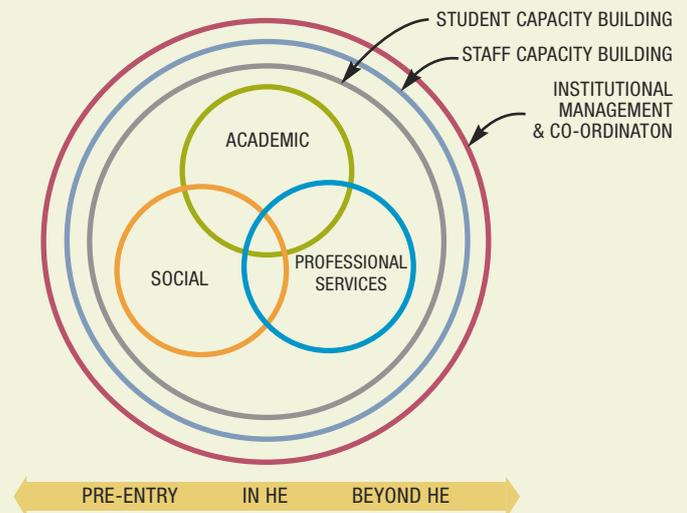
The emerging model of student engagement to improve student retention and success is shown in Diagram 3. It is however still in development, and a further iteration will be published in 2011 (Thomas and May forthcoming).

Implications for Institutions

What the discussion above suggests is that HEIs should proactively provide a range of opportunities for students to engage with peers, academic staff, professional staff and broader constituencies (such as communities and employers), throughout their student journey. The empirical evidence suggests that engagement in the academic sphere is particularly important, but that this

should not be at the expense of developing supportive friendship networks and helping students to access information, skills, opportunities and support to achieve their goals (whether this is with regard to entry into HE, success in HE or progression into employment or further learning). The 'overlaps' between academic and social, and academic and professional services, are vital as this is where non-academic engagement is embedded into the academic sphere, and made accessible to a more diverse student cohort.

The research teams have been investigating the effectiveness of a range of interventions which institutions can implement to provide engagement opportunities across the institution. Examples include: peer mentoring, personal tutoring, study advisers, student services, field trips, welcome lunch and information, extended induction, social networking, project-based learning, early feedback etc. The empirical research is starting to suggest that the exact type of engagement opportunity is less important than the way it is offered and its intended outcomes. Thus, we suggest that in all spheres engagement activities should be planned and informed by the following principles:

1   **Proactive**: activities should proactively seek to engage students, rather than waiting for a crisis to occur, or the more motivated students to take up opportunities.

2   **Inclusive**: activities should be aimed at engaging all students, this may mean thinking about the circumstances that constrain some individuals to engage in some activities throughout the institution.

3   **Flexible**: activities need to be delivered sufficiently flexibly to facilitate the participation of all students, this will include consideration of timing and time commitment, as well as location and accessibility.

4   **Transparent**: the ways in which students are expected or able to engage in an activity should be transparent, and the potential benefits of engaging should be explicit.

5   **Ongoing**: activities tend to benefit from taking place over time, rather than one-off opportunities, as engagement takes time (e.g. to develop skills and build relationships).

6   **Timely**: activities should be available at appropriate times, for example students' needs for engagement in the social and service activities will change over time.

7   **Relevant**: activities need to be relevant to students interests and aspirations.

8   **Integrated**: as least some opportunities for engagement in all spheres should be integrated into core activities that students are required to do, i.e. in the academic sphere.

9   **Collaborative**: activities should encouraged collaboration and engagement with fellow students and members of staff.

10 **Monitored**: the extent and qualify of student's engagement should be monitored, and where there is evidence of low levels of engagement follow-up action should be taken.

We have observed that the specific activities that are being evaluated have some frequently occurring outcomes. Thus, we suggest that the exact nature of an intervention is less important than the fact that it is aiming to achieve some or all of the following outcomes. Institutions should select activities or interventions which are likely to achieve the highest number of these outcomes, and/or for which they have particularly strong evidence that these outcomes will be achieved.

- Nurture supportive **peer relations**.

- Foster meaningful **interaction between staff and students**.

- Develop **students' knowledge, confidence and identity** as successful HE learners.

- Engender a **sense of entitlement and belonging** in HE.

To achieve these outcomes institutions need to encourage and facilitate partnerships between staff and students, which are based on a shared understanding of and responsibility for engagement and success. This will involve winning hearts and minds and creating an appropriate institutional infrastructure.

BIOGRAPHY

PROFESSOR LIZ THOMAS is Senior Adviser for Widening Participation at the Higher Education Academy and Director and Chair of the Widening Participation Research Centre at Edge Hill University. She is also Lead Adviser Working with Institutions for Action on Access, the national widening participation co-ordination team for England. Liz is currently directing the What works? Student retention and success programme on behalf of the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. Liz is committed to using research to improve policy and practice, and she is renowned internationally for her research on widening participation and student retention and success. She has undertaken research, consultancy and keynote addresses in Europe, the US and Australia. Liz is author and editor of nine books on widening participation, including *Improving student retention in higher education: The role of teaching and learning (2007, RoutledgeFalmer). She is also editor of the journal Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning.*

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FROM ACCESS TO ENGAGEMENT

Contributor: Stuart Billingham, Emeritus Professor of Lifelong Learning, York St John University

Abstract

The history of widening access to higher education in England since the early 1960's is one of considerable success. Although, as the paper reveals, this is not a story of perfect progress by any means, the statistical and other evidence presented does show that many more, and many different, people are benefitting from higher education now than in the past. The central question of this paper is whether the approaches we have used to achieve these gains are capable of delivering such new patterns of participation across future generations? The article suggests they are necessary but not sufficient to achieve this goal. It is argued that what is required are university and college strategies which encourage local communities to help shape the what, where, when and how of the higher education offer. Simultaneously with this 'opening-up' of the academy, widening access and participation strategies must be designed so that they consciously contribute to, and are integrated with, other key policy agendas such as employability and enterprise, workforce development, employer engagement.

Introduction

It is possible to discern concern even as far back as the early twentieth century about some of the patterns of participation in English higher education. This said, it is only since publication of the Robbins report[6] in the early 1960s that policies and practices to increase and widen access to higher education, and latterly to improve also the quality of that participation and student success rates, have become a regular and routine feature of the educational landscape in England[7].

However, in 2008, in the context of nearly half a century of interventions to increase (and later widen) access to higher education - though focused on the especially strong policy "push" since the turn of the new century - the National Audit Office (NAO) painted a patchy picture of progress;

"The participation rate for men is currently 10 percentage points below that for women. Those from non-white ethnic groups are better represented than white people….People from lower socio-economic backgrounds make up around one half of the population of England, but represent just 29 per cent of young full-time, first entrants to higher education. Young people living in deprived areas have experienced an increase in participation of 4.5 percentage points since 1998 compared with an increase of 1.8 percentage points in the least deprived areas".[8]

Other studies, such as the review of widening participation research and other literature by Gorard et.al., were even more pessimistic, revealing;

"…inequalities in participation in all forms of post-compulsory education have endured over the past fifty years in the UK with significant minorities routinely excluded"[9]

This said, and broadly accepted, it is easy to under-estimate the progress towards greater and wider participation in higher education over the last 50 years and to forget the impact this has had on the lives of many thousands of people. Whilst it is beyond the scope and purpose of the present paper to provide a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the complex statistical evidence now available on this subject, gaining a sense of the changes to the size and composition of the higher education student population, and the sector itself, over recent times is important to arguments made later.

Whatever else we might say about these developments, it is clear that there has been a remarkable change in the proportion of the population accessing higher education since Robbins. Figure 1 shows the broad pattern. Although we must bear in mind *precise* comparisons before and after 2000 cannot be made given the changes to the way participation was measured after that date, the *broad* trend is clear and widely acknowledged.

FIG. 1: AGE PARTICIPATION INDEX (API) AND HEIPR IN ENGLAND (SELECTED YEARS)[10]

1961	1970	1980	1990	1991	1992	1995	2000	2004	2006
6%	14%	13%	19%	22%	28%	31%	35%/ 39%	40%	39%

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) captured the recent scale and pace of this growth well, when it noted, the number of full-time

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6   Committee on Higher Education, HMSO, Cmnd 2154, 1963

7   This paper refers to the higher education sector and policies for widening access in England unless otherwise stated

8   NAO (2008), p.6

9   S.Gorard et.al. (2006), p.7

10 This data has been produced drawing on: DfES (1985); HEFCE (2009). The two figures shown for the year 2000 represent the participation rates as measured by the different methodologies referred to in the text

students in HEIs has risen from below 600,000 to around 1.2 million over the last 20 years[11]

The National Audit Office report revealed that:

"When students up to the age of 60 are included, the current [2007-8] participation rate stands at 48.7 per cent"[12]

Accompanying the growth in the number of higher education students, and notwithstanding the patchy and sometimes pessimistic pictures painted by commentators and analysts, there have also been some significant - and from a widening participation perspective encouraging - changes in the student profile over the last 50 years. For example.

"Barely a quarter of places were filled by women in 1963 and not much more than a third by 1980. By the turn of the millennium, around 53 per cent of new entrants were female. By 2006-07 the percentage had risen to 55 per cent... 47 per cent of women now experience higher education by the age of 30 – up from 43 per cent in seven years – while the equivalent figure for men has remained static at 38 per cent."[13]

Indeed, such has been the progress in increasing participation by women that the focus on gender inequality has recently shifted to serious concern at the consistently low participation rate of young, white, and especially working class, men. As the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has noted in startling terms, "the participation rate of young men now trails that of young women by a decade".[14]

There has been a steady increase, especially over the last 20 years, in the absolute number and relative percentage of home UK minority ethnic students participating in higher education, measured both in relation to their number in the general population and in comparison to white students. Those of Asian ethnic origins are particularly well-represented as measured in these ways, though it must be remembered that some

minority ethnic sub-groups remain under-represented in the younger age range though well-represented in older age ranges.[15]

Whilst virtually all data relating to widening participation can be, and usually is, contested, the data on disability is, for a variety of reasons, particularly so. With this cautionary note in mind, it is still widely accepted that the proportion of students in higher education institutions declaring a disability has not only risen significantly in real terms, especially over the last ten years, but it is now higher than that in the general population.

Concerns over participation rates relating to gender, ethnicity and disability have figured prominently at various times in the history of widening participation policy and practice over the last 50 years, but the issue which has consistently pre-occupied policy-makers, practitioners and analysts over that period is that of social class or socio-economic status. Specifically, and especially over the last decade, it is the participation of young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and areas of deprivation, which have commanded most attention.

Figures 2, 3 and 4 are drawn from HEFCE's latest analysis in their on-going programme of research into the proportion of young people who enter higher education at age 18 or 19 years.[16]

According to the data in Figure 2, young people from the 2009-10 cohort are 12 per cent more likely to enter higher education than those in 2004-5 and 22 per cent more likely than those from the mid-1990s. Figure 3 shows the young participation rate for those living in the most disadvantaged quintile of areas measured in terms of HE participation. The data reveals that the proportion of those living in these areas entering HE has increased by 32 per cent between 2004-5 and 2009-10 entry cohorts and 51 per cent in comparison with the 1994-95 cohort.

FIG. 2: TRENDS IN YOUNG PARTICIPATION FOR ENGLAND

FIG. 3: TRENDS IN YOUNG PARTICIPATION FOR THE MOST DISADVANTAGED AREAS DETERMINED BY HE PARTICIPATION RATES
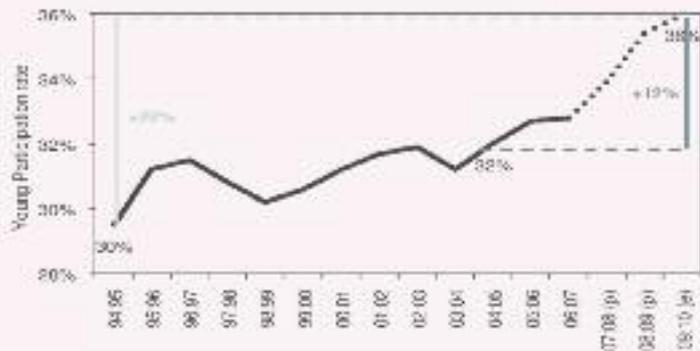
11 HEFCE (2009), p.21
12 NAO (2008), p.11 [parenthesis inserted]
13 NAO (2008), pp.23-24
14 HEFCE (2010)
15 See NAO (2008)
16 See HEFCE (2010), Figures 8,13, and15; pp.13-23 inclusive
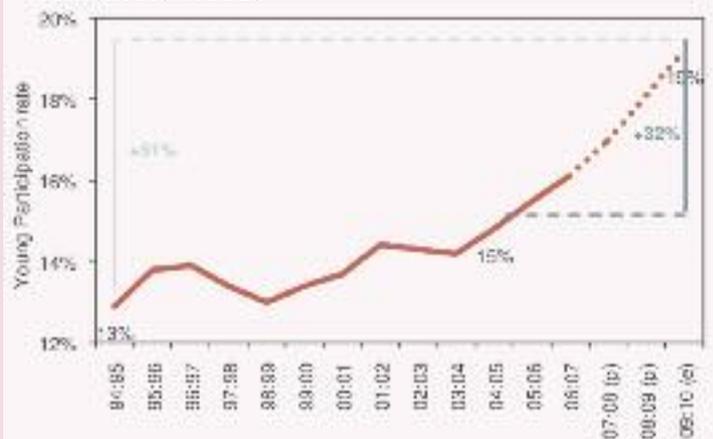
FIG. 4: TRENDS IN YOUNG PARTICIPATION FOR THE MOST ADVANTAGED AREAS DETERMINED BY HE PARTICIPATION RATES

In relation to Figure 4, the HEFCE report comments, "Since the 04:05 cohort the most disadvantaged quintile has shown a larger participation rate increase compared to the most advantaged areas (…) whether measured in terms of proportional increases (+32 per cent against +4 per cent) or the absolute percentage point increase (4.7 percentage points against 2.4 percentage points)".[17]

With regard to socio-economic background the HEFCE analysis produced the following picture;

"The proportion of young people from these [most income disadvantaged] areas entering HE was 15 per cent for the 94:95 cohort, increasing to reach (an estimated) 25% for the 09:10 cohort. Compared to the other area classifications this trend differs by having a larger increase in young participation overall…"[18]

Taken together, these most recent data on young participation and disadvantage reveal that significant progress has been made in reducing the impact on participation of some key social, economic, and geographic structural barriers. It is easy to underestimate this progress and, perhaps more importantly, the impact it has had on the lives of many thousands of young (and sometimes older) people in our society. Of course, this is not to deny there is still a very long way to go to achieve equality of opportunity for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and areas of traditionally low-participation in higher education. Writing in 2007-8, the NAO described the scale of the remaining task succinctly when it commented;

"People from lower socio-economic backgrounds make up around one half of the population of England, but represent just 29 per cent of young full-time, first-time entrants to higher education".[19]

There remain many significant and hard challenges ahead for those working to achieve greater equality of opportunity in access to higher education and the widest possible social, cultural and economic mix of students in our universities and colleges. This said, there is a very great deal to celebrate in the progress made over the last 50 years. The key question is how do we sustain that

progress over coming generations and most effectively rise to the continuing challenges identified above.

From Access to Engagement

The arguments presented in the following pages are based on a simple assumption. If we are to sustain the progress made so far and also meet the challenges which still remain with regard to patterns of participation in higher education, it is higher education itself which must change. This is not to deny the findings of several reports, or the views of respected commentators, which have emphasized that it is what happens in schools – and in particular achievement in national examinations – which is the key to further progress in widening participation in HE. Such changes are absolutely essential and attention must be paid to them in educational policy.

However, the argument here is that changes in patterns of participation are unlikely to be sustained if the school sector changes but the higher education sector fails to respond. As Layer argued in 2005,

"…the sector needs to address the major question of what the role of HE actually is. Is it to provide access to an 'academic finishing school' model for students who have been prepared for this traditional experience? Or is it to provide opportunities for a broader range of individuals to study for higher-level awards and to gain the social and economic benefits of a degree? One model is very much focused on students fitting in to an existing model of HE, the other is about the extent to which HE needs to change". [20]

And, of course, we have seen some significant changes in higher education provision nationally, and in local approaches too, which have been driven (at least in part) by the widening participation agenda. For example, there has been the growth of Foundation Degrees; the development of two-year honours degrees; new and innovative partnerships and alliances to enhance access and widen participation such as Combined Universities Cornwall (CUC) or University Campus Suffolk (UCS); the creation of "lifelong learning partnerships" (LLNs as originally funded by HEFCE) now, in some areas at least, a more permanent feature of the educational landscape; until very recently, progressive and very significant expansion of collaborative provision between universities and colleges with widening participation as a central objective; evidence-based and new approaches to student support and development, acknowledging the particular challenges which face non-traditional entrants in the transition to HE.

All of these developments have had, and should continue to have, a significant part to play in helping sustain changes in patterns of participation in HE. However, they do not in themselves open-up the policy-

17 HEFCE (2010), p.22
18 HEFCE (2010), p.30 – text in square brackets inserted
19 NAO (2008), p.6
20 G.Layer (2005), p.2

framing processes of the academy – or the sector as a whole - to influence by those communities which widening participation policy is designed to serve. To put it bluntly, to achieve sustainable change in patterns of participation in higher education into the future now requires that government, the sector as a whole, and individual HEIs, move from a preoccupation with widening participation as "outreach" and see it as being more about "in-reach".

Figure 5 schematically describes the process of transition from a primary concern with "access" to an added concern with "engagement".

FIG.5: FROM ACCESS TO ENGAGEMENT

WIDENING ACCESS = GETTING IN

WIDENING PARTICIPATION = ACCESS + RETENTION

WIDENING ENGAGMENT = PARTICIPATION +

This schematic clearly does not do justice to the history of, or the array of approaches to, widening access and participation. It is simply a device to capture the broad thrust of the present argument. Broadly, it is suggesting that the original concerns of the "access movement" were, primarily and understandably, about who gets into university and college. From these beginnings, and after some significant successes in changing the profile of "who gets in" (as seen earlier), attention began to focus also on the experience of those new types of student now accessing university education. This has been the period of concern with participation – not just "who gets in" but "what happens once they are in". This approach has, like the concern with access, also delivered real and significant change in universities and colleges. Some examples of these were given earlier. Despite such real successes, there are two major problems with both the "access" and the "participation" approaches in terms of the longer term sustainability of change.

The first is that they do not seek and so do not bring about *structural* change. What this means is that the changes they do create are potentially vulnerable. For example, in an individual institution they may not survive changes in key personnel. At a sector as well as an individual HEI level, they can be vulnerable to relatively minor, let alone major, shifts in government policy. Examples of this vulnerability can be found in many areas. One topical example, at the time of writing, is the very recent announcement by the UK government that it will not be funding the Aimhigher initiative from the end of the current funding in July 2011.

Aimhigher has been a flagship widening participation initiative involving the development of local area partnerships between universities, colleges, schools, local authorities and others to design and deliver aspiration, awareness and achievement-raising interventions primarily, but not exclusively, with learners in the 14-19 age range. Aimhigher was never designed to produce structural changes in the what, where, when and how of higher education provision. It was explicitly designed as an outreach initiative with a discrete funding stream. Closure of this initiative will have a very real personal impact on a large number of people employed by Aimhigher partnerships; much expertise in effective outreach interventions will probably be lost; cost-effective and efficient projects will cease; many schools and many school and college students will no longer have the benefit of these experiences; over time, local (and possibly national) improvements and changes in patterns and rates of access, participation and success may well stall. Will any of this, however, throw the higher education sector into turmoil? Will Vice Chancellors be battering at the door of the responsible Minister with claims of disaster ahead for their universities? For that matter, will school students, their parents and their teachers be marching on London about this? I suspect not. Despite real success in changing patterns of participation over the last twenty years and more, approaches such as Aimhigher are not designed to *fundamentally* alter organizational and educational cultures whether in schools, universities, colleges or local communities. And this is also largely true of institutional widening participation strategies where the chances of achieving some change in practices is often perceived to rest on proposing policies which resonate with, rather than challenge too deeply, the dominant institutional culture. What this means is that in practice the structural impact, and therefore potential sustainability, of change is likely to be relatively low.

The second major problem with "access" and "participation" approaches is that they have not tended to connect explicitly and purposefully with other important strategic agendas in modern higher education including those which are of very specific interest and concern to many in the targeted under-represented groups and communities. A good example of this is the whole question of graduate employability and access to the labour market. Thomas and Jones (2007) summarise the research evidence on the link between widening participation and employability as follows:

"…graduates from all non-traditional backgrounds experience disadvantage in the labour market….Some of the barriers these students and graduates face are long terms and closely related to the widening of participation more generally. They include issues such as the paucity of information provided, and the quality of advice and guidance made available…Further disadvantage may arise in relation to their comparatively low reserves of

cultural capital (ie. knowledge relating to higher education and graduate employment) that can be called upon from family, school and other spheres…Students from non-traditional backgrounds may also lack social capital – i.e. networks of contacts to provide "hot knowledge" about higher education and the labour market, and to assist them to adjust to higher education and secure suitable graduate employment".[21]

Similar points could be made about other related agendas such as employer engagement, workforce development, enterprise and entrepreneurship. In the author's experience, it is rare to find policies and strategies in these fields explicitly linked to those for widening access and participation or vice-versa. The failure to do so has many consequences but one key result is that the widening participation strategies remain detached from the real-world concerns of those whom they are targeting. They become too narrowly focused on getting into and being successful in higher education as if that is a credible end in itself. Those in under-represented communities are unlikely to have that luxury.

Conclusion

The argument presented in this short paper is that in order to make sustainable the hard won changes in patterns and rates of participation in higher education of the last 50 years, and to make in-roads into remaining patterns of inequality of access and participation, the widening participation "movement" needs to start focusing on "in-reach". That is, whilst continuing to press ahead with initiatives to further widen access, further enhance the experience of students from non-traditional backgrounds and their success rates, the "movement" needs to promote new ways for those from these backgrounds and communities to help shape future higher education structures, processes, services and products. Simultaneously, the "movement" must ensure its strategies are properly connected to those others which impact upon, and are vitally important to, the futures of the communities, groups and individuals being targeted.

Only if higher education as a whole, and widening participation practitioners in particular, address these issues will we be able to sustain current progress and embed it for many future generations to come. The prize was clearly articulated in the late 1990s by the late Ron Dearing:

"…the economically successful nations will be those which become learning societies: where all are committed, through effective education and training, to lifelong learning…in that learning society, higher education will make a distinctive contribution".[22]

21 L. Thomas and R. Jones (2007), p.9
22 Dearing Report (1997), Chapter 1

BIOGRAPHY

STUART BILLINGHAM

The author worked in further and higher education for just over 30 years before stepping down from full-time employment in the university sector in the summer of 2010.

His postgraduate study and research, teaching, academic writing, and policy development work has centred on issues of educational inequality and widening participation especially in higher education. In addition to speaking at national and international conferences on widening participation, he has also contributed directly to national policy development in this field. He was an inaugural member of the national Aimhigher Evidence Steering Group for England, and of the Ministerial Task Group which advised the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) on good practice guidance for targeting widening participation activities and resources published in May 2007. Stuart was the UK academic representative on the Council of Europe Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR) 2009-2010, and Editor of the European Access Network (EAN) e-newsletter from 2005 to 2010. Most recently, he was one of the editors of the book *Challenging isolation: the role of lifelong learning*, published March 2009, (ISBN: 978-1-905858-15-6).

Stuart was appointed Chair of the North Yorkshire Business Education Partnership (NYBEP) in June 2010. NYBEP's mission is "to develop the future workforce by delivering work-related learning and engaging employers in education".

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OTHER KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Professor Áine Hyland

Former Professor of Education and Vice-President, UCC

"Accessing Higher Education? The importance of early intervention"

Áine has been involved in education as a civil servant, researcher, teacher, parent activist, professor and university vice-president for the past fifty years. She has served on a number of government boards and chaired the (Statutory) Educational Disadvantage Committee and the Commission on the Points System which reported in 1999. She chaired a Working Group for the NESF on Literacy and Social Inclusion. She was Director of Bridging the Gap which ran from 2000-07 and her research interests include curriculum and policy issues in education, nationally and internationally.

Bahram Bekhradnia

Director of Higher Education Policy Institute, UK

"The many facets of disadvantage in Higher Education"

Bahram became the first director of the Higher Education Policy Institute on its creation in November 2002. HEPI is an independent think tank concerned with higher education policy, and has achieved an international reputation for rigorous and objective research and analysis, advising governments in 12 different countries and is one of the most widely referenced and influential independent bodies concerned with higher education policy. He is also a visiting professor at the University of Bath and the London University Institute of Education. Until it was disbanded he was Special Adviser to the former IUSS Select Committee.

Peter Brown

**Programme Manager,
National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education**

"Exploring Connections from a National Perspective"

Peter has also held the position of Acting Head of the Office. The Office coordinates national policy on access to higher education fortraditionally under-represented groups, working closely with the higher education sector, statutory agencies and the social partners. He works on a range of projects in the area of equity of access, including the development of funding prog-rammes and information resources.

Previously Peter held the post of Access Officer of Dublin Institute of Technology. He has a B.Comm. in Banking and Finance and an M.Sc. in Equality Studies from the NUI.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES TRACKING REPORT – 2005 INTAKE: AN ANALYSIS OF THEIR PROGRESSION, RETENTION AND SUCCESS THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION

Contributors: Mary O'Grady and Orla Twomey (Pathways to Education, University College Cork and Cork Institute of Technology)

Abstract

An increasing number of students with disabilities and learning difficulties in third level, pressure to meet national targets and a dearth of information available on the progression, retention and success of students with disabilities were the driving forces behind this research project. The research tracked students with disabilities registering across nine Irish higher education institutions in 2005/06 to determine patterns in their progression, retention and success. An in-depth case study of University College Cork and Cork Institute of Technology was carried out to investigate these patterns further. Major findings include: 1) the first year of a student's studies is crucial in their retention; 2) students with Mental Health Difficulties have the poorest retention; 3) Blind/Vision Impaired students have the lowest access rates; 4) the category of Specific Learning Difficulty is the largest in most institutions and these students attain the highest percentage of first and second class honour exam results; and 5) the Fund for Students with Disabilities is crucial in the retention of students and the implementation of supports in the first year is vital. The relevance and application of this research are discussed in this paper.

Introduction

Students with disabilities experience many challenges in successfully accessing and participating in higher education in comparison to their peers. In 2008/09, according to AHEAD research data, the participation of undergraduate students with disabilities in higher education was 3.8%. This figure was dramatically low in comparison to other under represented groups. Increasing the number of students with disabilities in third level has been noted as now being a national educational imperative[23]. In the past two decades a number of Irish agencies and associations concerned with the tertiary education sector have collated and analysed data and statistics concerning the participation and progression of students with disabilities in third level

institutions. Overall, these reports paint a positive picture of an increasing rate of participation by students with disabilities; for example, a rise in participation is noted "*from 1.1% to 3.8% of the total student popul-ation in the last ten years*"[24]. It is important to note however, that increased enrolment does not automatically entail increased retention and participation.

The *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013*, the State's strategic plan for increasing the access and participation of minority students and those with disabilities in Higher Education in Ireland, recognises the positive developments which have taken place in recent years but it equally acknowledges that much work remains to be done. Recently improved recognition of the need for enhanced accommodation and provision for students with disabilities is reflected in various strategic plans issued by the State, relevant agencies and educational institutions. Individual institutions contribute significantly to access and participation initiatives in their own literature, policies and practices. UCC cites the increase in enrolment by students with disabilities by 5% as one of its core targets for 2012, while also citing a commitment to increasing retention rates in first year of 93% or greater.

Two key challenges which unite educational institutions across the globe are that: i) "cultural barriers" or attitudinal issues remain[25], that is, positive attitudes to students with disabilities are still not widespread (for example, in some cases there is a fear that inclusivity may entail a necessary lowering of standards[26]) and ii) staff need to enhance their understanding of the needs of students with disabilities in order to best accommodate them[27]. Shevlin et al concur:

> *This is intimately connected with the many examples of insufficient knowledge and lowered expectations in relation to young people with disabilities [...] (it) must be treated as a cultural shift that will transform the current 'deficit' conceptualisation of disabilities and establish an equitable, transparent system...*[28].

23 Disability Support Service UCC, 2006, Review of Supplementary Procedures for Students with Disabilities, p.4.

24 AHEAD, 2009, Survey on the Participation Rates of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education for the Academic Year 2008-2009, Summary.

25 Goode, J. (2007), ' 'Managing Disability': early experiences of university students with disabilities', *Disability and Society*, Vol. 22, No.1, January 2007, p. 36.

26 Goode, J. (2007), ' 'Managing Disability': early experiences of university students with disabilities', *Disability and Society*, Vol. 22, No.1, January 2007, p. 36.

27 HEA, 2000, *Access and Equity in Higher Education: An International Perspective on Issues and Strategies*, Dublin, HEA, p.45.

28 Shevlin, M., Kenny, M. & McNeela, E. (2004), 'Access Routes to Higher Education for Young People with Disabilities: A Question of Chance?', *Irish Educational Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 2, Autumn, 2004, p. 51.

While there is quite a body of information regarding the national targets and entitlements of people with disabilities in higher education, a dearth of information still exists in relation to how students with disabilities progress once in the higher education system. This research tracks 438 students across 9 higher education institutions in Ireland to establish patterns and trends related to this sector of the education system. The research report seeks to offer additional insights that might add to previous studies carried out in the areas of student access, retention and success. Analysing the data on the access, retention and success of this cohort of students and reviewing the outcomes will enable the higher education sector to achieve the national targets set by the HEA and will provide valuable data to those working in the educational sector, people with disabilities, disability organisations and professionals working in the field of disability.

Method

Data was collected on 438 students across 9 higher education institutions who registered for the first time in the 2005/06 academic year. Information on these students was inserted into a tracking table for each institution which outlined the access, retention and success of these students over their academic careers. Summary tables illustrate overall trends in these institutions.

A case study was undertaken in two institutions where it was possible to generate more in-depth patterns and trends on students with disabilities such as: disability categories; programmes of study; examination success; funding and supports; student experiences generated through interviews; rates of access, retention and success of students with disabilities versus the general population; students first destinations; and the progression of students who entered via supplementary admission.

Interviews were conducted in a number of ways depending on the student's location and personal circumstances. Some were carried out face-to-face, others over the phone and more via email.

Results

NATIONAL STUDY (9 PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS)

There is a lack of data available on students with disabilities in particular in relation to reasons for their withdrawal. As well as this, each institution has its own method of recording students and for categorizing programmes of study making the gathering of data very difficult.

RETENTION

The first year of study is crucial in the retention of students with disabilities (see Table 1). Across the 9 institutions studied, the largest withdrawals are occurring in the first year of a student's studies. The category of Mental Health Difficulties (MH) has the poorest overall

TABLE 1

RETENTION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES PER YEAR

	CIT	UCC	AIT	DIT	DCU	NUIG	NUIM	IT Tallaght	Trinity	Total
Started Year 1	25	84	22	144	20	34	35	16	58	438
Reten. Year 1	23	77	20	136	20	32	30	11	55	404
% Retention	**92%**	**92%**	**91%**	**94%**	**100%**	**94%**	**86%**	**69%**	**95%**	**92.2%**
Started Year 2	23	77	20	136	20	32	30	11	55	404
Reten. Year 2	20	69	18	136	20	32	29	11	54	389
% Retention	**87%**	**90%**	**90%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**97%**	**100%**	**98%**	**96.3%**
Started Year 3	20	68	15	118	19	32	29	7	51	359
Reten. Year 3	20	65	10	118	19	32	27	7	50	348
% Retention	**100%**	**96%**	**67%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**93%**	**100%**	**98%**	**96.9%**
Started Year 4	6	17	6	6	0	1	2	0	12	50
Reten. Year 4	6	17	6	6	0	1	2	0	12	50
% Retention	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**0%**	**100%**	**100%**	**0%**	**100%**	**100%**

retention rates in the national sample with only 56% of students being retained over the course of their studies. On investigation of the first year of studies the category of Mental Health Difficulties (MH) also has the lowest retention rate of 78% (see Table 2).

Access

The category of Blind/Vision Impaired (VI) shows the lowest access levels across all 9 institutions amounting to only 2.96% of the total intake in the 2005 sample. This is followed by the categories of Deaf/Hard of Hearing (HI) at 5.93% and Mental Health Difficulties (MH) at 6.16% (see Table 3). The category of Specific Learning Difficulty (SPLD) is the largest category entering almost all institutions at 61.41% of the total sample as is illustrated in Table 3.

TABLE 2

FIRST YEAR RETENTION BY DISABILITY CATEGORY

	CIT	UCC	AIT	DIT	DCU	NUIG	NUIM	IT Tallaght	Trinity	Total
Physical/Mobility Difficulties Reten. %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%		75%	50%	100%	88%
Significant Ongoing Illness Reten. %	100%	92%	100%	83%	100%	100%	77%	100%	100%	91%
Deaf/Hard of Hearing Reten. %	100%	100%	100%	100%		100%	100%	100%	75%	96%
Blind/Vision Impaired Reten. %	100%	100%		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	50%	92%
Specific Learning Difficulty Reten. %	88%	95%	82%	95%	100%	96%	100%	67%	97%	94%
Mental Health Difficulty Reten. %		69%	100%	67%	100%	100%	75%		100%	78%
Other Reten. %				100%						100%
Overall Reten. %	92%	92%	91%	94%	100%	94%	86%	69%	95%	92%

TABLE 3

PERCENTAGE OF NEW ENTRANTS BY DISABILITY CATEGORY

Total Number of Students in Study: 438

CATEGORY OF DISABILITY	NO. OF NEW ENTRANTS (INTAKE PER DISABILITY CATEGORY)	PERCENTAGE OF NEW ENTRANTS WITH DISABILITIES IN 2005/06
Physical/Mobility Difficulties	43	9.81%
Significant Ongoing Illness	58	13.24%
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	26	5.93%
Blind/Vision Impaired	13	2.96%
Specific Learning Difficulty	269	61.41%
Mental Health Difficulty	27	6.16%
Other	2	0.45%

NOTE: The category of "Other" is not usually a category considered by institutions and so may not be often referred to throughout the report.

TABLE 4

OVERALL UNDERGRADUATE RETENTION RATES OF DISABILITY CATEGORIES

OVERALL FIGURES (FOR ALL NINE INSTITUTIONS)

CATEGORY OF DISABILITY	NUMBER	NUMBER RETAINED	RETENTION%
Physical/Mobility Difficulties	43	31	72%
Significant Ongoing Illness	58	50	86%
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	26	22	85%
Blind/Vision Impaired	13	12	92%
Specific Learning Difficulty	269	242	90%
Mental Health Difficulty	27	15	56%

Success

Students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SPLD) have the highest percentage of first and second class honours with 90% retained and expected to graduate (see Table 4). The case study institutions reflect this finding also.

Case Study (2 of the 9 Participating Institutions)

FUNDING AND SUPPORTS IN UCC AND CIT

The importance of providing supports in the first year of a student's studies was outlined in the personal experiences of the students interviewed in the research. This is supported in the case study statistics where funding figures dropped over the subsequent years showing less support is required.

The importance of the Fund for Students with Disabilities, provided through the National Access Office, was also highlighted through the interview process. All interviewees explained the value of their supports in maintaining their ability to partake in higher education. There are a wide variety of supports available to students through this fund and these are tailored to meet the needs of individual students. Without these supports many would not be in a position to attend college at all. As one interviewee so succinctly explained:

> *"The funding given to me for my supports has changed my life. I wouldn't be pursuing my chosen career otherwise. I absolutely would not cope without my supports in college [if I didn't have them] I would have dropped out".*

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES VERSUS THE GENERAL STUDENT POPULATION IN UCC

With regards to the data analysed from UCC alone:

- It emerged that the access rate for students with disabilities was **2.59%** (i.e. all 1st year entrants to UCC in the 2005/06 academic year who registered with the DSS).

- The retention rate of DSS students versus the general UCC population was **92%** and **90%** respectively (i.e. 92% of all DSS entrants of 2005/06 re-registered in 2006/07 versus 90% of the general UCC population).

- The success rate of DSS students versus the general UCC population was **75%** and **96%** respectively (i.e. 75% of the UCC DSS study sample in 2005 were expected to graduate and 96% of the general UCC population on average graduate every year).

   Note: The reason for this low success rate can be partly attributed to deterioration of some student's disabilities / illnesses as is further explained below.

FIRST DESTINATIONS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN UCC

Research into the first destinations of students in the UCC sample proved to be very useful as it highlighted that the majority of students have continued to progress in their studies. Approximately 44% of the graduates in the sample are still in some area of study (i.e. undergrad, postgrad or other) while 16% are currently in employment. Of those who withdrew approximately 48% withdrew due to deteriorating health conditions and 19% went to study in other institutions.

TABLE 5: COMPARISON OF SUCCESS/WITHDRAWAL OF SUPPLEMENTARY ADMISSION ENTRANTS 2005 WITH REMAINDER OF SAMPLE			
TOTAL NUMBER IN UCC SAMPLE	STATUS OF STUDENTS	15 SUPPLEMENTARY ADMISSION ENTRANTS	69 MERIT ENTRANTS (EXCLUDING ADMISSION ENTRANTS)
84	GRADUATED	60%	59.42%
	STILL STUDYING	26.67%	15.94%
	WITHDRAWN	13.33%	24.64%

SUPPLEMENTARY ADMISSION ENTRANTS TO UCC

Fifteen out of the 84 students tracked in UCC for this research entered the university through the Supplementary Admission Route in the 2005/06 academic year. This access route is currently known as the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE). These students have progressed well in their academic careers, proving that the route is a viable method of accessing higher education. 60% had graduated at the time of the study which is just above the rate for the remaining 69 of the UCC sample. 13.33% withdrew during the course of their studies which is far below the remainder of the UCC sample. Table 5 outlines these figures.

Discussion

In some of the 9 institutions participating in this research study there was an apparent lack of data available on the reasons for withdrawal. It is imperative that institutions are informed as to the reasons for the withdrawal of their students in order to address the issue of retention. There is a crucial need for a standardised system of tracking students with disabilities across institutions for more comprehensive analyses of this cohort of students.

The data collated from the general study of the 9 higher education institutions suggests that first year is a significant year for students with disabilities illustrated by the poorest retention rate. The interviewees outlined the importance of providing supports in the first year of a student's studies, describing how a strong foundation in first year can sustain a student through the remainder of their college experience. The case study supports this claim, demonstrating that funding allocations fall after first year. The absolute necessity of the Fund for Students with Disabilities was highlighted by interviewees who described the difficulties they faced in their higher education careers and how the supports were invaluable to their survival in the system.

The fact that the category of Mental Health Difficulty has the poorest retention rate is cause for concern, especially given the reality that they have one of the lowest access rates. The category of Blind/Vision Impaired has the lowest levels of access and this is followed by Deaf/Hard of Hearing students, however these disability categories have considerably higher retention rates.

The category of Specific Learning Difficulty has the highest percentage of success which can be partly attributed to the fact that this category has the highest number of registrations in most institutions studied. It was noted from the study that students with disabilities do progress through their courses / programmes of study but they may take a longer period of time to do this in comparison to the general student population. Students with disabilities have proved that they are on a par, if not above, in relation to retention in their second year of studies.

On evaluating the first destinations of students in the UCC sample it emerged that approximately 44% of students have continued to progress in their course of study and 16% are currently in employment. This shows that students with disabilities are very academically able in continuing to postgraduate level and many do progress to employment on completing their studies. On reviewing those students who withdrew, approximately 48% withdrew due to deteriorating health conditions and 19% went to study in other institutions. This demonstrates that students are withdrawing for personal and health reasons or changing direction in their career choices rather than withdrawing due to failure in their studies.

The Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) is an essential process in enabling students with disabilities to access higher education on a reduced CAO point basis. Regarding the 15 students who came in through this route in the 2005/06 academic year, they have progressed well and have been successful in their studies. This research demonstrates that while students enter on reduced points due to the impact of their disability they can perform on par educationally with the general population once they are given this opportunity.

Conclusion

This research provides information on the trends in access, retention and academic achievement of students with disabilities in higher education, the personal experiences and challenges faced by students with

disabilities, and more in-depth data is explored in the case study institutions (e.g. exam success, funding patterns, supplementary admission entrants, comparative analysis of students with disabilities and general student population). The study has the potential to inform the way supports within higher education are approached, enlighten guidance counselors of patterns and trends, and offer worthwhile information to people with disabilities, disability organisations and professionals working in the field. This research could be used as part of comparative studies with other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across Europe to investigate if similar trends occur in other countries.

The data and information generated in this study indicates that further research is needed in areas such as:

1) reasons for withdrawal rates in first year; 2) why withdrawals are highest in the category of Mental Health Difficulties, especially given the fact that this category appears to have one of the lowest access levels; 3) the first destinations of all graduates with disabilities of 2005 across the 9 participating HEIs; 4) the destinations of those students from the 2005 sample who withdrew from their studies across the 9 participating HEIs; and 5) continue tracking students with disabilities to increase the level of information available on challenges faced by different and emerging disability categories. In an international context, further research would prove beneficial in comparing the access, retention, and success of students with disabilities in Higher Education Institutions in Ireland with other countries.

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GLOSSARY

Participating Institutions:

AIT	Athlone Institute of Technology
CIT	Cork Institute of Technology
DCU	Dublin City University
DIT	Dublin Institute of Technology
NUIG	National University of Ireland Galway
NUIM	National University of Ireland Maynooth
Tallaght IT	Tallaght Institute of Technology
Trinity	Trinity College Dublin
UCC	University College Cork

Disability Categories:

HI	Deaf / Hard of Hearing
MH	Mental Health Difficulties
PHY	Physical / Mobility Difficulties
SOI	Significant Ongoing Illness
SPLD	Specific Learning Difficulties
VI	Blind / Vision Impaired

Other:

CAO	Central Applications Office
DARE	Disability Access Route to Education
DSS	Disability Support Service
HEI	Higher Education Institutes

BIOGRAPHY

PATHWAYS TO EDUCATION is a partnership and joint access initiative between UCC and CIT funded through the Strategic Innovation Fund – Cycle 2. It has the specific aim of widening participation and increasing access to higher education. It builds upon the work already undertaken by the Access offices of UCC and CIT and work carried out in the wider body of each institution.

THE BACK TO EDUCATION ALLOWANCE: OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO SUCCESSFUL PARTICIPATION IN THIRD LEVEL EDUCATION?

Contributor: Dr. Martin J. Power, Department of Sociology, University of Limerick.

Abstract

This paper examines whether the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) has successfully overcome obstacles to participation by welfare recipients in 3rd level education. The paper finds that BTEA participants require more than financial support to successfully access 3rd level education. Additionally, the research suggests that there is a need for a strategy which proactively targets those who are most distant from the labour market for the BTEA, and provide them with direct assistance to obtain a place in 3rd level. While recognising the importance of eventually removing the need for alternative routes into 3rd level education by addressing the inequities that exist from preschool through to the senior cycle of 2nd level education (Tormey 2007), this paper argues that we must do everything possible to ensure that the potential of schemes such as the BTEA is maximised, a situation which has not been achieved to date.

Introduction

Irish responses to educational disadvantage tend to be targeted rather than systemic. Yet there are two major limitations to such an approach. Firstly, such responses mainly benefit the most advantaged individuals from the disadvantaged groups that they are targeting (Lynch 2007) and secondly, focusing on those who are said to have 'failed' within the system denies us the opportunity to focus on inequalities inherent in the system itself (Tormey 2007, p.191). This assessment is crucial to understanding the ability of individuals to access second chance education schemes, such as the BTEA, which this paper examines.

Methods

The data collection for this paper was undertaken using a qualitative methodology. The focus of the research was to explore the perceptions of Back To Education Allowance (BTEA) participants on the effectiveness of the BTEA in removing barriers to participation in 3rd level education for welfare recipients in Ireland. It further enquired about the value, implementation and administration of the scheme, and sought the views of the respondents on any positive and / or negative impacts the scheme had for them, and what could be done to improve levels of participation. The interviews with 18 BTEA participants[29] were recorded and transcribed. A Grounded Theory approach to data analysis was then adopted to identify key themes within the data (see Creswell 1998).

Inequalities in Access to 3rd Level Education:

I begin by noting the words of Mary Hanafin, who when Minister for Education and Science in 2004, stated that:

> *"Equity of access must be an integral feature of our higher education system if that system is to deliver for individuals, society and the economy… There is now general agreement that individuals should be able to enter and successfully participate in higher education, regardless of social, economic or cultural background".*

(Higher Education Authority 2004, p.5)

Such statements were indicative of an evolving government discourse, where widening access to higher education not only offered benefits for disadvantaged groups but also for wider society. Tackling social exclusion through education, achieving equity of educational opportunity, and encouraging access to and successful participation in higher education have thus been national policy priorities in Ireland since the mid-1990s (Higher Education Authority 2004, p.9).

Yet, it is clear that a society where successful participation in higher education is unrelated to social, cultural or economic background has not materialised. Empirical evidence shows that while rising participation rates in 3rd level education have assisted all socio-economic groups, working-class groups have not gained any great advantage in relative terms (see O' Connell et al. 2006; Action Group on Access 2001). Furthermore, there are still major differences between socio-economic groups in terms of the type of college[30] students attend

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29 While my interviews were with people of similar backgrounds in terms of how they qualified for the BTEA, they were still diverse in terms of the participants' course of study, gender, and age. Furthermore, though the interviews were held in the University of Limerick and the National University of Ireland Galway, there was diversity in terms of the geographic origins of my sample (my participants came from ten different counties). I firmly believe that it is possible to extrapolate the findings and place them in a countrywide context as the BTEA is a national scheme and should be administered and experienced uniformly throughout the state.

30 See the Higher Education Authority website www.hea.ie for a list of these colleges. The Universities offer courses up to doctoral level. Institutes of Technology primarily offer courses to certificate and diploma level, though some degree courses are provided. The courses offered in IT's are primarily technical courses. The Colleges of Education prepare individuals for careers as primary school teachers.

(O' Connell et al. 2006, p.50; Clancy, 2001). The debate therefore rests upon whether we should be satisfied that the absolute participation rates of lower socio-economic groups have increased considerably over the last few years, or whether relative participation rates should be of paramount interest. I would argue that relative participation rates must always be of overriding concern as we must remain acutely aware of continuing competition to achieve the most highly valued credentials (Clancy 2001, pp.174-175).

Welfare to Education Programmes in Ireland:

Internationally, there is substantial empirical support (see Deprez and Butler 2001; Polakow et al. 2004; Christopher 2005) for investing in the education of welfare recipients, which results in major benefits for the individual and the state. A large body of Irish literature identifies a correlation between low levels of educational attainment, the development of socially and economically marginalized communities and the maintenance of social inequalities (see Lynch 2007; O' Connell et al. 2006; Clancy 2001). Such links were among the factors which first prompted the Department of Social & Family Affairs (DSFA) to offer people in receipt of certain social welfare payments an opportunity to avail of education programmes as a stepping stone to employment.

Yet Lamm (1990, cited in Jarvis 1992, p.407) claims that government supported adult education only developed because of the ideology of 'second chance', which holds that it is fair (in certain circumstances) to allow those adult individuals who have failed, dropped out of, or not completed their education for whatever reason, a 'second chance' opportunity to obtain those now valuable educational credentials. On a certain level this creates a dichotomy as to whether the individual applying for this 'second chance' is actually deserving of it, given that they have 'failed' in the past.

The Back to Education Allowance (BTEA):

In July 1990 the Third Level Allowance (TLA)[31] was introduced on a pilot basis, with its primary objective

LEVEL OF BTEA PARTICIPATION SINCE 1990:

	THIRD LEVEL OPTION		THIRD LEVEL OPTION
1990/1991	67	1991/1992	184
1992/1993	363	1993/1994	914
1994/1995	1228	1995/1996	2228
1996/1997	3150	1997/1998	3852
1998/1999	4503	1999/2000	4765
2000/2001	4853	2001/2002	4431
2002/2003	4968	2003/2004	5458
2004/2005	4,285	2005/2006	4,310
2006/2007	4,731	2007/2008	4,641
2008/2009	6,559		

SOURCE: DSFA 2009[32]

being the removal of the barrier to participation in 3rd level education faced by the long-term unemployed.

Initially, the number of participants was extremely low with only 67 applications approved in the first year. In 1993 the qualifying period was reduced to twelve months, other categories of welfare recipient became eligible and postgraduate courses were included. The introduction of a number of measures resulted in a dramatic increase in participants between 1995 and 1997 (see Power 2006 for details). In 1998 the TLA became an element of the new BTEA scheme, which was non-statutory. Further progressive changes extended opportunities to access the BTEA to a broader base of social welfare recipients. However, in 2003 / 2004 restrictions were placed on the BTEA[33], which resulted in the average number of participants over the next 4 years being approximately the same as that participating in 1998 / 99. From September 2005 the qualifying period for the 3rd level option of the BTEA was once more set at twelve months[34]. Further extensions to eligibility have been made since 2007[35] and this would *appear* to have impacted on the numbers availing of the scheme. Yet, increasing eligibility merely increases competition for the finite number of 3rd level places in any given year. In that context, comparing the numbers accessing the scheme with the numbers on the live register in the relevant year offers an interesting insight on participation rates[36].

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31 This was essentially the fore runner to the 3rd level option of the BTEA.

32 Data provided by the DSFA in response to a request for same.

33 The summer payment to BTEA participants previously on an unemployment payment was discontinued. Furthermore it was decided that the postgraduate option was now to be restricted only to those who wished to pursue a Higher Diploma (H.Dip.) or Graduate Diploma in Primary School Teaching. This was followed up in 2004 by the decision to extend the qualifying period for the 3rd level option of the BTEA to fifteen months.

34 This followed a review of the BTEA undertaken by the DSFA. The qualifying period for the 3rd level option of the BTEA stood at nine months if you were assessed and approved by FÁS under the National Employment Action Plan.

35 See www.welfare.ie for up to date information about the BTEA.

36 In 2000 the live register stood at 144,932 (CSO 2001) with the BTEA participation rate relative to this figure being 3.35%. In 2003 the live register rose to 170,822 (CSO 2003) with the relative BTEA participation rate dropping to 3.2%. Finally, the live register in 2008 was 240,217 (CSO 2009) with the BTEA relative participation rate dropping further to 2.73 % in spite of the numbers on the scheme increasing to over 6000 individuals.

The budget of December 2009 removed eligibility for BTEA students to receive a student maintenance grant as well as the BTEA payment[37]. Furthermore, social welfare payment rates were reduced by between 3.5% and 4.2% (DSFA 2009). Yet research highlights that monetary difficulties[38] and the lack of supported services such as childcare are prominent obstacles which have to be overcome by mature students (Action Group on Access 2001, pp.88-89; Healy 1997). The underlying reality is that the implementation of such measures will impact severely on the ability of the BTEA to tackle the social exclusion of welfare recipients in Ireland, as they will have increased costs associated with being in college yet expected to live on a reduced social welfare payment with no entitlement to a 3rd level grant.

Findings

BTEA PARTICIPANTS

Participants were typically under thirty five years of age, single and had no children. Those with higher levels of cultural capital have a much greater chance of participating in the BTEA scheme. Lower socio-economic groups show lower levels of participation in the BTEA[39]. All bar one of my participants had at least a Leaving Certificate, which was indicative of a trend continuing from Healy's study (1997, p.15). Furthermore, only two of my participants were unemployed for more than two years prior to accessing the scheme[40], inferring that the most socially excluded are a lot less likely to avail of the scheme.

INFORMATION

Most of my respondents did not receive adequate and accurate information from the DSFA, which impacted on their ability to access the BTEA and / or get the maximum benefit from the scheme. Denis explained that his experience of the social welfare office is that:

"… I got to deal with this member of staff who after listening to me for 5 minutes told me that another member of staff was more familiar with it. Then when she came out, I'm not sure about that but I'll take your name and I will send you out a form… it was about 2 weeks, maybe 3 visits and a follow up letter but I couldn't find one person who could say right this is what you do, this is the process".

Accordingly it is very concerning that little has changed since Healy (1997, p.27) highlighted that obtaining information about the scheme was very difficult and a general lack of knowledge about the scheme existed in local Social Welfare Offices.

THE ACCESS ROUTE FOR BTEA STUDENTS

Alternative proactive routes for disadvantaged mature students are becoming ever more important. The original intention of access was to transform 3rd level education by increasing the numbers of marginalized groups in the academy, creating a "fundamental shift in the distribution of cultural capital" (Williams 1997a, p.43 cited in Burke 2002, p.14). Ten[41] of my participants gained entry to 3rd level education via an access course, with participants highlighting that an access course provided them with increased levels of both institutionalized and embodied cultural capital. The allocation of places on such courses is often based on the results of interviews, where previous educational / work experience is taken into consideration. Participants spoke of the increasing difficulty of obtaining a place on certain access courses, and how it is becoming harder in relative terms for welfare recipients (particularly those whom the BTEA was targeted at) to gain places on such courses. Finally, one of my participants relates that he was told that he could not take his place on an access course because it had not been organised for him by the DSFA. This example highlights that decisions taken by individual civil servants can have a bearing on access to education for welfare recipients, irrespective of decisions taken at government level (see Power 2009).

MANAGING MONEY

Participants expressed concerns about money problems adversely affecting their studies, in spite of 72% of my sample being in receipt of local authority grants. These rates were broadly similar to Healy's (1997) study and the Lansdowne Market Research study of 2003/ 2004 (see DSFA 2005, p.80). All bar one of my participants felt that they would not have been able to attend college without the financial assistance of the BTEA. However, participants who were parents were more likely to experience the financial support of the BTEA as insufficient (DSFA 2005, p.51).

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37 This was in response to a recommendation from the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes (2009).

38 As a consequence of the inadequacy of maintenance grants, and the need for additional support towards the cost of books, course materials and transport.

39 There is a even a suggestion that this imbalance may be understated (DSFA 2005, p.46).

40 This was replicated in Healy's (1997, p.16) findings and the DSFA's (2005, p.47) own data.

41 Two lone parents, seven unemployed & one BTEA participant with a disability.

Diane*: At the end of the day you cannot educate yourself and live, and I mean we are not talking about holidays and dinners out, far from it. It's basic, very basic living.*

Maxine*: You go to the bargain bin in Tesco's to get your meat that's half price because it's going off Friday or its out of date the following day.*

Diane*: … You are not living. You are surviving from day to day which is a horrible and very stressful way to live. Nobody wants to live like that indefinitely and the only way out of that is to educate yourself".*

These views are highly significant given the changes made in the December 2009 budget which now prohibit BTEA recipients from being eligible for a 3rd level grant.

LACK OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

Some of my participants encountered a lack of social support for their participation in education, expressing doubts over whether they belonged in 3rd level institutions. Many participants believed that in particular, their mastery of academic language and accent was identified as an indicator of a devalued class identity. For a small number of participants, the fear of not belonging was reinforced by judgements from peers and family. The following extract is illustrative of this lack of social support.

"My Mother has never physically been out here, my sisters have never physically been out here…. This is a different world…. so if you speak to somebody who has no conception of what this place is like, if they do mention it, it's when are you going to finish and get out of there?"

It is crucially important to note that the BTEA does not provide assistance in relation to the alleviation of any of the difficulties just discussed. Yet in spite of these challenges all of the participants held they did not allow such judgements to distract them from achieving their educational qualification.

IMPACT OF PARTICIPATING

Healy's study (1997, pp.50-61)[42] and a DSFA (2005)[43] report documents that the BTEA has positively impacted on participants' class position. My data showed similar

trends. Of the twelve participants graduating during this research, three entered employment[44] and nine continued on to do postgraduate courses[45]. Only two of my participants returned to welfare having graduated. In all cases, participants graduating spoke of having greater confidence levels, status, assertiveness, and empowerment on finishing their degree. The following quote is illustrative of the tangible benefit of accumulating such cultural capital

"I recently took a case against the city council for discriminating against me on gender grounds in terms of housing… Ten years ago if someone with a biro or a tie was talking to me, then I assumed that he or she was superior to me education wise…. so if they told me Black was white, well then black must be white … Whereas now I don't accept anything that they will tell me first hand. I will find out for myself."

MAXIMISING THE POTENTIAL OF THE BTEA:

Thirteen participants held that there should be an individual in every DSFA office that specifically targets people who are eligible for the BTEA and gives them the information and encouragement to access 3rd level. The participants argued that this targeting is essential as being on welfare has a psychologically negative effect on those who find themselves in that situation.

"Just saying the scheme is there and it's up to them to decide whether they want to get on it or not is not going to work… There are people who have been unemployed not for months but for years. They are never going to be able to get out of that situation unless someone actually physically intervenes and says ok this is what you should do, it will benefit you, let's discuss what channels you can take."

It was very disappointing to find that only one respondent believed they were recruited to the BTEA in this way. The absence of such supports forces applicants to rely on their own social and cultural capital in order to access 3rd level education, a process that further advantages those who are already advantaged in this regard. This is an area where the potential of the BTEA to increase access can be maximised, yet it is given almost no consideration by those designing the scheme.

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42 76% of her BTEA participants were employed (with 81% of this group being employed in the professional categories) or in further study after completing their course.

43 72% of BTEA participants were employed or in further study after completing their course.

44 Prior to accessing the BTEA these participants were situated in the unskilled manual worker, intermediate non-manual worker and salaried employee socio-economic categories respectively. Having completed their courses and entered employment they experienced upward social mobility in terms of their class location.

45 All of those undertaking postgraduate study had humanities / arts degrees. This decision saw these participants seek to gain even higher levels of institutionalised cultural capital, which they would convert to economic capital at a later stage. In essence, they held that postgraduate qualifications are becoming a prerequisite (in particular for certain disciplines) to achieving a modicum of secure sustainable employment in modern labour markets.

Conclusions

Information regarding the adequacy of the BTEA payment, and the relative impact of financial versus other types of support on the capacity of the target groups to participate in the scheme, have until now only parsimoniously been available. As such this research adds to our existing empirical data on the BTEA.

In spite of increases in overall admission rates to 3rd level and national policy priorities to achieve equity of educational opportunity, there has not been any huge reduction in relative class inequality in access to higher education in Ireland. Equality of opportunity policies provides access to the competition for second chance education, rather than to education itself. I argue that in such an open competition the relative disadvantage of the very groups that second chance education seeks to assist will unfortunately be maintained. This research has shown the vital necessity for a policy, which facilitates vastly improved access for welfare recipients to 3rd level education. Such a policy has been implemented (sparingly) in the shape of the BTEA, however its impact is not being maximised.

The paper has presented empirical evidence that BTEA participants require more than financial support to successfully access 3rd level education. This research identified that 3rd level education is considered by many potential applicants to be beyond their capabilities, as a result of low confidence levels from their time spent on welfare. Thus there is a need for a strategy which proactively targets those who are most distant from the labour market for the BTEA, and provide them with direct assistance to obtain a place in 3rd level. While there have been improvements in the way information is disseminated I recommend that steps be taken forthwith to ensure an improvement in access to information on the BTEA and in the uniformity and quality of the information that is provided to potential applicants.

In conclusion, this paper argues that the apparent requirement for 3rd level qualifications in contemporary labour markets[46] and the positive impact of participation in the BTEA for participants is highly significant, particularly when we consider that when the numbers availing of the BTEA went above 5000, changes were implemented which saw the numbers decline again for 4 of the next 5 years. It is vital that we recognise the importance of eventually removing the need for alternative routes into 3rd level education by addressing the inequities that exist from preschool through to the senior cycle of 2nd level education (Tormey 2007). Until such a transformation occurs, we must rely on programmes such as the BTEA and do everything possible to ensure that the potential of such schemes is maximised.

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46 In the current recession unemployment has increased for those with third level qualifications but employment for such individuals has largely remained stable over the past year, the collapse for all others has been in the range of 10 to 20% (O' Rian 2009).

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BIOGRAPHY

DR. MARTIN J. POWER is a College Lecturer in the Department of Sociology at the University of Limerick. He has published his research on the Back to Education Allowance in a number of International Peer-Reviewed journals including, the International Review of Modern Sociology, Policy Futures in Education, and the Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies.

EMBEDDING INCLUSION WITHIN THE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT: LESSONS FROM THE SIF II FUNDED TRINITY INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM PILOT

Contributors: Michelle Garvey and Declan Treanor (Trinity College Dublin)

Abstract

Trinity College Dublin (TCD) established Trinity Inclusive Curriculum (TIC) in October 2008 with the aim of embedding inclusive practices within the teaching, learning, and assessment environment of TCD. This was a response to the increase in students entering TCD from non-traditional routes. TIC recognises that while non-traditional access routes have enhanced the opportunity of non-traditional students to enter TCD, it has not address inequalities in the teaching and learning environment. TIC addresses this issue, aiming to enhance the accessibility of the teaching and learning environment, thereby levelling the playing field for students from a variety of backgrounds.

This paper looks at the work done by TIC between October 2008 and April 2010. It reports on the progress made in embedding inclusive practices within the teaching and learning environment in TCD, and shares the lessons learnt along the way.

Introduction - Background and Objectives of TIC

In 2008, Trinity College Dublin (TCD) obtained funding from the HEA for a three-year project aimed at embedding inclusive practices within the mainstream curriculum of College. Primarily Trinity Inclusive Curriculum (TIC) aimed to promote inclusive practices through embedding teaching and learning self-evaluation tools into College policies and procedures and supporting these tools through training activities, and the creation of an inclusive resource website (www.tcd.ie/capsl/tic).

Following a period of research into the current teaching and learning environment in TCD, and consultation with key stakeholders, (e.g. students, academic staff and access staff), TIC created a draft teaching and learning self-evaluation tool.

TIC piloted this self-evaluation tool over the academic year 2009-10, and will take this opportunity to report on it.

Pilot of the Self-Evaluation Tool: Processes and Lessons Learnt.

The TIC pilot incorporated two phases. Phase 2.1 ran through semester one 2009 and phase 2.2 ran through semester two. The pilot represented all three faculties in TCD, and included both level eight and nine programmes.

The pilot aimed to:

- Develop a user-friendly self evaluation tool to be blended into design, review and quality enhancement systems,

- Ensure that recommendations arising from the tool are realistic and attainable considering resources available through consultation with staff and students.

- The pilot therefore sought to assess the content and format of the self-evaluation tool, the feasibility of the resulting action report, and the process for enacting recommendations.

PILOT METHODOLOGY

The pilot included the following stages:

1. teaching observation,
2. resource review,
3. stakeholder feedback,
4. tool completion, and
5. presentation of an action report.

PILOT STAGES

Stage One: Teaching Observation

The TIC Officer attended a selection of classes and other events (e.g. orientation and committee meetings) for each participating course.

The aim of teaching observation was to:

- Experience the physical learning environments from the perspective of students to discover any difficulties faced (e.g. lighting, acoustics, temperature, available IT equipment).

- Understand the variety of teaching and learning methods used across College to better match suggested future actions to real world practice, and

- Observe good practices that can enhance advice offered to future courses engaging in evaluation.

Stage Two: Resource Review

Selected resources were reviewed for each programme / module involved in the pilot. Resources included programme handbooks, reading lists, handouts, WebCT, and webpages.

The aim of resource review was to:

- Gauge compliance with the College Accessible Information Policy: http://www.tcd.ie/about/policies/accessible-info-policy.php

- Identify the information conveyed to students through different media in College, and

- Observe good practices that can enhance advice offered to future programmes / modules.

Stage Three: Stakeholder Feedback

TIC sought feedback from staff and students within pilot programmes and modules.

- The aim of stakeholder feedback was to:

- Ensure questions asked within the tool are relevant and grounded in the real experiences and concerns of stakeholders,

- Ensure suggestions within the action report are feasible and relevant considering the academic environment and available resources,

- Request instances of good practices that can enhance advice offered to future programmes / modules.

As the structure, size, and organisation of programmes / modules vary, there was no universal method of feedback collection. The TIC officer adapted the feedback process to suit each individual programme / module.

Staff Feedback

Staff feedback mainly came from primary pilot liaisons (e.g. Programme co-ordinators and Directors of Teaching and Learning). These individuals completed the draft tool and fed back regarding its format and content. They offered the majority of feedback regarding the usability and relevance of the tool.

TIC sought feedback informally from teaching staff following lecture observations on issues that they felt significant to their teaching. Lecturers commonly took this opportunity to comment on how the physical environment affected their teaching (e.g. acoustics within the classroom, classroom layout etc).

Finally, at committee meetings, the TIC officer presented the tool and action report, explained the purpose behind the pilot and welcomed feedback on form and content from all staff.

Student Feedback

As each course varied in size and structure, there was no universal method of student feedback. Instead, the TIC officer tailored student feedback to respond to the needs of each individual course.

Qualitative Feedback

For each pilot the TIC officer conducted a semi-structured interview with student representatives. She asked student representatives to gather feedback from their classmates regarding their academic experiences in advance.

One pilot programme had a peer mentoring system, and so the TIC officer arranged to meet peer mentors.

Another programme of eleven students was too small to survey, and so the TIC officer met a sample of students instead.

Survey Data

TIC aimed to conduct a student survey seeking perspectives on teaching, learning, and assessment methods along with College facilities and physical environment, with each course involved in the pilot.

TIC administered surveys either online or during class. Class surveys could guarantee a higher response rate and so were preferred. However, as undergraduate programmes involved multiple year groups an online survey took place instead with a response rate of between 20-30%.

Stage Four: Tool Completion

TIC sent the full draft tool to the primary liaison within each programme / module for completion, and the placement section to programme placement personnel where applicable.

Though given the option of dividing the tool between relevant staff members for completion, most liaisons chose to complete the entire tool themselves. An exception occurred where the primary liaison was an administrator. Administrators always chose to pass the tool onto an academic staff member.

After completion, the TIC officer arranged to meet with the liaison to obtain feedback on the process. Feedback focused on:

- Ease of completion,

- Usefulness of guidance notes,

- Suggestions for additional guidance.

Stage Five: Creation and Presentation of Action Report

Following data gathering, TIC created an action report for each programme / module.

Format of Action Report:

The main body of the action report contained, in tabular format, the questions contained in the tool, responses given, data collected by the TIC officer, and suggested future actions. TIC collated key actions, and invited programmes / modules to indicate the timeframe for completion of actions and the person responsible. Once these are underway, the TIC officer and pilot liaison will meet again to discuss the process of implementation (e.g. what was/ was not viable and why).

An appendix was included highlighting good practice either observed during the pilot or reported by staff and students within the programme / module. The aim of this section was to encourage and motivate staff, showing their current progress towards inclusion. This also provided an opportunity to promote the good practices of individual lecturers.

Following a meeting with the primary liaison to respond to any questions, the TIC officer circulated programme action reports to programme personnel and presented at the next programme committee meeting.

OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNT

Lesson 1: Importance of Visible Buy In

The visible buy in of senior academic staff was extremely important to the pilot to avoid delays and disengagement within the process.

The level of engagement from lecturers varied throughout the pilot. Some lecturers showed great enthusiasm, including reorganising classroom observations for the TIC officer, e-mailing lecture handouts and granting access to WebCT pages. Others displayed less enthusiasm, avoiding classroom observation and expressing reluctance to share resources.

In analysis, TIC noted that where there was active engagement the primary liaison was a senior member of academic staff (e.g. programme co-ordinator or director of teaching and learning). These individuals liaised between TIC and the programme / module, seeking classroom observation volunteers and gathering materials for review. They were also the first to volunteer for lecture observation.

Where there was a reluctance to engage, the primary liaison was often an administrator. These individuals, while seeking pilot volunteers, could not volunteer themselves. This, we suspect, gave rise to reluctance and fear amongst staff asked to volunteer for classroom observation.

We conclude that if you want buy in, the visible enthusiasm and engagement of senior academic staff, along with evidence that they are willing to hold themselves to the same scrutiny as junior staff, is important.

Lesson 2: Design the Tool to be Quick, Easy, and Informative.

Staff will disengage from a difficult, time-consuming process. Volunteers used different approaches to the completion of the tool during the pilot and this affected satisfaction levels. There were three modes for completing the tool:

1. A printed copy without access to e-resources or the TIC officer.
2. An electronic copy with access to e-resources but not to the guidance of the TIC officer.
3. A printed copy with guidance from the TIC officer.

Those who completed the hard copy felt greater levels of frustration during the process than those who used the other two methods. Without access to the TIC officer, or e-resources the process was time consuming without being informative.

Thus, the creation of quality guidance resources is important as the tool moves online. These will provide an incentive to users during the process, and guidance for good practice following the process.

TIC intends to further enhance and simplify the completion process through the creation of informative audio-visual tools and other resources over summer 2010.

Lesson 3: Ensure a Collaborative Process

There are two elements to this lesson:

1. Seek to work with, rather than judge, academic staff.
2. Value the insight that academic staff can offer you.

Staff within your institution will generally value inclusive teaching practices, and where best inclusive practice is not followed it will usually be due to a lack of understanding or external constraints (e.g. a lack of resources, time, staffing levels, physical infrastructure). Either way, passing judgement is unhelpful. Where understanding is lacking, provision of information and practical tips can be sufficient to encourage best practice. Where external constraints exist, work with the programme to find the best possible compromise or solution.

Always consider the insight possessed by academic staff. They will have invaluable understanding of:

- Areas where students experience difficulties
- Resource constraints that affect inclusion
- Enabling teaching strategies.

Listen to academic staff, learn from them, and use their ideas and solutions when working with others. Staff will have a lot to share regarding good practice and strategies that work for their students.

Lesson 4: Highlight Progress

Many lecturers view 'inclusion' as a new and exotic concept, and feel ill equipped to respond to an increasingly diverse student population. Without knowing it though, every course will already engage in inclusive practices on a daily basis.

It can be beneficial to highlight where current good teaching practices increase inclusivity, whether that be the range of teaching materials used, sample essays distributed, key texts highlighted, or summarising at the beginning and end of class to ensure students understand their learning goals.

By highlighting these practices, you can ensure that future recommendations to enhance inclusion seem less daunting.

Future TIC Activities

This pilot ensures that the draft TIC self-evaluation tool reflects and responds to the TCD environment. From pilot feedback the tool was revised, extended and clarified, and the content is now ready to be transferred online.

Phase III of TIC will run through the academic year 10/11 and will seek to further enhance the usability and scope of the online tool, and to embed it within TCD processes and policies.

Phase III seeks to pilot the tool within other Irish Higher Level institutions. TIC anticipates that either the final tool will be open for use by the entire higher education sector in Ireland, or, if this proves unworkable, other institutions will be able to construct their own version of the tool. This will help mainstream inclusion post-registration across the Irish higher education sector.

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BIOGRAPHY

MICHELLE GARVEY

Michelle has been working in Trinity College Dublin on the SIF funded Inclusive Curriculum strategy since October 2008. Her duties involve enabling staff to enhance the inclusivity of their teaching and assessment practices through training and awareness raising activities, and the creation of supporting resources. Michelle has developed online resources to guide and support staff, including an inclusion resource website and a series of self-evaluation tools.

Previously, Michelle has worked in various roles within Trinity College, the University of Sheffield and Sheffield College of Further Education including Educational Support Worker, philosophy tutor, and administrator on a back to education programme. She has also worked as a guidance counsellor. Michelle obtained a BA in Mental and Moral Science from Trinity College, an MPhil in Philosophy from the University of Sheffield and an M.Ed in Educational Guidance and Counselling from Trinity College.

DECLAN TRAYNOR

Declan has been working in TCD since the service was set up in 2000. He has responsibility for ensuring College embeds disability related issues in to the core of all thinking and delivery so as to mainstream all issues for the College environment is as accessible to people with disabilities as possible. Declan has worked in a variety of posts prior to working in College, these included teaching science in London, setting up 'People First' a self-advocacy organisation for people with people with learning difficulties all related to disability and working for Kensington & Chelsea as their Voluntary Sector Manager.

Declan has an extensive educational history and these include a B. Sc. in Science for NUI Galway, a Masters in Social Policy and Administration from the London School of Economics and Political Science and a Post Graduate Diploma in Education, Trinity College Dublin. Declan is presently specialising in the area of Autism Spectrum and Asperger's Syndrome having completed the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule – Generic (ADOS-G) a direct observational assessment used to assist in the diagnosis of autism. In addition, he is reading the Masters in Autistic Spectrum Disorder at Queen's University Belfast.

BARRIERS TO HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS IN IRELAND: FINDINGS FROM A LARGE-SCALE STUDY

Contributor: Dr. Selina McCoy, Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)

Abstract

The paper stems from a large-scale mixed method study (McCoy et al., 2010a) examining the processes underlying higher education entry and non-entry among young people from lower white-collar backgrounds. This socio-economic group, which accounts for 20 per cent of the population, is the only group to have seen a decline in their higher education entry rates over time, with participation rates now among the lowest. The study, commissioned by the HEA, assesses the relative contribution of social, cultural, economic and educational processes to understanding the position of this group. In addition, the analysis identifies crucial differences within this socio-economic group – with two groups with distinct educational outcomes clearly identifiable. The lower of these groups, dominated by service sector occupations, display educational patterns largely on a par with those socio-economic groups traditional targeted under policies addressing educational disadvantage (i.e. semi- and unskilled manual groups and unemployed households).

Introduction

Identifying which groups fare least well in higher education entry and understanding the potential barriers they face in gaining entry is of central importance to Ireland's economic future. However, in the Irish context relatively little is known about what shapes young people's post-school choices and the decision to enrol in higher education. A major Irish study (McCoy et al. 2010) focuses on a group which has not shared in the general trend towards increased third-level participation – the offspring of the "non manual" group. Within this social group, two distinct sub-groups are identifiable – one of which can be termed the lower non-manual group. This group largely comprises lower level service workers and accounts for just 10 per cent of the Irish population. Young people from this socio-economic group are poorly placed in terms of higher education participation and have seen a fall in levels of entry over time. This research assesses the position of this group over time and the processes underlying their low levels of higher education entry.

Methodology

The study took a mixed-method approach combining nationally representative cross-sectional School Leavers' Survey data over a ten year period with in-depth life course interviews with 29 school leavers from non-manual backgrounds, representing the most 'at risk' group in terms of declining higher education participation rates. The mixed method approach is very much to the fore of educational research today (Day *et al.*, 2008). A sole reliance on either quantitative or qualitative methods has been the subject of some debate, with researchers arguing that research programmes that emanate from one perspective tend to 'illuminate some part of the field … while ignoring the rest … [and hence] the danger for any field of social science or educational research lies in potential corruption by a single paradigmatic view' (Shulman, 1986). Further, the field of research into higher education access in particular has been criticised for the dominance of quantitative methods, which are judged 'to be more trustworthy and capable of replication', leading to a neglect of qualitative studies which attempt to unpack the black box behind the statistics in policy discourse (Bernard, 2006, p.28). Thus, in adopting a mixed method approach, the paper combines the strengths of these two methods to allow a much fuller understanding of the processes underlying higher education entry and non-entry among disadvantaged young people.

The School Leavers' Surveys, first begun in 1980, are based on nationally representative surveys of young people two years after leaving school. The surveys collect detailed information on respondents' social background characteristics, school pathways and attainment and post-school trajectories, including whether they pursued a higher education course. This data allows us to look at the characteristics of young people who progress successfully to higher education and to identify how different groups fare over time. Of particular interest are the experiences of different socio-economic groups, in particular the 'non-manual' or lower white collar group. The broad 'non-manual' group, is comprised of two main socio-economic groups: intermediate non-manual and other non-manual. These two socio-economic groups have distinct occupational profiles – the former is comprised of a number of relatively high status positions such as Garda sergeants and lower ranks and government executive officials. In contrast, the latter 'other non-

manual' group is dominated by lower level service workers – including bus drivers, barbers/hairdressers and waiters/waitresses. While much existing educational research in the Irish context largely considers the non-manual group as one category, such an approach has concealed important differences between these groups and hidden a pattern of educational attainment among the latter lower non-manual group which is highly disadvantaged (see McCoy *et al.*, 2010a).

The qualitative component was based on in-depth interviews with 29 school leavers, 13 of whom with at least one parent employed in one such lower non-manual occupation and the remaining 16 with parent(s) employed in intermediate non-manual positions, selected by theoretical sample from the 2006 School Leavers' Survey cohort, as detailed above. The framework of the interview schedule was within a life/oral history context. As Thompson (1988) highlights, using a life/oral history framework uncovers the underpinnings of 'the decisions which individuals make' (Thompson, 1988: 298). Using this framework allowed the research to focus on the factors which influenced young peoples' decision-making with regard to their post-school choices. Consequently, the research captures the essence of what shaped their decision to attend higher education or to pursue other pathways (for example, full-time employment). The interviews, taking a semi-structured format, spanned the home and family environments of the participants, their school experiences and engagement with schooling, peer influences, career and educational aspirations and the factors influencing their expectations and plans for the future. The young people were typically 22-23 years of age at the time of interview and had taken a range of post-school pathways, including entry to Post-Leaving Cert courses, apprenticeships and entry into the labour market.

Results

The study, based on analysis of both the survey data and interviews with young people, pointed to three main factors shaping higher education access among young people from lower non-manual backgrounds. These were: school experiences and engagement, information and awareness and financial constraints.

1. SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

Many of those who enter college reported positive orientations towards, and experiences of, their initial education – most simply they placed a value on education. Among those that do not go to college, this research identifies some important issues around self-belief and aspirations with young people typically stating

that college 'is not for me'. While these beliefs to some extent stemmed from a more short-term orientation and a necessary priority on earning money in these families, they also reflected the nature of their previous educational experiences at second level. The findings pointed to a greater risk of disengagement from school among this group of young people who reported skipping school, lack of motivation and misbehaviour which fed into a negative cycle of interaction with teachers. Moreover this group of young people felt that they had been treated unfairly by their teachers and perceived that their teachers held low expectations for them. Going to college was perceived as an extension of school for this non-manual group and hence to be avoided. Low levels of school completion and poor performance in the Leaving Certificate examination among this group were the result of these often negative school experiences, meaning large numbers were ineligible for college.

Several such young people were critical of their teachers and the teaching they had received. Some spoke quite negatively about their school experiences, which stemmed from a lack of interest in school activities, 'I had no interest in school; I just did not like school at all, the sooner the better I could get out of there'. For many who found school difficult or uninteresting, their response very much reflected that they had disengaged from school life 'I wasn't in school that much … it's long hours and very boring some of it … I skipped school a lot'. Some of the young people interviewed felt that teachers made a distinction between those who would go on to college and who would not, which then influenced how they were treated by teachers. What was particularly interesting was that some of this group had applied to go to higher education, but also had alternative education or training pathways earmarked if they did not gain access or did not obtain their higher education preference. As Sharon explained:

> … *they had their favourite kids, if they thought like you were academic like they'd love you but if they thought you were a bit laid back they'd just leave you.*

Many of these school leavers expressed a desire for varied teaching techniques and not just copying notes from the board or reading from a book. The respondents spoke about teachers who took different approaches that enabled them to learn better in class. Some were also somewhat dissatisfied with the subjects on offer to them and would have liked a wider range of subjects and more hands-on, practical subjects. It was also evident that those, particularly males, from the other non-manual

group were much more likely to fall into cycles of negative interaction, poor behaviour and failing to take school seriously. This had led to a process of gradual disengagement from schoolwork and a desire to 'get away' from education. This raises crucial issues around school climate, and has many parallels to the findings of a longitudinal study of secondary students (see Smyth et al., 2006). It points to the importance of promoting a positive school and classroom climate, where good relations between students and staff are fostered, positive reinforcement is promoted and students are encouraged to become involved in school both at formal (student councils for example) and informal (sports and extracurricular) levels.

2. INFORMATION AND ADVICE

This research highlights how the availability of information and advice on college is another key factor in the decision to go to college. In many ways, this group of young people were far more reliant on the advice and support from their school in making college decisions, since few had parents with experience of college and their siblings and peers were also not generally familiar with the college 'process'. However, findings show that for the lower non-manual group career guidance was variously absent, only focused on certain groups of students (such as the 'honours' class), narrowly focused or directed them away from college altogether. Some young people felt they would have liked more help in evaluating the range of post-school options, rather than just receiving information.

Those who successfully progressed to higher education were much more positive about the career guidance they received while at school and the expectations school personnel held for them. They spoke very highly about the career guidance in their schools and felt they had ample information and advice about their available options. They all commented that help was available in relation to the CAO (college application) form if required; this included filling out mock CAO forms. Other career guidance included one-on-one meetings with the career guidance teacher to discuss available options, aptitude tests, attending the careers day in the RDS as well as open days in individual colleges and universities. In some instances past pupils returned to their school to talk about college life, and guest speakers were invited to the schools to talk about particular career paths.

However, others were more critical of the guidance and advice they received. Some felt that they were often directed away from higher education, perceived that they were not considered higher education 'material' by

teachers and guidance staff and, where they did get information on higher education, it was often about the mechanics of applying rather than discussing what they might like to do. As a result, a number of (particularly male) members of the other non-manual group left school unsure about what they wanted to do and clearly lacking any real direction. Given that the vast majority of their parents had not themselves attended higher education, the young people were much more reliant on school-based advice than more middle class young people, hence signifying the importance of comprehensive advice at school and a supportive environment where expectations are high. Variable access to guidance and judgements as to their suitability for higher education information meant that many of the young people from lower non-manual backgrounds did not feel well-equipped to face higher education choices or did not feel that college was considered an option for them. As Sharon, for example, observed 'I remember my class tutor told me in sixth year that I'd amount to nothing and I'd fail me Leaving Cert'. She went on to explain:

> … if they thought you were an honours student they'd like do everything for you but if they thought you weren't good they'd just kind of leave you there do you know that way, I don't think they pushed us enough, do you know that kind of way, they just kind of left some of us.

Others, such as Charlie, would have liked more encouragement to consider higher education, feeling that they were not really challenged to consider this as a realistic option for them:

> So I settled for the apprenticeship, and like I said, I know that if I had of been pushed to do something, or if I had of been kept interested, I most likely would have gone to college.

Some noted that only the 'higher classes' were given the opportunity to attend open days, which they felt was unfair to other students who may have an interest in progressing to higher education. This was viewed as sending out a message to students that certain 'brainier' students were destined to go to higher education, but this option was not open to all students.

In reflecting on the advice and support from parents, there was evidence among the lower non-manual group that their parents were highly supportive in 'whatever they wanted to do'. Many didn't push them in a particular direction, 'they never put pressure on me'. There was evidence of what has been referred to as a

working class discourse of 'child as expert' in the UK context (Reay and Ball, 1998). Within the school context, in contrast, it appeared that for many the push was if anything 'diversionary', focusing on alternative post-school options, like further education (Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses), which were considered more 'appropriate', required fewer 'points' in the Leaving Certificate exam and were judged to be a less riskier option. In Sharon's school, large numbers progressed to further education courses, many doing so because they felt they wouldn't get sufficient 'points' for higher education:

> … a lot of them went on to do PLC courses … a lot of them were worried about the points for the, you know the way you have the big points [for higher education courses] … I think they all kind of put their name down for the PLC because they knew they'd kind of more or less get that … So that was kind of the preferred choice.

3. FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS

Financial issues also influenced the post-school choices of this group of school leavers. For some, the financial commitment to study was perceived as too great or would exert too much hardship for themselves and their families. Many felt that they would not have been eligible for financial support (and in fact this group saw the sharpest fall-off in grant receipt levels over time), or if eligible, they felt the support would not have been adequate. Again there was evidence of insufficient information and understanding of the system of financial supports and the costs entailed in going to college. The research also found that perceived financial barriers also framed the aspirations of these young people and, among those who were eligible to apply to college, perceived financial barriers often shaped that final decision not to attend.

Finally, it was clear that the pull of the (then booming) labour market represented an important motivating factor for males, particularly those from other non-manual backgrounds. It meant that leaving school without further education plans was an easy option and didn't seem to be challenged by teachers (and was even encouraged in some cases). While some of these young people now reflect on these choices with some regret and see themselves as more vulnerable than college-educated peers, it seems that teachers and Guidance Counsellors should place a greater emphasis on highlighting the implications of taking various post-school options in the longer term.

The study also pointed to the importance of focusing not only on college entry and supporting students in that regard, but also on supporting young people through their college lives. Levels of dropout from college during the first 18 months were found to vary dramatically across socio-economic groups. It is clear that, alongside initiatives promoting college entry, support for young people to fully participate in both the academic and non-academic aspects of college life is important. Ongoing monitoring of the relative position of this lower non-manual group both in terms of college entry and completion will also be important. Recent economic conditions are likely to further restrict the ability of these and other students to fund their studies through part-time employment. The current economic situation is also likely to curtail the ability of their parents, situated in vulnerable economic sectors, to support their children through college and increase the pressure on these young people to seek employment.

Conclusions

This study fundamentally questions the traditional definition of under-represented groups in higher education. It finds that young people from lower white-collar backgrounds (the bulk of whom work in lower service sector positions) have low levels of participation and retention in higher education – levels which are no higher that those from lower blue-collar backgrounds, a group traditionally defined as 'disadvantaged' in higher education access. Key findings of the research include:

1. The influence of early educational experiences. Many of those who did not progress to higher education were alienated and disaffected from school at an early age. They saw higher education as an extension of school and for this reason something to be avoided.

2. Information, awareness and support were also central. Many who did not progress to higher education had negative constructions of the advice they received while at school. Guidance was variously absent, only focused on certain ('select') groups, narrowly focused or directive away from higher education. Yet these young people were far more reliant on advice from school, given that most of their parents did not have experience of higher education.

3. Financial concerns emerge in various forms. The financial commitment to study was seen as too great or would entail too much hardship. Many felt that they would not be eligible for financial support. For males in particular, the pull of the (then booming) labour market represented an important incentive to forego college entry.

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BIOGRAPHY

DR SELINA McCOY, a Senior Research Officer at the ESRI, has worked extensively on key policy-relevant educational issues, spanning primary, second-level and higher education sectors. Findings of this research have been published in such international journals as *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility; Higher Education; Work, Employment and Society; Higher Education Quarterly; Child Indicators Research; and Educational Review*. Higher Education access and student experience have been of particular interest, stemming from work on the study Who Went to College in 2004? (O'Connell, Clancy, McCoy, 2006), examining the profile of students attending higher education. She has since led two large-scale studies of Higher Education in Ireland; the first examining the experiences of young people from non-manual backgrounds in accessing higher education, *Hidden Disadvantage? A Study on the Low Participation in Higher Education by the Non-Manual Group*, and the second examining the costs of participation in higher education. Most recently, she examined student progression and retention in higher education, published by the HEA as *A Study of Progression in Higher Education* (2010).

THE UNDERGRADUATE AMBASSADORS SCHEME – MATHEMATICS UNDERGRADUATES AS AMBASSADORS IN SECOND-LEVEL SCHOOLS

Contributor: Maria Meehan (University College Dublin)

Abstract

The Undergraduate Ambassadors Scheme (UAS) was set up in the UK in 2002. The scheme provides a framework for a third-level module that offers undergraduates the chance to gain academic credit for developing their transferable skills while working with teachers and students in second-level schools. The School of Mathematical Science in University College Dublin (UCD) first offered such a module in 2007-08 and has done so each year since. The majority of schools involved in the UCD scheme to date are government designated disadvantaged. In this article we will describe the relationship between UCD and these schools and describe the types of mathematics support our undergraduates have provided to them over the last three years of the scheme.

Introduction

The Undergraduate Ambassadors Scheme (UAS) was set up by Simon Singh and Hugh Mason in the United Kingdom in 2002, out of concerns over a shortage of second-level teachers in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects, and a shortage of students applying to study these subjects at third level. The main idea behind the scheme is that third- and fourth-year undergraduates enrolled on a UAS module receive academic credit for successfully developing their transferable skills while working with a teacher, or a group of teachers, in a local second-level school.

In 2002, 28 undergraduates from four university departments took part in the first UAS modules in the UK. (To learn about some of the first UAS experiences, we refer the reader to [1, 2, and 4].) By the academic year 2009-2010, over 1,000 undergraduates from 137 departments in 48 universities were spending time in schools as part of UAS modules. Initially, these modules were aimed at STEM undergraduates, but in recent years there have been modules in a range of subjects, for example, modern languages and Geography. For a complete list of departments and institutions involved in the UAS, along with detailed information relating to the scheme, please see the website: www.uas.ac.uk.

University College Dublin (UCD) became the first university in the Republic of Ireland to take part in the scheme in 2007/08 when the School of Mathematical Sciences offered the five-credit UAS module, MST30060, to final year mathematics undergraduates. Nine undergraduates expressed an interest in taking part, and after an application process which included an interview, six were offered places on the module. The UCD School of Mathematical Sciences has offered the module each year since then with nine undergraduates taking part in 2008/09 and the same number in 2009/10. At the time of writing, we have a received a record 24 applications from undergraduates from Mathematics, Economics & Finance, and Engineering interested in participating in 2010/11.

There are many interesting aspects to the UAS that are worthy of discussion. For example, one could write at length on the benefits that an undergraduate might enjoy from participating in a UAS module - from the development of key transferable skills (particularly, the skill of communicating mathematics) to the opportunity that the module affords the undergraduate to explore a career in teaching. Another aspect particularly interesting to educators is what the learning objectives of the module are and how one can effectively assess them. Others may be interested in reading about what exactly is involved in setting up and running such a module, particularly in the Irish context. However we will not discuss any of the above here. For the reader interested in such issues, we refer him or her to the articles cited above, and also to [3] where I describe our experiences of the scheme in UCD.

The majority of second-level schools involved in hosting undergraduates enrolled on the UCD scheme are government designated disadvantaged schools. The involvement of these schools in the UAS is the focus of this article. Specifically we will describe the relationship between UCD and the schools involved and describe the types of mathematics support our undergraduates have provided over the last three years of the scheme.

Schools Involved in UAS

For anyone coordinating a UAS module, an important part of the job is finding second-level teachers and schools who are willing to host an undergraduate for about three hours per week, for approximately ten weeks. When it came to finding second-level schools interested in hosting mathematics undergraduates from the UCD scheme, I approached the university's New Era Office. Fiona Sweeney and her staff are responsible for running the university's widening participation programme. One

of their aims is to encourage students from socially-disadvantaged backgrounds to pursue a third-level education. Consequently they have links with government designated disadvantaged schools in the surrounds of the university.

When the module was first introduced in UCD, the New Era Office contacted fourteen of their schools inviting them to take part. We invited schools that offered a transition year to participate, as we felt that teachers might appreciate the undergraduates working with these students. Eleven schools declared an interest in the scheme, but as we only had six undergraduates enrolled we could only use the same number of schools. The six schools were chosen primarily on their proximity to UCD and on whether there was a good bus service between the university and the school. This was to facilitate our undergraduates in travelling to and from their host school.

What surprised me the first year we ran the module, and every year since, is the eagerness of schools to take part. I always feel indebted to the schools who host our undergraduates, because I see the welcome that the teachers give them and the support and range of experiences they offer them. This takes teachers' time, and for that I am really grateful. Yet, the work involved for the participating schools does not seem to deter them in signing up to the module. The reason for this I believe is that schools are anxious to get as much mathematics support for their students as they can, and our undergraduates genuinely do provide such support in the host schools. In the following section, I will discuss the types of mathematics support provided by our undergraduates over the past three years of the scheme.

Mathematics Support

As mentioned above, while setting up the UAS module, we invited schools to participate in the scheme that offered a transition year. This was because I believed that teachers would not mind our undergraduates working with first year or transition year students, but would be reluctant to let them into classes where students were preparing for either the Junior Certificate or Leaving Certificate Examinations. The exact opposite was true, and since the scheme commenced in UCD, these are mainly the classes that our undergraduates have worked with. I will now describe some of the mathematics support they have given to these groups.

Primarily our undergraduates have provided one-to-one or small-group support in mathematics to students at either end of the ability spectrum in third and sixth year. A common problem that many teachers describe is one where they have a large group of Ordinary Level

students, included in which are a small group of students who are quite weak at mathematics and are on the verge of moving to the Foundation Level class. The teacher may believe they have the ability to persist with Ordinary Level but cannot give them the extra support they need. In the past, our undergraduates have provided such support to these students – either during class and/or after school in a Study Group or Homework Club. The issue of students not completing Ordinary Level Mathematics at the Leaving Certificate Level concerns many teachers and career guidance councillors, as it means that the students are not eligible to apply for many third-level courses.

Another common problem in some of the schools on our scheme, and one that seems to be a particular issue for schools in socially disadvantaged areas, is the small number of students taking Higher Level Mathematics at the Leaving Certificate Level. Every August when the Leaving Certificate results come out, there is a cry of concern from various sectors over the low uptake of Higher Level Mathematics. Usually 16%-17% of the Leaving Certificate cohort takes the Higher Level paper, and this percentage is low given the government aspirations of developing the Smart Economy. However in a number of the schools involved in our scheme, the percentage taking Higher Level Mathematics is in single figures, and in one or two schools is zero. (An interesting research study would be to examine the percentage of students taking Higher Level Mathematics in designated disadvantaged schools and I would hypothesise that overall it would be much lower than in the general population.)

Some of the schools on the scheme have such low numbers taking Higher Level Mathematics at Leaving Certificate Level that these students do not have the luxury of being in a class by themselves. Often they must sit in an Ordinary Level class, and depend on the teacher giving them extra support, usually outside class. In at least one school, the teacher was doing this in her spare time - at lunchtime or after school. Over the last three years, the UAS undergraduates have provided extra mathematics support to these students, working with them either during class or in an after-school study group. For example, in 2007/08 one of our undergraduates was placed in a school where just one fifth-year student was taking Higher Level Mathematics, and she covered a topic with him after school. The following year, a second undergraduate placed in the same school, provided mathematics support to him during his sixth year.

While individual or small-group support to students who are either weak or strong at mathematics, especially

in third and sixth year, has been the most common form of help provided by UAS undergraduates, in some schools they have also worked with teachers in providing support to first years engaged in numeracy programmes. A number have also worked with Leaving Certificate Applied students, once again supporting the teacher in giving support as individualised as possible.

Finally it is worth mentioning that as part of the assessment process, the undergraduates must deliver a *Special Project* during their placements in the schools. The nature of the *Special Project* depends on the group of students the undergraduate is working with and on what the teacher feels would be most beneficial to the students and school. The following is a flavour of some of the undergraduates' *Special Projects* in 2009/10: designing lesson plans on Probability for the new Project Maths syllabus for use in a Higher Level Junior Certificate class; applying the software program GeoGebra to teach volume to a group of second years; developing an interactive approach to teach probability to transition years; designing a game of mathematical bingo and using it with first year students engaged in a numeracy programme. In addition, there was a project on developing a power-point presentation on complex numbers and a few projects on designing revision notes on various topics from the Junior and Leaving Certificate syllabi. As some of these examples illustrate, the undergraduate's project can result in the school obtaining a resource that can be used by teachers and students in following years.

Conclusions

A successful UAS module should benefit all involved. The development of transferable skills and the opportunity to explore a career in teaching are some of the benefits that the undergraduate can enjoy. It is possible for both teacher and second-level students to benefit from extra classroom support, and/or individual or small-group support either during class and/or after school. The school may also benefit from having a lasting classroom resource resulting from the undergraduate's *Special Project*. Also the effect on second-level students of having an enthusiastic role model, who can tell them not just about mathematics, but life at university, cannot be underestimated. Finally, the third level institution gains from having a good working relationship with local secondary schools.

One of the things I have realised since being involved in the UAS is that the percentage of students taking Higher Level Mathematics at the Leaving Certificate Level in several of the designated disadvantage schools involved in the UCD scheme seems to be far below that of the already low figure of 16-17% nationally. If an undergraduate can provide any extra support for these students, then I believe the UAS has provided a worthwhile service to these schools.

There is no reason why a UAS module should be confined to mathematics or the STEM subjects in general. As indicated at the start of this article, there are UAS modules in a variety of different subjects running in third level institutions in the UK. Thus the UAS framework could be a means of providing support to second-level students in a range of subjects, while simultaneously provided undergraduates in these subject areas with a really valuable learning experience.

I conclude this article by offering my help and support to anyone interested in setting-up and running a UAS module in his or her institution.

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BIOGRAPHY

MARIA MEEHAN is a senior lecturer in mathematics in the School of Mathematical Sciences in University College Dublin. Her current research interests are in mathematics education at the tertiary level.

YOU CAN DO IT!: EVALUATING THE CORK TRAVELLER MENTORING PROGRAMME

Contributors: Pat Twomey, Jacqui O'Riordan and Michael O'hAodain (University College Cork)

Abstract

This paper draws on two evaluations of the Cork Traveller Mentoring Programme that took place between 2008 and 2010 and involved a number of secondary schools in Cork City. It locates the findings of these evaluations, in the context of literature on mentoring and best practice, in the area of student participation and retention. The paper begins with a brief outline of the Travelling community in Ireland. Particular emphasis is placed on educational statistics highlighting the continuing issues related to low levels of participation in education by Travellers. We examine related literature on mentoring, and particularly that which is focused on mentoring in school and educational contexts, as it has been used nationally and internationally as a means of encouraging participation in education by marginalised communities. The paper includes an outline and analysis of the experiences of mentors. It draws attention to the views and opinions of students participating in the programme and their parents. It also incorporates the views of a range of significant stakeholders. We then go on to make some key recommendations that will contribute to the development and sustainability of the programme in line with good practice and a student-centred approach.

The Traveller Mentoring Programme, Cork City

A Traveller mentoring programme has been operating in a number of second level schools in the Cork area for the past two years. This programme emerged from a number of initiatives that had been put in place, by various groups, in an attempt to increase participation and retention rates of Traveller students in post-primary education. Under the umbrella of the Traveller Interagency Group it was envisioned that a co-ordinated response could be more successful in delivering an enhanced integrated programme – and thus a number of statutory, educational and third sector agencies came together to operate and oversee the Cork Traveller Mentoring Programme. Since its inception in 2008 two evaluations have taken place of the Traveller Mentoring Programme and what follows is some of the main findings of these evaluations. However, prior to the discussion of these findings, it is first necessary to provide a brief overview of Travellers and education in Ireland and also an outline of the mentoring process.

A Brief Background to Travellers and Education in Ireland

Irish Travellers are an indigenous minority group who have managed to survive on the margins of Irish society for many centuries. They have their own language, share a common descent and subscribe to distinct cultural practices that enable them to be recognised by others, and recognise themselves, as a separate ethnic minority group within the wider society[47]. Because of their marginalised and minority status many Travellers have and still do experience discrimination, racism and socio-economic disadvantage (Hayes 2006; Helleiner 2001).

According to the last census (CSO 2006) the Irish Traveller population numbers 22,435, which represents approximately 0.5% of the total Irish population. The population structure of the Travelling community is significantly different from that of the 'settled' community in that Travellers have high birth rates and low life expectancy rates; the latest census figures also show the Travelling community to have a large number of under 15 year olds (two in every five compared with one in every five for the population of Ireland as a whole) and a small number in the over 65 category (2.6% compared with 11% for the general population). It was also found that the average age of Travellers is 18 compared with a national figure of 33 (Ibid).

Educational statistics from the 2006 census reveal that almost 70% of Travellers aged 15 or over left school having completed only primary level or with no formal education qualifications while only 0.25% (33 out of 13,134) reported as having obtained a third level degree or higher. For secondary education less than 3% of Travellers completed the upper secondary cycle compared with almost 24% of the national population (CSO: 2006). It was also found that levels of attainment for Traveller students, particularly in the area of reading standards, were still not on a par with their 'settled' peers (DES 2005:70). While these educational statistics are worrying there are some positive figures emerging from the latest statistics concerning Traveller student enrolment in second-level education as Tables 1 and 2 indicate.

While these can be viewed as encouraging figures they still cannot hide the high drop-out rate between the junior and senior cycles and the small number of Travellers obtaining Leaving Certificate qualifications. This in turn has implications for the low participation

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47 Irish Travellers in the UK are recognised as a distinct ethnic minority according to the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Race Relations Amendment Act 2001. However, in Ireland, Travellers have been denied this recognition (see McVeigh 2007).

TABLE 1: TRAVELLER STUDENT ENROLMENT
POST-PRIMARY LEVEL, NATIONAL FIGURES

Year	Total enrolled	Junior Cycle			Senior Cycle		
		1st year	2nd year	3rd year	4th/Transition Year	5th year	6th year
1999/00	961	478	266	116	31	51	19
2000/01	1,165	531	319	183	27	67	38
2001/02	1,365	582	397	220	31	86	49
2002/03	1,594	650	482	272	26	102	62
2003/04	1,714	626	527	341	44	113	63
2004/05	1,845	671	556	357	44	145	72
2005/06	2,229	745	638	478	86	172	110
2006/7	2,317	724	670	509	93	203	118
2007/8	2,598	848	736	558	85	236	135
2008/9	2,874	910	836	631	118	220	159

(DES 2010)

Note: These national figures are replicated in the Cork City area as can be seen from Table 2.

TABLE 2: TRAVELLER STUDENT ENROLMENT
POST-PRIMARY LEVEL, CORK CITY FIGURES

Year	Total enrolled	Junior Cycle			Senior Cycle		
		1st year	2nd year	3rd year	4th/Transition Year	5th year	6th year
2005/06	70	28	20	14	1	3	4
2006/7	85	27	30	16	6	6	0
2007/8	77	23	20	20	1	6	7
2008/9	86	25	25	19	5	3	9

(DES 2010)

rates for Travellers in third level education which the latest available figures estimate to be just 28 students for the year 2004 (DES 2006:74).

Mentoring and Education

In general terms a mentor can be defined as a trusted counsellor, advisor or teacher especially towards a person who is younger and less experienced. While the origin of the word can be traced to Homer's *Odyssey* the history of the concept of mentoring can be located in a much more modern setting (OED 2009). The first recorded use of the modern understanding of the term occurred in a book called *Les Aventures de Télémaque* by the French author François Fénelon which was published in 1699. However, the first recording of the term in English, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (Ibid.), occurred when it was used by Lord Chesterfield in a letter to his son on the 8th March, 1750. Since then increasing attention has been focused on the mentoring process as a means of helping people achieve their potential. While mentoring programmes are popular in medical, legal and business circles the use of these programmes in the educational setting has mushroomed in the recent past.

Many positive outcomes have been recorded in the use of school-based mentoring programmes in attempts to increase retention and promote academic success (Randolph and Johnson 2008:177). Students who are engaged in a mentoring programme tend to achieve higher grades and have higher retention rates than non-mentored students (Ogan and Robinson 2008:257). Even better results have been reported for ethnic minority students who have been engaged in a mentoring programme whereby it was claimed that, as well as increased academic success and retention rates, mentoring also helped ethnic minority students to improve their communication skills, better understand science and maths, learn good study habits, and generally cope better with problems (Allen-Sommerville 1992:30). For these and other reasons we had high expectations for the Traveller Mentoring Programme for which we were engaged to provide some feedback and evaluation.

Methodology

The following methods were used in evaluating the Traveller Mentoring Programme which has been running in a number of secondary schools in the Cork City area in the last two years: scanning, participant observation and a number of semi-structured interviews. The evaluation also relied on the idea of a wide consultation and communication process that included key players from the various agencies involved and with Traveller students from third and second level institutions.

The scanning element of the evaluation process necessitated a review and appraisal of all the relevant documentation in order to familiarise ourselves with the mentoring process and in particular how this process

could be useful to the Travelling community with regards to education. The mentors allowed us to observe and participate at their monthly meetings which were held in the various schools taking part in the Traveller Mentoring Programme. A number of semi-structured interviews were conducted with many of the key players involved with the Traveller Mentoring Programme including: Principals of the schools involved in the Programme, representatives of the various interagency groups and support workers. Consultations with Traveller advocacy groups, agencies, higher level Traveller students and other interested parties were also conducted in order to get as wide a response as possible from a diverse range of people and organisations. Feedback from the mentored students and their parents were also sought in the first year of the evaluation through peer consultation and in second year through the Education Worker[48]. The Education Worker also provided the evaluation team with monthly reports of initiatives being adopted and progress being made. One initiative that was run over the two years involved visits made to UCC and CIT by Traveller students from the participating schools to provide an opportunity for the students to experience and familiarise themselves with some local third level institutions and the courses, clubs and societies on offer there.

The schools that participated in the programme were Christ King Secondary School, South Douglas Road; Terence McSwiney Community College, Knocknaheeny; St. Aidan's Community College, Dublin Hill; North Presentation Secondary School, Farranree; Bishopstown Community College. The Ursuline Secondary School, Blackrock participated in the programme during the second year of the evaluation, 2009-2010. The number of Traveller students in the first year of the programme amounted to 51 students. This rose to 70 students for the second year. One mentor was allocated per participating school and the programme was supported by three teachers from the Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers (VTST) as well as the Education Worker, mentioned previously, who was employed in 2009-2010 only.

At the beginning of the first year of the programme the mentee students were drawn from both the junior and senior cycles of the second level system; 43 students were participating in the junior cycle and 8 were in the senior cycle while in the second year of the programme there were 62 students participating in the junior cycle and 8 in the senior cycle. These figures, even at first glance seem to replicate the national figures that indicate a significant decrease in transition from junior to senior cycles.

With regard to gender, in the first year, the students were more or less evenly distributed between boys and girls. However, the inclusion in the second year of an additional all-girl school (Ursuline Secondary School), together with a changing gender balance in some other schools, meant that more than twice as many girls took part in the programme as boys (49 girls and 21 boys).

Discussion and Key Issues Arising

INTERPRETING MENTORING

The mentoring programme in each of the schools revolves around the mentors and the students. Mentors also have the support of a member of the Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers that operates in each of the participating schools. The general role of the VTST is 'to promote, facilitate and support the education of Travellers from pre-school to 3rd level access' (Dept. of Education and Skills 2010). Their role in the programme involves supporting mentors on the ground and liaising with parents to promote participation of their children in education. They also organise and facilitate monthly mentors' meetings which continue throughout the year and which provide an opportunity for all mentors to meet and discuss their roles and experiences.

Within the micro-mentor/student relationship as members of staff, and, thus, as those with authority within the school as an educational institution, mentors have a key role in how the programme is developed and implemented in each school. Mentoring relationships often take time to develop and generally the catalyst for their development lay in attending to daily practical and organisational activities, such as attendance and so on. It incorporated academic issues in addressing the needs of academically weaker students, while at the same time supporting and encouraging the academically stronger ones. It also included addressing behaviour deemed inappropriate within school contexts, such as the use of strong language towards teachers. The mentors referred to being empathic with students, chatting, developing opportunities for informal engagement, and generally having 'to make it up as you go along'. Acknowledging Traveller culture and cultural differences between Traveller and Settled communities and associated norms and practices were highlighted as important aspects of the mentoring process. Their importance in laying the foundations for understanding and developing empathy was emphasised a number of times. Outside of this micro-environment, parental involvement is key to sustaining this relationship; in particular, the views of parents and students draw attention to the broader socio-educational context within which the mentoring relationship is structurally situated.

Throughout discussions in both evaluation years, the

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48 A full-time Education Worker was employed for the second year of the programme.

importance of building a trusting relationship was emphasised as core to the whole programme. It was suggested that through the mentoring relationship 'trust develops between the mentor and students and boosts morale of some of the students in the programme' (Comment from Mentor, Evaluation 2009-2010); through the relationship the mentor becomes a familiar face and contact for students and is identified as someone 'who is interested in' and who will 'look out for' the students. Students, while varying with location and levels of interaction, positively identified mentors as 'someone to talk to' and as 'having someone to look out for you'. They also indicated that it was good that the mentors checked that they were attending school and were very positive about activities such as lunch clubs, where the emphasis was not specifically on academic concerns or adhering to school practices.

MENTORS' VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES

The role of mentor, itself, is one that is evolving through participation of the schools in the programme over the past number of years, since its initial inception in the mid-1990s. Mentors viewed their role as a combination of academic and normative support, in the context of building a supportive and trusting relationship with students, located within the school environment and systems. Regular attendance at school was highlighted as important, as it was thought to enable students to progress with class work and engage with the everyday activities of the schools. Furthermore, mentors offered support in complying with ancillary school rules, such as having adequate uniforms, homework, materials for class and so on. Such support was thought to be of assistance to students in avoiding possible conflict with school management and fitting into school practices. This can become particularly important coming up to exam time, when mentors can provide a central connecting role, ensuring that students are prepared for exams, complete projects and meet submission deadlines.

With regard to addressing issues arising with individual students, mentors might, for instance, bring students' attention to their attendance at school, their conduct in class, and the possible options open to them with regard to education. They might also visit students' parents to discuss issues arising with regard to their education generally. Sometimes such visits were carried out in conjunction with Home School Liaison Officers (HSLO) in the schools and with the VTST personnel. As part of the mentoring process, in one particular school, a specific six-week programme was formulated, in order to address behaviour difficulties that arose with two junior cycle students. In this instance, teachers and support staff co-operated, and parents were consulted and supported the initiative. It developed individual education plans for the two students, addressing their literacy and numeracy levels. While this programme was successful, it was very resource-intensive. In another instance role-play was used very effectively to address what was considered aggressive and inappropriate behaviour on the part of one student. This provided the student an opportunity to reflect on the possible impacts of such behaviour on others, as well as an opportunity to discuss its origins. Again, this strategy was thought to be effective and could be used in a diversity of situations.

STUDENTS' VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES

Using different methods of enquiry students' experiences and opinions of the programme were elicited throughout the two evaluations, in the context of their experiences in school, and of first and second levels of education in general. Their comments included positive and negative aspects of these experiences. Often they made positive comments about teachers/staff in their schools who were supportive of them[49], they mentioned that they felt comfortable around them, and commented on how they often needed someone to talk to while in school. They identified encouragement and praise in school as important to them. They also generally expressed a dislike for a strict regime within schools. Also the use of journals, which seemed to record mostly negative comments, were viewed disparagingly by the students.

While on the one hand students expressed a desire to be free of restrictions of the formal second-level system, they had a positive view of what they perceived to be greater freedoms of a higher-level system. They were largely receptive to going to higher-level and were very interested in discovering that there was grant aid available to attend college. During the course of visits to higher-level institutions, the range of courses and associated job possibilities seemed to surprise many of the students. As a result of these experiences, they viewed the possibility of going to higher-level in the future more positively. In particular they enjoyed their visit to UCC's sports centre at the Mardyke and were surprised and pleased at the diversity of college life, which wasn't totally focused on the academic and had extensive and diverse social aspects to it. However, it emerged that their knowledge of the process of application or criteria for admission was limited.

During the course of discussions, students also brought attention to a number of reasons why their school attendance was low. These included traumatic events in their lives, the lives of their families and communities in which they live. Many of these students

49 It is worth noting that all students were not aware that they were involved in a mentoring programme during the course of the first year of the evaluation, 2008-2009.

indicated that they believed Traveller culture was negatively viewed by the Settled community and that Travellers, themselves, had a long history of experiencing discrimination. Traveller students involved in the TMP indicated that they felt that they were 'targeted as trouble makers and get blamed for things that they do/not do because they are Travellers' (O'Riordan *et al* 2010: 16). They also indicated that they felt that 'teachers had used discriminatory words in class to them and had very low expectations of them' (ibid). Worryingly, when asked to begin to brainstorm the issue, the words students identified that expressed their feelings regarding discrimination and education, included 'Tormented, discriminated and unfair, angry, not wanted and disappointed, terrified, really disappointed that I don't feel like I can do my leaving cert here' (ibid). Such comments did not seem to be directed at the mentors: rather they gave voice to their perceptions of their experiences of the wider society, education, and their experiences within and outside of actual schools. They highlight the connection between the micro-environment of the school and the wider society. These views and experiences give weight to the importance of developing Traveller cultural awareness for all staff and students within schools. They also demonstrate levels of alienation and distance from the system as it currently stands. Furthermore, there are indications from the youth groups that were held throughout the second evaluation year that levels of alienation among some boys was particularly high. Discussion, of any sort, concerning education, proved difficult with a particular group of boys, even when they were actively participating in discussions around other issues.

PARENTS VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES

The second evaluation, carried out in the academic year 2009-2010, also had the benefit of eliciting parents' views and experiences of the programme. Parents indicated that they were generally supportive of the mentoring process and their children's participation in education. However, they also indicated that they had difficulty in understanding the intricacies of the education system. For instance, the difference between Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied programmes was often not clear to them. Furthermore, some parents indicated that when they attempted to get some clarification on this, clarification to their satisfaction was not forthcoming from schools in general. Some parents also did not fully understand the grade system and didn't really know how to interpret results and communications from the school. Such misunderstandings indicate the importance of developing relationships based on trust,

active listening, and effective communication, not just for the mentors, students and parents, but throughout the school and their catchment communities.

Work with parents indicated that while parents demonstrated interest in becoming partners in their children's education, their own possibly negative experiences of education, perceptions of discrimination within schools, and social dissonance from education, present barriers to this. Also, within the community, it is generally mothers who deal with issues arising for their children in school. They indicated that other childcare and family responsibilities can take precedence and highlighted their need for practical, accessible, and specific information as well as one-to-one discussions about their children's education.

Concluding Comments: Sustaining the Mentoring Relationship in the Longer Term

In total this range of opinion, experience and concerns lead to the inevitable conclusion that in viewing mentoring on the programme a number of things are critical. The development of relationships within individual schools will of necessity be based on the micro-school environment, including local and historical influences on particular schools. The student-mentor relationship is a structural one, where the mentor has a lot of power over its form and construction and will operate within school norms, practices and priorities. It is almost inevitable that it will be instigated and maintained through attention to daily requirements of school and curricula. Its maintenance, sustenance and development, however, reaches well beyond such concerns, and rest on the development of mutual recognition, respect and trust.

In cognisance of this, it is recommended that the role of mentor become a longer term one, that the relationships are supported to extend beyond academic and practical concerns so that sufficient space is afforded to the more nurturing and less quantifiable aspects of the relationship. Furthermore, it is recommended that value be afforded to such nurturance throughout the school so that, in time, it has the potential to become a place where students feel comfortable to raise broader societal issues, which the school community, as a whole, can more actively engage in challenging.

Specific supports developed in each school will, again necessarily, be tailored to students' needs and levels of literacy, numeracy and so on. However, because there is a clear connection between development of such capacities and broader social concerns, they need to be developed in the context of the inter-relationship between the school, the parents and families of the

students and local communities. In this respect, at times, emphasis is diverted from more short-term and measurable criteria, to longer-term ones. However, mentoring can be viewed as a longer-term project that, while focusing on practical day-to-day activities, has longer-term ambitions. It is recommended that the programme keep the longer-term goals of inclusion in sight.

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BIOGRAPHY

JACQUI O'RIORDAN: College lecturer at the school of Applied Social Studies, UCC since 2006. She is a member of the BA Childhood and Early Years team, the school support and outreach team, and the Child Migration and Social Policy research group.
She also lectures in sociology, women's studies and adult education settings and worked as an independent researcher in Ireland and Tanzania. Her work with the Higher Education Equality Unit gained her extensive experience in a range of equality concerns. Her research interests focus on a range of issues concerning equality and diversity in local and global contexts, with a particular interest in the intersection between gender, lives and livelihoods, women¹s studies, minority groups.

PAT TWOMEY: College lecturer and Student Support Officer at the School of Applied Social Studies at the National University of Ireland, University College Cork, where he is also a member of the Bachelor of Social Work course team.

MICHAEL O'HAODAIN: College lecturer at the School of Applied Social Studies at the National University of Ireland, University College Cork, where he is a member of the B.Soc.Sc. (youth & community work) course team. Before joining UCC, Micheal worked as a Garda, including fifteen years spent in community policing.

Developing Post Entry Supports – An IoT Case Study

Contributors: Deirdre Creedon and Louise Bermingham (Access Service, Cork Institute of Technology)

Introduction

Cork Institute of Technology is a diverse and complex third level educational institution, including as it does the areas of Science, Engineering, Technology, Business, Hospitality, Humanities, Art, Design, Music, Maritime, Professional and Collaborative programmes. CIT has approximately 1800 full time first year students and students study across 4 campuses. The CIT Access Service is committed to widening participation, increasing access and supporting positive educational outcomes for under-represented groups. The Access Service actively ensures widened participation to CIT among under-represented groups. The Service will lead the way in high quality, professional amd responsive access provision. This is achieved through a strong commitment to education and social inclusion principles and by working in partnership with all key stakeholders.

Social Inclusion

The CIT Access Service is committed to ensuring that education is a basic right, not a privilege. The Service believes that everybody is entitled to equal access and equal opportunities in relation to their lives. It is committed to empowering people to take control of their own education and long term life chances. The Service is committed to social justice as a key social inclusion principle. Social justice promotes the right of every individual to be a respected contributor to family, community and society.

Education

CIT Access Service is dedicated to reducing educational disadvantage and inequality. Education is a key catalyst for social change. It provides an opportunity for people who may be experiencing disadvantage or inequality to improve their circumstances. Education is one of the key mechanisms for breaking the poverty cycle. The Access Service believes that equal access, equal opportunities and equal treatment are key principles to support access to, and progression through further education.

The CIT Access Service works with 4 target groups.
- Socio-economic disadvantaged groups
- Mature Students
- Students with Disabilities
- Ethnic Minorities

Up to September 2009 the CIT Access Service had one full time Access Officer and one full time Access Administrator. The pre-entry activity given to schools was focused on encouraging and motivating students from disadvantaged backgrounds into third level. The pre-entry activity that was carried out was offered to nine City DEIS Schools. The list of activity is as follows;

Drama Programme – 'You Get What You Give' Programme

'Science for Life' Programme

Access to Education, Bridge to Employment Programme

Maths Support Sessions for Leaving Cert Students

Biology Support Sessions for Leaving Cert Students

The Study and Sports Programme

Parents Information Sessions

Interagency Traveller Programme

Pathways Programme – Community Access

Pre-entry programmes in CIT worked with schools to tackle social exclusion through a range of innovative, targeted initiatives for individuals who for socio-economic reasons have not yet reached their full potential within the educational sphere. The programmes on offer have proved to be highly effective in enabling individuals to overcome barriers and fulfil their potential and have also helped to create a supportive educational culture in families and communities affected by disadvantage.

In 2009, in CIT, there were no specific, tailor made, post entry supports for students from DEIS Schools who commence a programme of study. These students have come through second level education where there has been significant additional educational input from organisations such as Junior Achievement, School Completion Programme, Local Partnership input and CIT and UCC Access Programmes. Recognising that entering third level education presents a new set of challenges, students who are accepted onto programmes in UCC were automatically given a full range of post-entry supports including financial, academic and personal supports. Due to lack of available resources in CIT, while there are generic student supports, students who have attended DEIS Schools had to fend for themselves in trying to find the supports and it can sometimes be a case of 'sink or swim'.

There was a concern that students were excluding themselves from applying to CIT because there were no evident student supports available to them. The Student Support 'Package' did not exist and therefore was not promoted to students or their parents at second level by their guidance counsellors, teachers, principals. Every year, the CIT Access Service received phone calls from Guidance Counsellors from DEIS Schools asking for the post entry supports for their students. They are familiar with the HEAR Scheme operated by the University Sector and were surprised when they heard that there were no specific post entry supports targeting their students in CIT. This 'message' was in turn given to the students, who can very often make the decision not to apply to CIT because of the lack of post entry support.

There is a very attractive 'Ladder of Progression' (see Appendix 3 for explanation) route available to students within CIT. This can be of particular interest to students from disadvantaged backgrounds who may be deterred from signing up for a three or four year programme. It was felt that if the Ladder approach were to be coupled with an attractive student support package it would make the decision to come to third level a little easier and less daunting. Without obvious supports in place, students who are exposed to considerable social, personal and academic support at second level can feel isolated, vulnerable and intimidated in an unknown and challenging third level environment.

Students within DEIS Schools are exposed to a significant number of schemes to tackle educational disadvantage. The DEIS initiative is designed to ensure that the most disadvantaged schools benefit from a comprehensive package of supports, while ensuring that others continue to get support in line with the level of disadvantage among their pupils.

In 2010 CIT received funding through the Dormant Accounts to put in place a post entry programme for students from its linked schools. Recognising that entering third level education, for some under-represented students, can be challenging and daunting.

The post entry support programme aimed to establish a programme for students from DEIS Schools. This programme ensured that the disadvantaged students who received the support at second level would have a similar range of supports at third level. While CIT has an impressive selection of student support services, this project aims to complement these and provide a specific tailor made programme of post-entry activities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Since under-represented students, as a group, are more likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds and to have experienced inferior schooling prior to college, they are also more likely to enter college with serious academic deficiencies…..Their departure is primarily determined by the nature of their on campus behaviours, especially those pertaining to the meeting of the formal demands of the academic system…. Where a sense of marginality exists, when students see themselves located in enclaves, departure is more likely. [50]

The Post Entry Project provides the motivational and educational assistance to students (who attended DEIS Second level Schools), during their third level education to enhance their ability to complete their academic programme.

The programme takes an integrated approach involving the Access Service, the student services team, heads of department, the Learning Support Centre, etc. It aims to develop strategies to ensure maximum participation levels in the education process.

Our Learning:
- A dedicated staff member is required
- Financial resources
- Heavy resource in year 1
- Certain emphasis has to be given at pre-entry
- Personal one to one support is crucial
- A good relationship with the student services team is important
- Identify boundaries with students – refer where appropriate.

BIOGRAPHY

Deirdre Creedon is the Access Officer for Cork Institute of Technology which has a commitment to widening participation, increasing access and supporting positive educational outcomes for under-represented groups.

Louise Bermingham is the Projects Officer for the Cork Institute of Technology Access Service.

50 P.73 Tinto 'Leaving College' 1993.

ADULT EDUCATION AND MENTAL HEALTH RECOVERY

Contributor: Marie Rooney (County Dublin Vocational Education Committee)

Abstract

Participation in adult education has the potential to counteract the marginalisation and segregation which people with mental health difficulties experience in our society. For many individuals, returning to education is a strategy in a recovery journey in which they are taking charge of their lives. It can be a stepping stone to re-entering mainstream life through gains in confidence and in social and cultural capital. The existence of opportunities and supports for people with mental health difficulties to participate in education is an important equality issue. This paper outlines the current landscape of educational opportunities for mental health service users, in which there are systemic gaps and few links between mental health services and adult education. There is a need for initiatives and structures which provide bridges for people to progress and integrate. The paper also outlines two initiatives which aim to promote inclusion and support of learners with mental health difficulties.

Introduction

Approximately one in four people in Ireland will experience mental health difficulties during their lifetime (Expert Group on Mental Health Policy, 2006). This proportion is greater in lower socio-economic groups, the rate of psychiatric hospitalisation in Ireland being significantly greater for people who are unemployed than for professionals (Daly et al, 2009). It can be expected, therefore, that Vocational Education Committees (VECs), being at the forefront of education provision for unemployed people and other marginalised groups, will encounter among their learners a significant proportion of people who have experienced or are living with mental health difficulties. Adult education provider policies on inclusion and support of such learners are an important equality issue.

Recovery

The mental health recovery model has developed since the late twentieth century. Traditional medical approaches to mental distress have, since the emergence of psychiatry as a profession in the mid-nineteenth century, emphasised diagnosis and categorisation, with a tendency towards viewing mental health difficulties as lifelong conditions, biophysiological in origin and treatment. This approach has been contested since the late twentieth century by mental health service user and survivor groups and also by questioning of the traditional

medical approach to 'mental illness' by some psychiatrists and writers (Bracken and Thomas, 2005; Tew, 2005; Scull, 2006; Bentall, 2009).

From a recovery perspective, the person with a mental health difficulty moves from being a passive patient in receipt of medical treatment towards assuming primary responsibility for their own recovery process. Recovery is not synonymous with cure. It has been described as "about claiming/ reclaiming a socially valued lifestyle, and social empowerment, rather than becoming 'symptom-free'" (Tew, 2005). Rethink (Schizophrenia UK) defines recovery as "a personal process of tackling the adverse impacts of experiencing mental health problems …... It involves personal development and change …. a sense of involvement and control over one's life, the cultivation of hope" (2005). In a review of the recovery literature, Allott *et al* write that "at its simplest, recovery can be defined as a subjective experience of regaining control over one's life" (2002). Deegan, who was one of the founders of the recovery movement, writes: "To me recovery means I try to stay in the driver's seat of my life. I don't let my illness run me" (1996).

The concept of recovery is extremely relevant to adult education. The opportunity to return to education can be an important ingredient in recovery for many individuals. In a study carried out by this author in 2008/9, people who had experienced mental health difficulties and were taking part in VEC-run adult education programmes were interviewed in depth about their experience of return to education. Participants reported gains in self-confidence, in cultural and social capital and in aspirations for their future. Learning in itself was of intrinsic value, playing an important role ranging from *occupation* ("Studying is a way of occupying my mind and stopping it turning in on itself") to *affirmation* ("I kind of thought I'll never be able to learn anything again – you feel like you're losing your mind when you're depressed … Once you feel that coming back it makes you feel so much more normal again") to *salvation* ("Being here in VTOS has been my saviour and studying – it's my therapy…. Basically it's my prescription").

These participants were on a recovery journey. They demonstrated the qualities of hope, agency and taking charge with self-directed coping strategies which are essential factors in recovery. Return to education enabled them to take a significant further step. However, the experience of education as a step in recovery cannot take place in a vacuum. Although recovery is a deeply individual

and personal process, it needs external supports and opportunities in order to happen: links and bridges between mental health services and adult education providers, along with inclusive and supportive attitudes and practices in education settings.

Systemic Gaps

"Mental health is an issue that cuts across traditional sectors and includes health, welfare, justice, education, housing, communities and NGOs. These sectors therefore need to collaborate for improved mental health care of the population" (WHO, 2007). Countries which are recognised as exemplars of good mental health practice, such as Scotland, Finland and New Zealand, have adopted cross-sectoral approaches, including building links between mental health and education services. In Ireland, however, "most departments have not taken substantial specific mental health action and …. it is clear that critical gaps remain" (Amnesty, 2010).

One of these 'critical gaps' is the building of systemic connections between mental health services and adult education. There is a lack of awareness on the part of both mental health and adult education services in Ireland of the potential recovery benefits of educational participation for mental health service users. This lack is evident in policy documents, both local and national, as well as in practice. The potential value of education for people with mental health problems is noted in a number of Irish policy documents. *A Vision for Change*, the document which outlines government policy for the mental health services, mentions adult education: "The flexible provision of adult education programmes can help address the educational needs of adults with mental health problems, especially for those who have dropped out of education early" (2006). This represents a limited view of the potential benefits of educational participation. "Addressing educational needs", the main aim of adult education, is inextricably bound up with many other potential benefits to adults with mental health problems. Participation in education can make a significant contribution to a person's mental health and is one of the most effective ways of tackling social exclusion and marginalisation.

The National Economic and Social Forum in its report on Mental Health and Social Inclusion demonstrates greater appreciation of the potential role of education in recovery: "Access to education is central to developing positive mental health and support for those with experience of mental ill-health. One strategy is that all learning institutions should have practical and user-friendly mental health policies, along with a holistic approach towards mental health. In addition, staff in these institutions should receive training and education to raise awareness about the needs of those with mental health problems, and confidence in working with this group" (NESF, 2007).

The aspirations expressed in both of these documents are a long way from realisation in adult education. This is largely due to lack of development of links between mental health services and education at both national and local level. At local level, failure to staff fully the proposed community mental health teams militates against proactive liaison with adult education services. At national level, "one of the central barriers to social inclusion for those with mental ill-health is a lack of responsibility by official bodies and agencies for non-health outcomes. To support recovery, responses for further social inclusion must include broader social and vocational aspects, not just health services" (NESF, 2007). There may have been some shift in thinking from a medical model towards a social model of mental health, but this has not translated into the development of integrated services with a holistic approach to promoting social inclusion. "The model of service delivery has still not substantially changed ... Many of the actions in the HSE Implementation Plan will simply result in a replication, on a larger scale, of what is already in place. There is no sense …. of the transformation that needs to take place in how mental health services are delivered" (Mental Health Commission, 2009).

Just as the mental health services, while moving physically from long-stay hospital care to community-based provision, are slow to adopt the change of culture needed to broaden treatment and supports beyond medical treatment, so VECs still perceive their role in education for people with mental health problems to be, for the most part, the provision of classes in segregated mental health settings. From the 1960s VECs provided classes in psychiatric hospitals; with the closure of asylums and moves towards community-based services, classes are now held in other mental health service settings such as day centres, training centres or even hostels. This type of education provision, while it has value, is based on a charity rather than a human rights model. It does not contribute to the progression of individual learners towards integration in mainstream education provision, or even towards their taking part in targeted programmes in mainstream adult education settings. In fact it may act towards perpetuating the social segregation of people with mental health difficulties.

The provision of discrete or separate classes/programmes for people with mental health problems as opposed to their integration into mainstream programmes

raises many issues with regard to equality, inclusion and progression. There is no doubt that education programmes specifically for people with mental health problems may be the only type of provision in which some people will be able or willing to participate and that it may be of crucial importance in their lives. However, "there are equality issues with regard to segregation of marginalised groups …. specific attention needs to be paid to ensuring progression from such entry level programmes to programmes offering higher levels of qualifications and skills. Failure to do this will result in a limited contribution to addressing the labour market inequality experienced by particular groups of people, notably members of the Traveller community, people with disabilities, and older people" (Ronayne, 2005).

These equality issues are particularly relevant to people with mental health problems in view of the long history of segregation and silencing of this group. There is a danger that people in segregated settings may develop what some call a "mental patient culture" of dependency and stigmatisation. "This isolation has helped develop a subculture in which many people with psychiatric disabilities accept themselves as part of a marginalized group of second-class citizens. People in this situation tend to think of themselves as 'mental patients', with all the emotional baggage that implies, rather than as citizens with psychiatric disabilities" (Penney and Bassman, 2007). People with long-term mental health problems experience severe stigma and marginalisation. Internationally, people with a psychiatric history do badly in their rate of returning to work when compared with people with other disabilities. This rate is particularly low in Ireland, with, according to the CSO Quarterly National Household Survey, only 15% of people with longstanding mental health problems in employment (Disability Update 2004, table 5b), an extraordinarily low rate particularly in what was a period of almost full employment. "People with mental health problems and disorders are disproportionately outside the labour market of employment, indeed outside the labour force entirely, and condemned to the double isolation of mental illness and workforce exclusion" (Conroy, 2005).

Need for a Continuum of Provision

"You wouldn't be ready for [a mainstream course] when you've just been diagnosed or when you're coming out of hospital. People said to me at the time you should get a job or do a course but no way would I have been ready for it – I'd have been missing so much it would have been overwhelming", said a participant in my study who subsequently completed successfully a full-time mainstream programme in an adult education centre.

Some people with mental health difficulties need the provision of targeted courses to enable them to access continuing education on an equal basis with other adults. Others will be able, with support, to use mainstream provision. Different types of provision are needed for people at different stages of the mental health continuum, the range to include:

1. Programmes in sheltered mental health settings.
2. Targeted programmes for groups of mental health service users in adult education settings.
3. Participation of people with mental health problems in part-time programmes.
4. Participation in full-time mainstream programmes.

The first situation listed above is the most common for people with long-term mental health problems in Ireland. There is a dearth of stepping stones and structures to support people progressing into and through the other categories of provision. This is a significant gap in provision because "educational provision in the community, targeting people with mental health difficulties, can be a 'bridge' between hospital and the community, particularly for those who do not feel ready to move straight onto general (mainstream) classes" (Wertheimer, 1997, p.6). In my study I found few instances of organisation and support of access to public service education for mental health service users. There were some exceptions, where individual learners were encouraged and supported to progress. However, these were exceptions because they depended on the interest and commitment of individual HSE or VEC staff and were not the outcome of any systemic links or development of policy. These interventions last only as long as the individual staff member remains *in situ* and committed enough to continue without systemic support.

Structures and Attitudes

To promote inclusion and equality for marginalised groups "adapting structures and attitudes are of equal importance" (O'Leary, 2003, p.2009). For adult education providers this implies the necessity of:

• links with mental health services to provide educational opportunities as bridges to mainstream adult education for mental health service users, as well as

• development and implementation of policies for support of learners who do access adult education, supported by staff training and development.

Progress in partnership and integration would reflect practice in New Zealand, whose mental health services

have been based on a recovery-centred 'blueprint' since the 1990s. The New Zealand *Blueprint for Mental Health Services: How things should be* highlights the importance of links between mental health and education services: "Provision of education and employment services is not the responsibility of the health sector. However, support to access and use these services is essential to achieving better health outcomes and recovery, and leads directly to reduced levels of illness and disability. Health services need to ensure people affected by mental illness have access to employment and education services [and should] facilitate collaboration between different sectors to ensure these needs are being met at both national policy and local service levels" (New Zealand Mental Health Commission, 1998).

The importance of attitudes is evidenced by the fact that the support most valued by participants in my study was an inclusive and encouraging attitude on the part of staff. The simplicity of this is sometimes surprising to adult education staff, who take for granted "an inclusive and encouraging attitude" as intrinsic to their practice. A HSE manager in the mental health service who is involved in developing a recovery approach confirms that mental health staff are also often "confounded by the simplicity" of the effectiveness of respect and encouragement in promoting recovery. It is easy to underestimate the lack of self-confidence experienced by learners with mental health difficulties. "Oh, it has knocked [my confidence] I have to say it has definitely knocked it. I think basically a lot of it is to do with the stigma that's still attached to mental illness anyway" said one participant in my study. Participants generally valued encouragement and support from tutors, and in some cases particularly from co-ordinators, as the most important factor in their successful completion of their course.

Policy, to be effective, needs to be developed with the active involvement of staff and then to be disseminated through training rather than simply being sent out by post or uploaded on to a website. This training should take place within the context of equality training and equality planning. All staff, including reception and ancillary staff, should have training in basic awareness of equality issues and of inclusion and support policies. Key staff should have the opportunity to confront their prejudices and biases and to reflect on their practice. Tutors may need more in-depth training on issues such as classroom practice and management. It is important that staff development emphasises the importance of boundaries, the distinction between education and counselling roles and a professional model of caring, which promotes independence as opposed to a culture of dependency.

Some Initiatives

County Dublin VEC has introduced two pilot initiatives in 2009/10, one focusing on collaboration with mental health services, the other on staff development.

A targeted course for mental health service users has been planned and developed through collaboration between an Adult Education Service and a Clubhouse (a HSE-funded day centre) in the same local area. An initial survey of Clubhouse members' preferences and needs with regard to a possible course informed planning from the start. A planning group consisting of Clubhouse members and staff along with VEC staff worked over several months on developing design and protocols for a course which started in September 2010. Responding to expressed needs for personal development and confidence building, an integrated 20-week programme in drama and creative writing will run for two afternoons per week in the Adult Education Centre. Learners will be supported with continuing collaboration between Adult Education and Clubhouse staff, with encouragement for individual learners to avail of progression opportunities. The course will be monitored, evaluated and reported, and it is hoped that the initiative will provide experience and learning which will inform further such developments.

A pilot training programme for County Dublin VEC adult education staff on inclusion and support of learners with mental health difficulties has also been developed and implemented. In recent years, staff in mainstream programmes had voiced concern about growth in the number of learners with a history of mental health problems, expressing fear and uncertainty regarding how best to work with such learners. An adult and further education working group drew up guidelines for support and inclusion during 2009. To support implementation of the guidelines, a five-day training programme was organised for Guidance Counsellors and Programme Co-ordinators, to take place at intervals during the year 2010. The training started with a session on the recovery model of mental health, facilitated in collaboration with the mental health services and emphasising mental health as a continuum as opposed to the 'othering' of those with mental health difficulties. Since then, sessions have focused on practical issues including access, enrolment, boundaries, support, mental health services and self-care. This training programme will be evaluated and reported and is seen as the first step in dissemination of guidelines and policy. In line with the principles of Universal Design, good practice in relation to students with mental health problems is simply good adult education practice and has benefits for all.

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BIOGRAPHY

MARIE ROONEY worked as a Guidance Counsellor for many years before branching out into other areas of education. Since then her roles have included developing and supporting the Leaving Certificate Applied programme and managing a cross-border Education for Reconciliation project. She is currently working as Development Officer in Adult and Further Education in County Dublin VEC. She was awarded an Education Doctorate by NUI Maynooth in 2010 for her thesis on Adult Education and Mental Health Recovery.

CREATING A COMMUNITY UNIVERSITY: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH WITHIN TRANFORMATIVE COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Contributor: Avril Bailey (An Cosan, Shanty Education Centre, Jobstown)

Abstract

This paper is a case study of An Cosán's innovative approach to support community individuals, activist and leaders, from Tallaght West, to engage in activism, contribute to social change in their communities and to progress to and access Third Level Education.

An Cosán is distinctive, dynamic and groundbreaking in its approach to radical community education and this article will attempt to illustrate this in its narration of the odyssey that led 17 students to the beginning of their final year in their Degree in Leadership and Community development in their own community.

It provides an overview of the collaborative process between community leaders and An Cosán in the development of the pioneering BA Degree in Leadership and Community Development.

I will argue that the community education sector is ideally positioned to provide continuous education services, from basic to third level education, which can build on its acknowledged track record of supporting those most impacted by socio economic, educational and social disadvantage to achieve equitable outcomes from all available educational opportunities.

I will show that while community education is recognised, supported and valued in various policy documents and political commitments. However I will also show that while community education is recognised in specific policy documents this rarely translates into significant support for the sector.

Introduction

An Cosán is a centre of Learning, Leadership and Enterprise. Its mission is *'to contribute to the development of a culture of learning and leadership through education and enterprise solutions for the challenges facing Tallaght West'*. [51]

The primary aim of An Cosán has always been to enable and support the people of Tallaght West in the active transformation of their individual lives and the life of their community through education. An Cosán is committed to the principles of equality of opportunity and outcomes, empowerment and capacity building and uses education as the tool with which to effect personal and social change.

This distinctive model of community education evolved over twenty five years and now has over 600 student places accessed annually in a range of education courses. An Cosán also provides early childhood education and care, and a social franchise enterprise providing early years education and care.

Tallaght West which comprises the communities of Jobstown, Fettercairn, Brookfield and Killinarden, is a vibrant, spirit-filled community with many local people actively engaged in the development of their community. However, it is not with out its challenges as highlighted in the organisation's strategic plan[52]:

- It has a population of 24,500 and is classified in the top 1% of disadvantaged areas nationally.

- More than 25% of those who had ceased education in Tallaght West by 2002 had either no formal education or had completed primary education only

- A quarter of the population leave school by the age of 15 and less than 5% go on to complete third level education

- High rates of low literacy attainment

- 85% of population are interested in returning to education but are prevented by significant barriers including low self esteem and lack of childcare

Rationale for the Degree Programme

Key to development of curriculum in An Cosán is the collaborative process, with a variety of stakeholders, in response to local need. As part of a consultative process An Cosán has developed and delivered several formal and non-formal programmes in community development and leadership. A number of students, community leaders, community workers and volunteers consistently looked for progression routes, access to a relevant degree programme and a professional qualification in order to more effectively engage in the active social transformation of their communities. These potential students were not in a position to access traditional third level institutes for a variety of reasons; these reasons are rooted in the extensive barriers experienced by disadvantaged communities, they include issues of language, internal and external oppressions, educational deficits and financial challenges. As one community leader stated;

51 An Cosán Strategic Plan 2006-2008
52 An Cosán Strategic Plan 2006-2008

I have watched and waited three years for this programme. I wanted to do it here because of An Cosán's commitment to empowering this community to address social justice issues.

There is also recognition that grassroots leaders are amongst the richest resources of the community and that such a wealth of social capital is an essential element of social transformation.[53]

A commitment to supporting students transcend these challenges was a fundamental element in the development of the programme. The programme is set within a framework of other developments within An Cosán which aim to build the capacity of members of the community to effect positive change in their community.[54]

Partnerships

A strong commitment to realising the first steps of a vision for an alternative 'Community University' has meant that An Cosán has been proactive in establishing partnerships which are mutually-beneficial for all stakeholders.

The Integrated Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development of South Dublin County 2002-2012 promotes the development of second-chance education to the adult population including access to third level.[55] Under this objective the council funded An Cosán for the initial development and delivery of the programme through the Community Linkage Fund.

The programme was developed in a collaborative partnership with IT Carlow (ITC) Centre for Lifelong Learning in alignment with strategic objectives outlined in the IT Carlow Strategic Plan (2005-2009).

An Cosán designed, developed and delivered the curriculum. IT Carlow partnered An Cosán in the HETAC system of accreditation and An Cosán adopted the ITC Quality Assurance and Improvement Policy and Procedures.

Overview

It is an innovative model representing the creation of an active learning process focussed on and developed *around* the real, relevant, current, local issues present for the residents of Tallaght West.

The overall aim is to provide learners with extensive knowledge, skills and competencies to become effective leaders in the community and voluntary sector at local and national levels.

It is a tailormade modularised part time programme which has the potential to be replicated in other areas of disadvantage.

It is envisaged that the programme will have a positive impact beyond the individual students and out into the wider community in the following ways.

- A commitment to community development will be reinforced

- Strong community leadership skills developed Increased awareness and knowledge of community issues

- Civic Engagement and local leadership on local issues

- Development of a collective collaborative leadership approach to local issues

- Awareness of policy mechanisms for impacting on local issues

- Improved community life and co-operation

- Educational impact into the future – for beneficiaries; their families; their community – ongoing after the programme ends

- Availability of additional progression route for community members

The Curriculum

It is an interdisciplinary curriculum with a transformatory agenda. Devised in collaboration and interaction with both community and participants it is based on thematic areas of learning:

- Leadership

- Community Development

- Sociology

- Praxis – reflective practice

There is a core focus on creating an understanding of the relevant concepts, theories, policy and legislation to develop the learner's knowledge and competence in the

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53 Waters, Towards a Model of Leadership in Communities of Disadvantage: A Case Study of West Tallaght; identifies a model of grassroots/community leadership practiced in West Tallaght and relates it to other international models. It also identifies the supports and strategies required to develop and support grassroots leadership within a global framework.

54 Active citizenship programme; 7 out of 21 members of the Board Directors of An Cosán are from the local community; 80% of staff are from the local area and are employed across all levels of the organization; establishment and hosting of Grassroots Leadership Network; Social enterprise programme

55 A key priority theme: Enhancing participation; Interventions and supports at critical junctures sets an objective to: 'Promote access to third-level by students from disadvantaged areas by ensuring that measures to retain students in third-level and to increase attainment levels are identified, extended and supported.'

field of grassroots leadership and community development. The academic content is balanced by a central focus on relating theory and concepts to practice, developing practical skills, encouraging critical thinking and reflection and engagement in community activism.

Assessment

Whilst measuring the achievement of learning outcomes the assessment methods also encourage students to apply knowledge, concepts and or skills acquired in an academic setting to a new instance or situation where that knowledge is in fact relevant and applicable to the issues that affect their local community.

For example, both An Cosán and South Dublin County Council recognise the importance of building the capacity of potential community leaders to utilise ICT. This led to the development of a module on Community Development and Technology with the support of South Dublin County Council Connect Project[56].

Using the e-learning tool Moodle, students gained an understanding of e-Engagement and e-Inclusion theory, considered the policy framework that supports e-engagement, identified the barriers and challenges with regard to using technology in the community sector and developed an understanding of the digital divide and identified a variety of strategies to combat the divide.

Specifically students used their ICT skills to support group community development campaigns as part of their assessment. As one student noted;

In any assignment I have done before my family or friends thought it was gobbledygook – this assignment (a video documentary on boarded up houses in West Tallaght, interviewing community members and local politicians) - everybody understood it and got the message – They were really interested and inspired by it – it was brilliant!

Student Supports

A key aspect of the educational ethos of An Cosán is the recognition that students from disadvantaged areas, who experience a variety of complex educational and social challenges, require a series of dedicated supports. The supports available to the Degree students include:

- Learner centred teaching and learning methodologies which build on prior learning and experience of students

- Integration of study skills across the programme

- Mentoring

- Tutorials

- Fostering of a community of learners, which recognises the value of both collective and individual learning

- Counselling

- Childcare

- Access to computer facilities

- Library of core texts

These supports ensure that students gain the knowledge, skills and competencies required to achieve the stated learning outcomes of the programme.

The focus is on the quality of learning and our ambition is to increasingly create an environment and experiences whereby students discover and construct knowledge for themselves. (Barr and Tagg 1995)

An Cosán is committed to providing a quality programme and student supports but it is increasingly difficult to adequately resource this provision to the level required.

Lack of financial supports for part time students at third level is well documented as a significant barrier to accessing third level opportunities[57]. Costs are kept to a minimum, for this programme, however the reality remains that the cost per student is €1900 per annum. This is offset by a Scholarship Fund set up by An Cosán to ensure that finance is not a barrier to any students' participation in the programme. Students and programme staff also fundraise to contribute to this fund. A number of students received financial support from employers which is recognition of the relevance of the programme and its overall aims.

The ongoing struggle to access funding, in the absence of a committed core funding for sustainable community education, by the state, impedes An Cosán's ability to achieve this aim and ensure that the principles of equity of access and outcome are fully implemented.

Policy Framework

A review of current policies[58] demonstrate that the aims and objectives of the degree programme, are reflective of government policy priorities, statutory agencies and educational institutions perspectives on the role of community development, active citizenship and lifelong learning.

56 For more information on the Connect Project see www.southdublin.ie/connect

57 McKenna A, (2007), Part-Time Fees Position Paper, Aontas

58 For further information on policy framework refer to bibliography

The one key policy document, the White Paper on Adult Education (2000) outlined ambitious plans for the sector, however, it is significant to note how few of the recommendations to date have been implemented.

The current National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013 recognises that community education has a significant role in addressing barriers to participation however the emphasis still remains on broadening entry routes to existing third level institutions. Funding which is available through the Strategic Innovation Fund[59] for supporting access is only available to third level institutions. These initiatives, in the main, still appear to focus on supporting individuals to cope with the demands of the institution rather than on the need for systemic change in the institution itself.

There is scope within the National Framework of Qualifications for An Cosán to independently apply for HETAC accreditation of programmes at the higher level of awards. This step towards the creation of a 'community university' as an alternative provider of third level education would require significant resources in terms of research, development and implementation.

An Cosán has established its commitment to embracing opportunities and overcoming barriers which promote equity of access to and successful completion within third level and also promote sustainable community development. The BA Degree in Leadership and Community Development is an example of community led innovation and good practice of providing quality education at third level. Access to core funding would facilitate An Cosán to contribute to the research and development of initiatives and pilot projects to achieve this aim, as a means towards a more equitable, accessible education system.

An Cosán is exploring funding strategies to support existing students progression to a 4th year Honours Degree. In addition, An Cosán is committed to the continued delivery of the Degree programme at local level.

There are examples of good practice partnerships between third level institutes and communities both nationally and internationally. An Cosán values a partnership approach and recognises that there are opportunities to learn from innovative community university partnerships, which harness the collective energies of both, and extend beyond supporting direct access to existing third level institutes.[60]

However, in an Irish context, O'Connor (2004) reports that collaborative community-university partnerships which have focused on promoting innovative access programmes are perceived as ancillary to the mainstream work of third level institutions and a lack of a direct funding line inhibits the sustainability of these programmes.

It is my contention that access and progression in third level should no longer be the domain of existing third level institutions particular in areas of disadvantage. Time is opportune to consider a radical response to the provision of third level education, particularly for those most failed and disempowered by the present system which would have much to offer to the HEA's vision for equality of access becoming a reality in higher education provision.

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59 Through the Strategic Innovation Fund the HEA will allocate €510m over the period 2006 and 2013 to higher education institutions for projects to enhance collaboration in the sector.

60 Opportunities exist for third level institutes with a stated commitment to civil society/social change to share their intellectual, economic and human resources to the hard work of community change, through such activities as research, community outreach in the broadest of terms and information exchange.

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BIOGRAPHY

AVRIL BAILEY is The Shanty Education and Training Manager with An Cosán with responsibility for the strategic development of the education function which offers a wide range of accredited and non accredited options for students.

Previous positions include Head of Development for Age Action Ireland and Education and Training Manager in Merchants Quay Ireland. She has worked with the National Adult Literacy Agency in the coordination of and lecturing on a range of third level programmes in partnership with N.U.I. Maynooth and Waterford Institute of Technology. She has over 25 years experience of working in the community and voluntary sector in a variety of roles and holds a Masters in Education, Training and Development from Sheffield University, England.

FROM A LOCALISED BALLYMUN INITIATIVE TO A NATIONAL SERVICE – THE ACCESS SERVICE IN DCU, 20 YEARS ON
Contributors: Cathy McLoughlin and Colette Keogh (Access Service, Dublin City Univeristy)

Abstract

Dublin City University (DCU) was granted university status in 1989, it immediately began looking at how it might assist students from the local Ballymun Community to study and gain third level qualifications. In collaboration with a number of interested groups in the Ballymun area, a new organisation called BITE (Ballymun Initiative for Third Level Education) was set up. Its main objective was to increase the participation of students from Ballymun into third level education (Boldt, 2000). Following the success of this pilot DCU extended its Access programme to 16 other schools in North Dublin. In early 2000, in collaboration with other HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) the scheme began to go nationwide. Today, the scheme is national with applications processed through the CAO (Central Applications Office). This research looks at the outcomes of the Access programme over 20 years using comparative figures from the UG (Undergraduate) population.

Introduction

Ballymun is located beside DCU in north Dublin, an area that has a high level of social deprivation and low income families. A decision was taken by the Governing Body of this new institution in 1989 to put in place an initiative to address the low numbers entering third level from the area. This initiative in collaboration with BITE ran as a pilot in DCU from 1990-1995 taking in a total of 15 students.

In 1995 *The White Paper: Charting our Education Future* stated that each University was to develop initiatives to promote participation among students from lower socio-economic groups. Based on the success of the BITE initiative it was decided to extend this programme to 16 schools in the North Dublin region. This saw numbers of Access students entering DCU begin to increase significantly – Diagram 1.

By the end of the 1990s a number of other third level institutions in Ireland had set up their own Access programs. In 2001 they collaborated on a Common Application Form. The scheme then went through a number of incarnations before arriving at the current Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) which is operated through the CAO.

The growth of the DCU scheme is mapped in the diagram below which tracks the intake of Access students over a twenty year period.

The Access programme began with an intake of just six students in 1990 culminating with 140 entering in 2009.

In 2009 the Access Service undertook research based on 20 years of the service to gauge;

1. The number of students, who had benefited.

2. The number of Access students who graduated and level of qualification in comparison to the general DCU population.

3. Further study and employment outcomes for Access graduates.

4. Why students failed to complete their studies.

DIAGRAM 1: DCU ACCESS STUDENT INTAKE 1990-2009
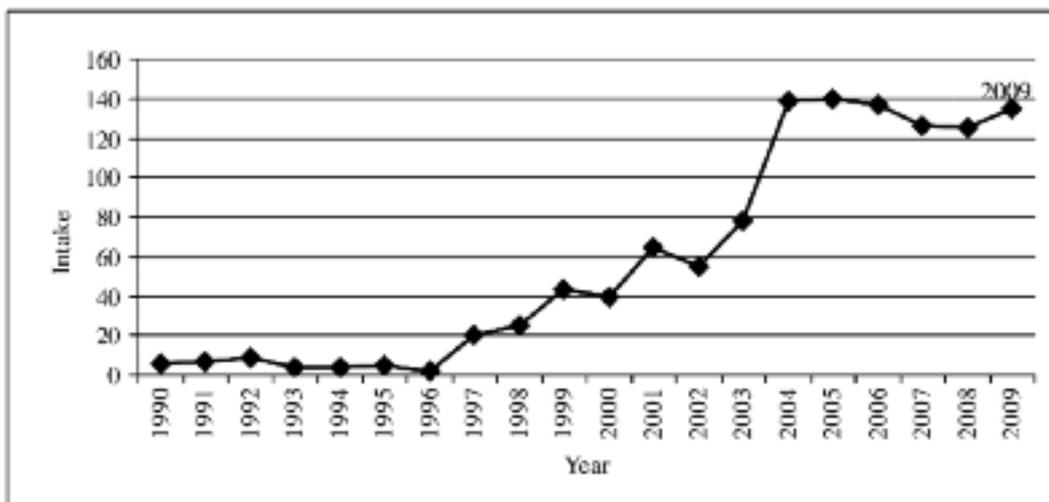
A comprehensive internal exercise took place to ensure that an accurate and complete database of all students who had entered DCU through the Access route was in place. All students were then written to at their last known place of residence informing them that the research was taking place and inviting them to participate. Former students then took part in a semi-formal telephone interview. The research team made contact with 63% of students who graduated during 1990 - 2007[61] and 71% of students who had failed to complete their studies.

Main Findings

One of the most commonly asked questions of Access programmes is do students who enter with reduced points perform as well as students coming through the main-stream? The diagram below answers this question.

DIAGRAM 2: LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION OBTAINED

	Access 1990-2010	Gen.UG DCU 2008/09
First	14.4%	14.9%
Higher 2 Div.1	45.1%	50.8%
Higher 2 Div.2	28.8%	19.8%
Third	6.0%	5.8%
Pass	5.6%	1.4%
Other (Pass/Dist*	N/A	7.3%

* Other includes Oscail and some Level 8 post-graduate nursing courses which is not relevant to this study.

As is clearly demonstrated there is very little difference in the outcomes between the general DCU under-graduate population and Access students in obtaining 1st class honours degrees. This figure includes students who entered through merit and reduced point offers. The gap widens to 6.2% when second division class 1 is taken into account but balances out when second class division 2 is included.

Areas of Study

DCU is renowned for its business, technology and engineering based programmes. It is only in recent years that it has begun to expand its humanities programmes. There is a clear preference for Access students to study business with 40% of students selecting this area in comparison to 27% of the general undergraduate population. The percentage of students studying humanities & social sciences plus computing & engineering is similar or identical with a real drop in the percentage of Access students studying science & health.

DIAGRAM 3: BREAKDOWN OF STUDENTS BY FACULTY

Faculty	Access 1990-2009	DCU UG 2008/09*
Business	40%	27%
Humanities & Social Sciences	28%	28%
Computing & Engineering	11%	9%
Science & Health	21%	36%

DCU offers students in most programmes a period of work placement either paid or unpaid, this can vary from 3 to 12 months depending on the area of study. The business degree can be completed in either three or four years, the four year option includes a one year work placement. A very interesting statistic arose when we looked at the difference between the classes of degree for those that took the three year option in comparison to the four year one.

DIAGRAM 4: COMPARISON OF BUSINESS STUDENTS TAKING 3 OR 4 YEAR DEGREE OPTION

Access Students 20 year average	1st	H2.1	H2.2	Third	Pass
Business with Intra	18%	64%	15%	2%	1%
Business without Intra	0%	51%	42%	2%	5%

DCU students 2008/2009	1st	H2.1	H2.2	Third	Pass
Business with Intra	21%	71%	6%	2%	0%
Business without Intra	2%	60%	36%	2%	0%

The findings were truly startling. An Access student who completes the three year option has never obtained a first class honours degree. In addition to not obtaining first class honours they were also less likely to obtain a Second class Division 2 degree. On looking at the general student body it was found that the statistics were almost replicated. This is a strong endorsement of maintaining the work placement element in courses even in difficult economic times.

Gender Analysis

As the diagram below shows there is almost a 2:1 ratio of female to male students.

DIAGRAM 5: GENDER BREAKDOWN

	Male	Female
On-entry	37%	63%
Graduation	36%	64%

61 It was decided not to contact 2008 graduates as this group of students were taking part in another research project in the University.

Employment

An area of interest to the researchers was whether students on graduation secured employment in the area they had studied. 83% of respondents stated that they were employed in an area directly related to their degree. Given the current high levels of unemployment it was interesting to see that the unemployment rate was incredibly low at 2% backing up previous research that the higher ones level of education the lower the likelihood of finding yourself unemployed (UCD Geary Institute, 2009, p1).

DIAGRAM 6: AREAS OF EMPLOYMENT
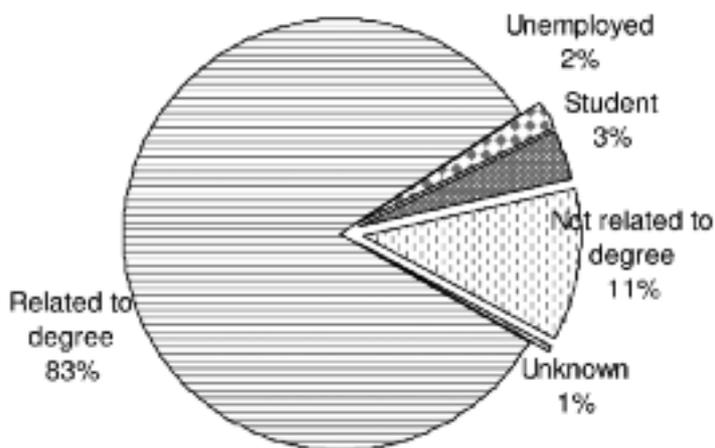
DCU degrees are very specific with a strong emphasis on business, science and technology with defined career paths which is reflected in the employment findings in this survey.

DIAGRAM 7: FURTHER STUDY
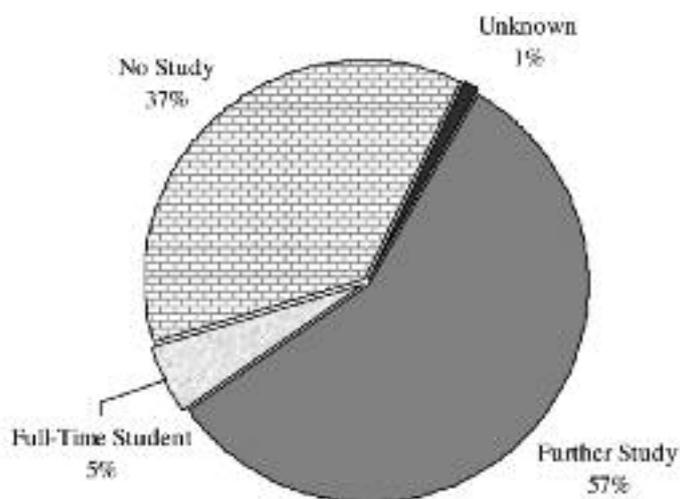
One of the primary aims of Access is to give school leavers who have the ability to benefit from and succeed in higher education and who come from socio economic groups in Irish society that are under-represented in third level education[62] the opportunities that otherwise may be denied to them. The diagram above shows that over 57% of Access graduates went onto further study. Given the high numbers of Access students who studied business, the research found that significant numbers then when on to complete level 9 qualifications and further studies in accountancy and other areas of finance.

Completion of Studies

Given that a significant percentage of Access students enter on reduced points it is important to monitor the attrition rate. As can be seen from the diagram below just 8% of students fail to complete their third level studies in DCU or another HEI (Higher Level Institution).

DIAGRAM 8: COMPLETION OF THIRD LEVEL STUDIES

Status	Percentage
Current UG	48%
Graduates	31%
Studies Elsewhere	13%
Withdrawal	8%

As part of the study we asked students the reasons that they had withdrawn from their course. Almost 50% of students indicated it was because they had chosen the wrong course. This is in line with research across the campus for the general undergraduate population in 2008/09 (see diagram 10) where a similar percentage also indicated they were withdrawing. 16% of students indicated that they found the course too difficult again this may be linked to selecting the wrong course and may indicate the need for more intensive career guidance when completing the CAO application form.

DIAGRAM 9: REASON FOR WITHDRAWING

Reason Given	Percentage
Wrong Course Choice	49%
Personal Reasons	22%
Course too Difficult	16%
Other	8%
Financial	5%

It is interesting to note that 11% of students from the general student body indicated that they were withdrawing for financial reasons compared to just 5% of

62 HEA, National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013, p25

DIAGRAM 10: DCU UNDERGRADUATE WITHDRAWAL 2008/09
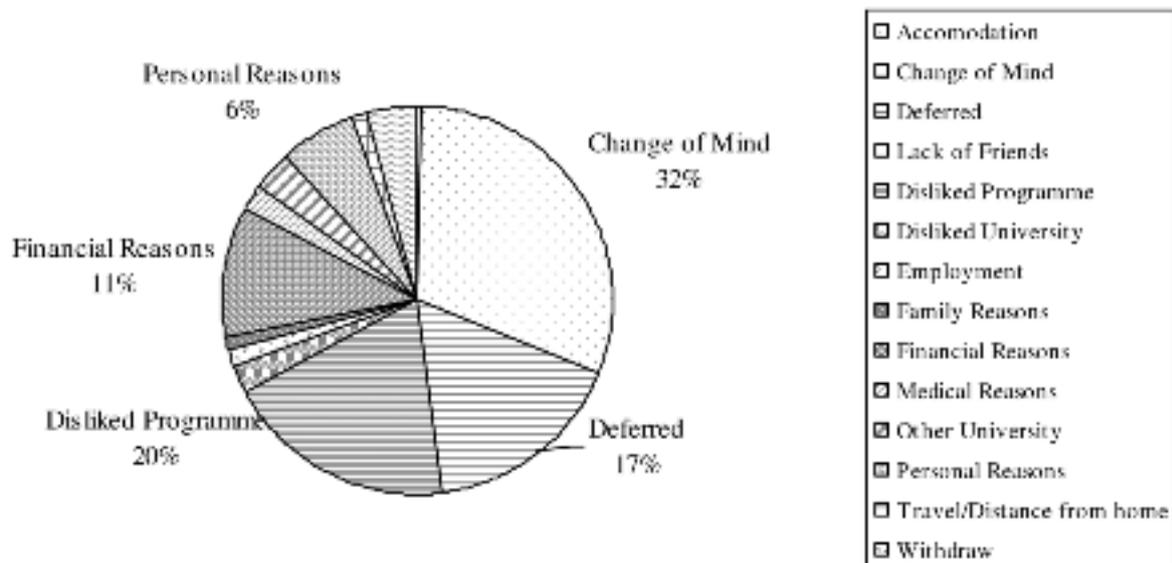
Access students. This would lead to the conclusion that the additional financial supports given to Access students does make a significant difference in alleviating the financial strain of attending third level and thus reducing the attrition rate.

Conclusion

DCU has been running a very successful Access programme for 20 years, with over 1,200 students obtaining scholarships, and with over 500 graduates it continues to grow from strength to strength. A number of reasons can be attributed to the success of its programme including a comprehensive range of post-entry supports;

- Scholarships – Private funding only
- Orientation
- Educational Trust offers networking opportunities
- Learning Agreements within 1 month of entry
- Designated first year post entry Officer
- One-one meetings
- Tuition Workshops
- Peer Mentoring
- Subsidised Accommodation

Plus the support and commitment of staff at all levels in the University.

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BIOGRAPHY

CATHY MCLOUGHLIN
Cathy works as a Post-Entry Access Officer and has been employed by DCU since 2008. Prior to that she worked for over 10 years in community and education roles in Blanchardstown and Ballymun. She holds a MA in Adult & Community Education from NUI, Maynooth and a Bachelor of Business Studies from DCU.

COLETTE KEOGH
Cathy works as a Post-Entry Access Officer and has been employed by DCU since 2008. Prior to that she worked for over 10 years in community and education roles in Blanchardstown and Ballymun. She holds a MA in Adult & Community Education from NUI, Maynooth and a Bachelor of Business Studies from DCU.

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN TOWN AND GOWN FOR ADULT LEARNERS

Contributors: Rhona McCormack & Patricia-Anne Moore (Downtown Centre, LIT George's Quay, George's Quay, Limerick)

Abstract

This paper describes the development and activities of a higher education information, support and guidance centre for adults in Limerick City. The centre was established in 2007, under the HEA's Strategic Innovation Fund, by the Shannon Consortium. The aim of the Centre is to provide a more accessible conduit to higher education for all adult learners. The paper reflects on the outcomes of the services provided by the Centre, and on the challenges and opportunities which are arising for the sustainability of the initiative. The paper concludes that the Downtown Centre has successfully facilitated progression to higher education for a sizeable number of people to date, and that demand is growing for its services, but that the real added-value for the Centre may well be in its role as an 'intermediary' between different stakeholders on issues related to access to third-level education.

Introduction

The Downtown Centre is a higher education information, guidance, and support centre for adults (aged 18+), based in Limerick City. It is a partnership initiative of four higher education institutions in the mid-west region: the University of Limerick, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick Institute of Technology and the Institute of Technology Tralee (collectively known as the Shannon Consortium). The Centre was funded between 2007 and 2010 by the Higher Education Authority's Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF).

The rationale for opening such a centre in Limerick, a city with three publicly-funded higher education institutions within close proximity of each other, was to make higher education more visible and accessible to a wider diversity of people within the region. Its aim was also to develop connections with a range of stakeholders and services already working with adults in education, particularly local community services, and to develop greater links between those services and higher education providers. By locating a small 'one stop shop' in Limerick city, the Centre also aimed to remove some of the physical and psychological barriers to higher education which are often evident amongst some adult learners.

From a national perspective, the National Access Plan (2008), produced by the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education, highlights the fact that widening access to higher education is a critical factor both in combating educational disadvantage and in maintaining the country's economic competitiveness. Among the key targets set out in the plan is that of enhancing access through lifelong learning through the "development of a broader range of entry routes" (ibid, p43) and also through greater collaboration between higher education and further education, particularly in areas of national skills priorities. Specific quantitative targets were set within the Plan for the participation of non-traditional learners in higher education, including for learners from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, mature learners, learners with a disability and learners from ethnic minorities.

The Downtown Centre works in collaboration with its partner institutions to assist them to meet their own targets in relation to increasing the numbers of under-represented learner groups, by providing services and programmes which support and encourage such learners to progress to higher education. It has also, since 2009, collaborated with Limerick City VEC Adult Education Service (LCAES) in the delivery of its Certificate in General Studies.

Downtown Centre Activities

The activities of the Downtown Centre to date have been focused primarily on three areas: the Certificate in General Studies; an Educational Guidance Service and a series of Return to Learning seminars. Each of these three core services are described briefly below.

CERTIFICATE IN GENERAL STUDIES

The Certificate in General Studies is a full-time FETAC Level 5 foundation programme, the purpose of which is to prepare participants for entry to third-level programmes. Guaranteed progression is offered to a choice of 32 programmes across all four partner institutions and is determined by the specialist elective chosen by the student on the programme - Humanities or Science. The Certificate is jointly delivered by the LCAES and by the Downtown Centre's three Limerick-based higher education partners. Classes are held in the LCAES, the Downtown Centre and on one higher education partner campus during the week. This offers participants the mix of a highly supportive environment as well as the opportunity to experience life on campus.

The main value of the Certificate lies in the fact that it has opened entry to higher education to a wider range

of potential learners by requiring only that participants be over the age of 18 and have the motivation and capability of undertaking the programme. The priority target clients for the Certificate are those aged between 18 and 22 who have not had the opportunity, or do not have the necessary qualifications, to seek a place on a higher education programme through conventional routes. Mature students are also a key target group of the Certificate as it offers an alternative to existing access programmes for mature students, both in terms of its structure, delivery times and its elective choices.

A review of the Downtown Centre by Nexus Research Co-Operative in 2009 found that the Certificate had been successful in offering opportunities to a high number of students from less qualified or lower income backgrounds. Over the three years to date, an average of 60% of places on the programme have been taken up by mature students (aged over 23), partly due to the high demand in the current economic climate from such students to return to higher education. 24% of students who initially registered on the programme presented with a disability, while 66% of students were in receipt of a social welfare payment at the time of application to the programme. Over the three years, 62% of those who originally commenced the programme have fully completed the Certificate, with 93% of these progressing immediately to higher education. A further 16% of original participants received single subject certification for completed elements of the programme.

EDUCATIONAL GUIDANCE SERVICE

The Educational Guidance Service in the Downtown Centre is aimed at adults who want to enter, re-enter or continue with education at third-level. The provision of this service includes giving information, advice and guidance about pathways into higher education to clients, primarily through one-to-one appointments. The service offered is free, confidential and objective, in that the guidance covers higher education in general and not just opportunities offered by partner institutions. The service is not bounded by socio-economic constraints although, in common with other providers, clients who may be experiencing socio-economic disadvantage form part of the primary target group for the service. Nor is it bounded by geographic considerations such as residence in a particular area, as the service is open to anyone over 18 who is interested in pursuing studies at third-level. In these respects therefore the Guidance Service can be distinguished from other guidance providers currently working in Limerick however the Guidance Service works closely with these providers on a referral basis, through the Limerick City Adult Guidance Partnership.

Over 550 clients had used the Guidance Service up to March 2010, with the majority of clients being male and over the age of 23. Feedback on the Service has consistently been positive due to the client-centric nature of the service. The Centre has found that an increasing number of presenting clients are unemployed and are seeking flexible learning opportunities. The provision of flexible and part-time courses is crucial to truly opening up access to higher education, as highlighted in the National Access Plan, however the Service has found that provision for such courses lags far behind demand. Affordability of flexible third-level programmes is also a significant barrier to adult learners, and increasingly adult learners are focused on the potential return on investments, in terms of both time and money, for undertaking third-level studies.

Return to Learning Workshops

The Downtown Centre every year runs a series of informal evening workshops and information seminars, which are free of charge, and offer learners an introduction to the kinds of skills which are required for third-level and to the information they require to assist them to make decisions about their learning pathway. The workshops are designed to be interactive and enjoyable and to raise participants' awareness of, and confidence in, their own skills. Evaluations have shown that these workshops are positively regarded by participants as they boost personal confidence and provide participants with the opportunity to engage interactively, yet informally, with like-minded learners and with staff from higher education institutions.

Achievements to Date

The Nexus Review of the Downtown Centre in 2009 found that, although difficult to quantify or to directly establish cause and effect, overall the Centre had facilitated progression to higher education for a sizeable number of people. It had done this through offering a flexible and responsive approach to clients and through offering a supportive, facilitative environment for clients in which to make that first engagement with higher education. The Centre had made a significant contribution to the access procedures and outcomes for its partner higher education institutions. The review also found that the Centre, through its collaborative work and developing links with different services, had laid the foundations for more effective links and a more cohesive regional strategy on access. Among the factors contributing to the Centre's success to date have been its unique positioning in strategic terms, operating at the 'nexus' of higher, further and community education, and

also its geographical positioning, being removed from the often imposing campuses of its higher education partners.

Future Challenges

There is no doubt that in an economic climate such as the prevailing one, demand for services such as those provided to date by the Downtown Centre will remain high. In addition, at a stakeholder (both internal and external) consultation meeting held in March 2010, widespread support was voiced for the continuation of the Downtown Centre. The Shannon Consortium partners have since all expressed a clear commitment to the Downtown Centre and to continuing to work together collaboratively. The three Limerick-based partners in particular each see continued added-value for the Consortium and for their individual institutions in maintaining a physical presence in the city. IT Tralee is also committed to the ongoing concept of the Shannon Consortium and has committed to fully supporting any process engaged in to chart the future of the Downtown Centre. Undeniably however, one of the critical underlying factors which will determine the continued existence of the Downtown Centre is the availability of resources, either financial or "in kind" from institutional partners or from other sources. In this regard, where the Centre positions itself in relation to the emerging local educational, social and policy environments will be crucial, as this will impact on the Centre's ability or otherwise to leverage funding from either internal or external sources.

One of the other critical factors which will determine the sustainability of the Downtown Centre will be the identification of clear objectives for its work going forward. While the Nexus Review clearly states that one of the core strengths of the Centre is its "position at the overlap of several key policy objectives", and recommends

that it becomes a "platform on which the already existing regional dynamic could be greatly reinforced", the success of such a high-level strategic aim will ultimately depend on the Centre stakeholders' ability to translate such an aim into measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound objectives. There is a sense that there is the potential for greater shared usage and delivery of services amongst partner institutions and other stakeholders, particularly in the areas of access and lifelong learning. The Centre to date has contributed to the sharing of policy and practice in these areas, but there is much greater scope for contributing to the development of a model for the delivery of shared services amongst partner institutions and stakeholders. If the Centre does move, as is suggested in the review report, towards more of an "intermediary" role in this arena, rather than a service-delivery role, the identification of agreed and expected outcomes and targets becomes crucial.

There is strong general agreement amongst its partners that the Downtown Centre has undertaken significant work over the past three years, and that it has achieved some important successes, particularly in relation to collaboration amongst its partners in the delivery of new, rather than existing services. In widening out this collaboration to other sectors, the challenge facing the Centre will be to identify how it can best provide added-value or support to the services and programmes already being delivered by key stakeholders. Nexus states that the question for the Downtown Centre is "not whether there are pressing needs to enhance opportunities for access, *but which aspects of these needs it can most usefully address, and by what means.*" The Centre's challenge for the immediate future therefore is to try and strike an appropriate balance between being a service provider and a strategic conduit for stakeholders in a climate of high demand from adult learners.

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BIOGRAPHY

PATRICIA-ANNE MOORE is the Educational Guidance Coordinator in the Downtown Centre. She has a longstanding interest in lifelong learning and worked in the Lifelong Learning Department at the University of Limerick for a number of years prior to moving to her current post. Originally from Belfast she now lives in Clare.

RHONA MCCORMACK is Project Manager of the Downtown Centre. She has worked in higher education for a number of years, both as a project manager and as a guidance consultant. She has a particular interest in soft skills development for higher education students, having worked on the Transferable Skills Project in Dublin for a number of years prior to returning to Limerick. She has a Masters in Education from the Open University.

OUTSIDERS! – EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF AN AFRICAN STUDENT (WITH EU STATUS) AT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK

Contributor: Michael O'hAodain (University College Cork)

Abstract

This paper intends to provide some insights into the experience of an 'outsider' in Higher Education in Ireland. This case will consider the experience of a black man of Nigerian origin who came to Ireland as an asylum seeker, was subsequently granted refugee status and obtained a place on an undergraduate course at University College Cork, as a non-EU student with EU status. The paper will seek to develop an understanding of these experiences setting them in the context of sociological theory, Irish society in general and Irish policy making, particularly with regard to education and 'outsiders'. In seeking themes through which the issue can be further explored and unpacked, some leads have been taken from, and some comparisons drawn with, a similar piece of research conducted in the south-eastern United States (Davis et al, 2004). It is intended that this research is the prelude to a larger piece of work in which it is proposed to broaden out the base of the research to bring in a wider range of voices, including those of other students, graduates and staff. The key intention of this paper is to encourage reflection and awareness on this issue where we, as the 'insiders', can so easily, often through ignorance and a lack of understanding, be insensitive in our approach to 'outsiders', perhaps to their detriment and to our own also.

Background

Some years ago, in my role as a lecturer and class co-ordinator on a course at UCC, I met with a new group of 26 mature students. Among the group was one person who was significantly different. He was a different colour, with a different culture and from a different place. He was a black man when the rest of the group were white. He was African in origin when the rest of the group were European. He also had a different status to the rest of the group who were European citizens while he was a refugee. As time went on I came to realise that it was possible that his difference was posing difficulties for him, in particular as he sought to establish himself in the group and to get the best from his time on the course. Following his graduation I decided to ask him about his experiences as an outsider, both in the University and on the course, in the hope that by gaining a better insight into these I might be able to develop a better understanding of the situation of such students and maybe bring some improvement, firstly with regard to

my own understanding and actions and, secondly, into the wider community and society.

Although I was conscious of his difference from the outset I did not openly acknowledge it as such and treated him in the same way as I treated the other students. I did not make any special allowance for him. At times I did notice that he seemed to be very quiet within the group. He sometimes seemed distant, aloof and possibly uncomfortable. He seemed disengaged at other times, keeping his gaze towards the floor and not making direct eye-contact (later enquiry revealed that in African culture in general, it is regarded as disrespectful to make eye-contact with an elder or superior – as a result he felt that the proper thing to do was not to look directly at the lecturer).

For most of my life I have been part of a majority culture. I am 'white', living in a society that is predominantly white, which until relatively recently was almost exclusively so. I am an Irish citizen living in Ireland. Notwithstanding all this there were many small ways in which I was an 'outsider', with which I often felt uncomfortable. In the overall sense though I was reasonably secure in my identity as I developed, growing up as a white person in a white society, with whiteness as the 'uncontested' and 'universal norm' (Christie, 2010: 202-203), as an Irish person in Ireland. I was generally able to operate in what Schutz (1944: 501) describes as a 'thinking as usual' mode, living in a world where the insider can take it for granted 'that his fellow-man will understand his thought if expressed in plain language and will answer accordingly, without wondering how this miraculous performance may be explained. Furthermore he does not search for the truth and does not quest for certainty'. This is in marked contrast to the position of the stranger or outsider whose 'thinking as usual' mode is separate, and who does not share the same 'basic assumptions' as the approached group. 'He becomes essentially the man who has to place in question nearly everything that seems to be unquestionable to the members of the approached group' (ibid.: 502).

From my position as an insider I was perhaps slow to recognise and acknowledge fully the extent to which the stranger or outsider can experience feelings of uncertainty, exclusion, alienation and isolation. It would seem that the greater the difference and distance of the outsider or stranger from the insiders or established group, the more profound the sense of difference, the

wider the gulf, and the greater will be the effort required from the outsider or stranger to be understood and accepted. In retrospect, I now realise that it must have been very difficult for 'him', coming into that group where he was so different. He didn't really know anyone in the group. He had very little experience of Irish society and Irish people. He had almost no experience of interacting socially with indigenous Irish people. Most of his social interactions in Ireland prior to coming into the group had taken place within the community of asylum seekers and refugees, while most of the interactions involving indigenous Irish people took place with the immigration authorities in a bureaucratic setting.

In general my approach to dealing with the stranger or outsider was to disregard difference, to act as if I was blind to it and treat the person in the same way, and perhaps have the same expectations of the person, as if they were an insider from the mainstream culture. I chose to see just another student before me, rather than who he specifically was. Even allowing that I acknowledged that he was an African man, a Nigerian, I did not really go any further than that. I didn't know what part of Nigeria he came from. I didn't know what group, culture or tradition he belonged to. I made an assumption that he would just fit in, that he would be able to fit in. Was it good enough of me to make such an assumption?

Outlining the General Situation in UCC

In the context of University College Cork there are a substantial number of overseas students attending the University. The vast majority of these are 'International' students, comprising 12% of the student body in 2009/2010, who mainly come to Ireland to study in areas such as Dentistry and Medicine, while there are also 'visiting' European Erasmus students from EU states and JYA (Junior Year Abroad) students from the U.S., both the latter groups come on short term visits. The three groups mentioned are officially recognised as being 'different' and offered support, while university staff who interact with these students are provided with workshops/seminars to assist them in working with these overseas students. However, there is a fourth group of students involved who are also originally from outside the state, but are not given the same recognition or support as the others. These include students from other EU states who enrol as full time students on undergraduate courses and also students from outside the EU who were resident in Ireland and had been granted EU status at the time of application. This latter group includes many people of African origin who came to Ireland as asylum seekers and on being granted refugee

status became entitled to apply for a place in higher education. The following table contains the information for the years 2008/09 and 2009/2010.

University College Cork: No. of undergraduate students who are of Non-EU origin but have EU status:

- 2008/2009 – 81 in total – 53 of African origin
- 2009/2010 – 126 in total – 72 of African origin
  (Systems Administration, U.C.C., 2010).

Most of these students come from countries, societies, cultures and systems that are significantly different to Ireland. However, at the present time, there is little or no recognition of their difference and there appears to be an expectation that they will be able to fit in with the system here without any particular support or acknowledgement of their difference.

What is the Policy Position of Various Interests with Regard to these Students?

In general, the intention of policies that have been developed towards these students is very positive. Taking a brief consideration of policy at three levels, that of the State, the Higher Education Authority and the University itself, one can see that in each case there is the intention of being inclusive, welcoming and accommodating of difference. However, the question that arises is the extent to which these policy objectives are realised in everyday settings.

POLICY INTENTIONS: THE STATE

The most recent policy document produced by the state setting out the overall strategy and intention with regard to development is Ireland: National Development Plan 2007-2013, where it is stated that:

> *'The high level objective is that, by 2013, students with a disability, mature students and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, including members of the Travelling Community and refugees, should have adequate opportunities to progress to higher education. Higher education institutions will pro-actively welcome and cater for a fully diverse student population'*
>
> (Government of Ireland, 2007: 250).

POLICY INTENTIONS – HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY

The most recent policy document produced by the Higher Education Authority, in which they address the issue of migrants and education in Ireland is the *National*

Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013, where it is stated that:

> *'We need to have special regard to the needs of recent immigrants… At present, over 10 per cent of higher-education students are originally from outside the state compared to just 4 per cent ten years ago…Ireland has rapidly become a much more diverse society in terms of nationality and ethnicity and it will be vital for the education system to reflect and accommodate that diversity… There are a number of complex issues around the provision of higher educational opportunities to immigrants…'*

(Higher Education Authority (National Access Office), 2008 : 37).

POLICY INTENTIONS – UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK

In various policy documents such as the *University College Cork Strategic Plan 2009-2012 and the University College Cork Equality Strategy 2009-2012*, it is the clearly stated intention of the University to ensure that the policies set out by both the State and the Higher Education Authority in this regard are achieved. In the *University Strategic Plan 2009-2012* there is a commitment to 'further develop teaching, learning and the student experience by …widening participation through an inclusive environment that embraces diversity and equality, ensuring that the objectives of the *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013* are achieved'.

Seeking to Understand the 'Outsider' Phenomenon

There are many contrasting ways in which strangers or outsiders are seen, depending on the society and the situation. These can range from welcome and acceptance, to tolerance and grudging acknowledgement; from suspicion and barely concealed annoyance, to outright rejection and hatred. Various authors have written about the stranger or outsider, aiming to develop our understanding of the experience and challenging us in how we act towards strangers and outsiders. In *L'Etranger*, Camus (1971) presents the situation of Mersualt as the stranger who does not fit in, who is different. He is seen as anomic, as not having the proper or appropriate responses in various social situations. He kills a young Arab man, but Thody (1964: 45) argues that he was executed, not for the murder, but because he did not weep for his mother at her burial, '…Mersault will always be the young man who buried his mother under the burning sun and who was executed because he did not weep'.

Other authors such as Simmel (1950), Schutz (1944), Elias (1994) and Beck (1998) variously identified the challenging situation facing the stranger. Both Schutz (1944) and Beck (1998) note what Beck terms the 'us' and 'them', 'First, there is an 'us' here that can be distinguished from 'them'. Second, the 'locals' have an absolute majority. Strangers are a 'negligible' minority, in both senses…The 'locals' have their place in the structure of social order from which 'strangers' must be distinguished and excluded' (Beck, 1998: 130-131). Similarly, in the context of communities, Elias (1994) considers the way in which established communities and groups are resistant to newer 'outsider' groups, working to preserve their 'power superiority'. He goes further and argues that members of the established group risk rejection by their own group if they reach out to the 'outsiders', 'The closing of ranks among the established certainly has the social function of preserving the group's power superiority…As outsiders are felt to be anomic, close contact with them threatens a member of an established group with 'anomic infection': he or she might be suspected of breaking the norms or taboos of their own group: in fact her or she would break those norms simply by associating with members of an outsider group' (Elias, 1994: xxiv). Resonating with the topic under discussion, Beck (1998) identifies an ambivalence in attitudes towards strangers, noting our willingness to help and support the stranger as the 'distant needy 'foreigner', while having a negative view of the 'stranger' with 'official claims to benefits in one's own neighbourhood'. He continues, 'The readiness to help increases geometrically with distance. Jealousy and hatred of strangers increase proportionally as strangers lose their strangeness and, unlike the numerous tourists, are experienced as competitors for meagre state entitlements' (Beck, 1998: 129-130).

'Outsiders' in Ireland: How do we Treat 'Outsiders'?

'Racism is hiding everywhere. It is in the schools. Everywhere in Ireland is racist, it is just being hidden. This country is crazy' (McGreevy, 2010). This was the reported comment of Patrick Kabangu, 17 years, originally from Congo, as reported in *The Irish Times* (05/04/2010), following the killing of Toyosi Shittabey, 15 years, in a stabbing incident at Tyrrelstown, Co. Dublin on April 4, 2010.

Is it true? Is Ireland racist, ethnocentric, xenophobic, anti-semitic? Are we not open and accepting towards all, especially considering the Irish historical experience of colonisation, emigration, anti-Irish racism and of being the outsiders in so many situations? The reality seems to

be that we are not open and accepting towards all, and that in general we carry many negative attitudes towards strangers, outsiders and those who are different from the mainstream. In developing a national identity, particularly in the nineteenth century, there was an emphasis on identifying, or constructing, the characteristics of the Irish and what it was that set the 'Irish' apart, especially from the English (Tovey and Share, 2003). The resulting nationalism, according to Fanning (2002: 8-9) 'emphasised the superiority of the Irish and the inferiority of the non-Irish'. It was also the case that indigenous minorities, such as Travellers, were not included as part of the nation, as they did not fit with 'dominant constructions of Irishness', while non-white people, including Africans, were viewed through the lens of 'colonial ideologies of western superiority', combined with assumptions of 'Irish spiritual superiority' (Fanning, 2002: 9-16).

How do we treat outsiders now? There is ample evidence to suggest that outsiders, including those of African origin, are discriminated against and treated quite negatively in Ireland. The following three reports, two of which were the results of research surveys, found that there was continuing discrimination against non-Irish people in Ireland.

In the *2009 Human Rights Report: Ireland* (U.S. Dept. of State, 2010) the issue of discrimination and violence against immigrants and racial and ethnic minorities in Ireland was raised. The report contends that, although in Ireland the law 'prohibits discrimination based on language or social status, and the government enforced the law', nevertheless, societal discrimination and violence 'against immigrants and racial and ethnic minorities, including Asian, Eastern and Baltic Europeans, and Africans, continues to be a problem'. The Report also noted that there had been an increase in 'Irish only' job advertisements.

The second report, the *European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey: Main Results Report* (EU-MIDIS, 2009), contained the results of a survey of 23,500 people from various ethnic minority and immigrant groups surveyed across the 27 member states of the EU in 2008. The survey involved 9 areas of everyday life. The results of the survey found that in relation to overall experiences of discrimination across these nine areas of everyday life:

- 54% of Sub-Saharan Africans experienced discrimination in Ireland, compared to an EU average of 41%.

- Ireland was placed 6th in the league of discrimination of the 27 EU countries surveyed.

The third report, *Discrimination in Recruitment: Evidence from a Field Experiment* (McGinnity et al, 2009), concerned a field experiment carried out by the authors at the behest of the Equality Authority and the Economic and Social Research Institute. In this experiment the research team submitted pairs of 'matched' CVs from fictitious applicants in response to 240 separate job advertisements. Both applicants in each case had equivalent qualifications, skills and experience. The only difference between the CV's involved the name of the applicant, in one case a typical Irish name and in the other a name that was identifiably African, Asian or German. It was found that candidates with Irish names were 'over twice as likely to be invited to interview for advertised jobs as candidates with identifiably non-Irish names, even though both submitted equivalent CVs' (McGinnity et al, 2009: viii). The levels of discrimination were consistent across the sample of jobs applied for. The results demonstrated the unequal access to the Irish labour market that is experienced by individuals from minority backgrounds and the extent of the discrimination 'directly contradicts any notions of equality in terms of access to employment' (McGinnity et al, 2009: viii-ix).

It is evident that, notwithstanding our history of colonisation and emigration, Ireland has historical trends of negativity towards 'outsiders', which continue to be present in modern Ireland.

Some Experiences of an 'Outsider'

I was interested to find out what he thought and how he felt about his time on the course and his experiences as an outsider or stranger. In trying to develop my understanding and insight into the issue I undertook a literature review and identified an article about a piece of research undertaken in the United States which had both a context and an exploration of issues that seemed very similar to the situation in which I was interested. This research by Davis et al (2004) involved exploring the experiences of successful black undergraduate students at a predominately white university campus in the southeastern United States. Their research started from the basis that the graduation rate for black students was lower than the total rate for the university and they decided to undertake research 'to obtain the first-person perspective of the students themselves', in an effort to understand this discrepancy.

The resulting research, undertaken using a phenomenological approach, identified five major themes that characterised the experiences of the participants. These themes were:

- 'It Happens Every Day': Unfairness/Sabotage/Condescension.

- 'You Have to Initiate the Conversation': Isolation and Connection.

- 'They Seem the Same; I'm The One Who's Different'.

- 'I Have to Prove I'm Worthy To Be Here'.

- 'Sometimes I'm Not Even Here/Sometimes I Have to Represent All Black Students': Invisibility and Supervisibility.

I decided that I could use four of these themes to guide an interview or discussion on the issue, similarly adopting a phenomenological approach in which the participant 'is enabled to describe his or her experiences of some phenomenon with as little direction from the interviewer as possible' (Davis et al, 2004: 423). Following an initial discussion on the issue, two interviews were undertaken with the 'outsider' student, who by this stage had successfully graduated. Using the themes as a guide, he responded to the issues that were raised there. The following section includes some of those responses:

'It Happens Every Day': Unfairness/Sabotage/Condescension

'…in the student centre, during lunch hour I sat at one of the tables…You know each of the tables in the student centre has four chairs…And I sat on one of the chairs and the whole place was fully jam-packed…None of the tables was left vacant except where I was sitting…And nobody ever came to me…Nobody ever sat on the remaining three chairs. And I said (to myself) 'what's going on here?'…Most of the students who came along would bring their food and as soon as they found out that this is a black man sitting here…They all walked away with their trays'.

'You Have to Initiate the Conversation': Isolation and Connection

'Well I suppose that I have to make that move – they were not willing to open up to me and to be honest I wasn't willing as well to open up…Because I have this fear, this insecurity…What do they think I am? (Maybe) a lot of people think I'm from Africa or Nigeria – evil – or maybe half afraid of some kind of negative pictures about people from Africa…but I know they were not willing to open up, to speak to me about any issues or to discuss…'

'They Seem the Same: I'm The One Who's Different'

'I wasn't really part of them in any way. I don't come from Europe – I'm not a UK, I'm not Irish…again my colour is totally different…I was in a situation where I

couldn't be placed at all…I'm totally different from everybody else'

'…where I come from you don't make eye contact with people, because when you do that…it is a sign of disrespect…You're not allowed to do that in Nigeria where I come from. Of course, here in the West, if you don't do that, it seems as if you have something to hide, which means of course some kind of cultural differences. The way we were brought up, and it still stands today, in Nigeria you don't do eye contact with people, most especially those who are older than you…when they talk to you, you put your head down, you don't make eye contact'.

'Sometimes I'm Not Even Here/Sometimes I Have to Represent All Black Students': Invisibility and Supervisibility

Invisibility: There is a sense in which the outsider is invisible. Their presence is not validated through acknowledging their history, culture and social norms. The only history, culture and social norms that are recognised are those of the established majority:

'And I remember most of the time I walked into the class…they tended to identify with themselves and walk away from me…they could just go on and say 'hello, hello, hello', but nobody says hello to me, but if I walk in and say 'hello everyone' I could see (that) some respond and some don't, so maybe some kind of insecurity or something…but again people were not willing to open up and I was not willing to open up because I have this fear of 'what do they think of me?..'.

Supervisibility:
'…I suppose everybody sees me as an African, or as a Nigerian…But see me as an individual – try to understand where I come from or what would be my own view or my own opinion about an issue…But they would see me as an African, a Nigerian – so if a Nigerian man does anything wrong, you know, they tend to see me as the same thing, so I have no doubt they see me as that – as a Nigerian, not just as an individual'.

One can see reflected in these responses the struggle of the 'outsider' for understanding, acceptance, inclusion and individual recognition referred to by Camus (1971), Simmel (1950) and Schutz (1944), where his difference causes him to feel uncertain and unaccepted: an 'outsider'; while they also capture the sense of non-acceptance, rejection and suspicion of the 'outsider' by those who are 'insiders' or the established reflected in the work of Elias (1994) and Beck (1998).

Conclusion

There is a challenge here for us. It is not enough to say that we have policies, rules and regulations, codes and ethics. We need to listen to what people in these situations are saying about their lived experiences and look at how we can respond to them.

In the research undertaken with successful black graduates at the predominately white University in the United States (Davis et al, 2004), it was concluded that, while some of the potential for improving the situation lay with the students themselves, there was also a very significant responsibility on both the university in general and the staff, both faculty and administrative. The report posed challenges for staff to examine their own actions and attitudes and look at how they impact on students and went on to make a number of recommendations. The recommendations included the importance of staff becoming culturally competent, as much of what was described as 'negative faculty behaviour' occurred as a result of ignorance. The importance of hearing the stories of all students, including black students, was also emphasised, especially the need to create both an appropriate space and methodology for doing so: 'The more we can enable the life experiences of all students to be heard, the more we can develop an understanding capable of leading to a healthy environment for all students and all faculty' (Davis et al, 2004: 443).

Although I have written about a situation and experiences based in University College Cork, there appears little reason to suggest that things are very different elsewhere and it is likely that some of the 'outsiders' in our various higher educational institutions have had, and continue to have, similar experiences.

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BIOGRAPHY

MICHAEL O'HAODAIN: College lecturer at the School of Applied Social Studies at the National University of Ireland, University College Cork, where he is a member of the B.Soc.Sc. (youth & community work) course team. Before joining UCC, Micheal worked as a Garda, including fifteen years spent in community policing.

BUILDING A ROBUST RESULTS BASED MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FOR ACCESS
Contributor: Niamh M. Kenny (Exodea Consulting)

Abstract

Access Services in Universities are like any development intervention and are expected to deliver results. For everyone involved in Access, the value of their ideas, advice and action produced is increasingly being gauged by whether it improves lives. The recent economic recession has focused all state funded resources on the need to improve efficiency and demonstrate results. This paper outlines the process involved in developing and implementing a Results Based Management (RBM) Framework for the Access Service in University College Cork (UCC).

Introduction

Results Based Management is a management strategy focusing on performance and achievement of outputs, outcomes and impactsi. Results Based Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) likewise is a tool that can be used to improve the way governments and organisation achieve results. Results Based Management M&E provides good performance feedback systems. In the case of Access, the Results Based Management M&E framework enables the UCC Access Services to answer the So What? questions. So what that AT training was provided to 100 secondary school teachers? So what that one to one support services were provided to students from disadvantaged backgrounds? So what that the Mature Students Office provided study skills training to all first year mature students? How do these actions result in the achievement of the Services key goals? Credible answers to the So What questions address accountability concerns, give service managers information on progress towards achieving stated targets and goals and provide substantial evidence on what is working and what is not.

This paper considers if the Results Based Management framework introduced for the Access Service in UCC works.

Results Based M&E

The power of a Results Based M&E system is that it enables more effective monitoring of the development intervention and enables the project manager and policy makers within the delivery organisation to measure results. There are many advantages to measuring results, the principal one being, if you do not measure results, you cannot tell success from failure. Likewise if you cannot see success, you cannot reward it and if you cannot reward success you are possibly rewarding failure. Most importantly, if you can demonstrate results, you can win public support. At a management level RBM focuses attention on achieving outcomes important to the organisation and its stakeholders. It provides timely, frequent information to staff by helping to establish key goals and objectives. The framework should permit managers to identify and take action to correct weaknesses.

The Process in UCC

The process undertaken with the Pathways Projects and the Access Service main offices in UCC was based on the Ten Steps to Results Based Monitoring and Evaluation System developed by the World Bank. The diagram below presents the ten steps.

Stage one, readiness assessment was assumed based on the decision of management to commission the M&E plan and evaluation of the Pathways Programme. Stage one therefore with all of the services was to agree on which outcomes to monitor and evaluate.

FIGURE 1 - RESULTS BASED M&E FRAMEWORK

Outcomes

Outcomes are defined as 'The intended or achieved short term and medium term effects of an intervention's outputs, usually requiring the collective effort of partners. Outcomes represent changes in development conditions which occur between the completion of the outputs and the achievement of impact'. (OECD/DAC Glossary of Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management 2002).

In order to agree the outcomes the services were supported to articulate their activity and outputs.

ACTIVITY

Activity is defined as 'Actions taken or work performed through which inputs, such as funds, technical assistance and other types of resources are mobilised to produce specific results. (OECD/DAC Glossary of Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management 2002).

OUTPUTS

Outputs are the products and services which result from the completion of activities within a development intervention. (OECD/DAC Glossary of Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management 2002).

Once the activities, outputs and outcomes were agreed by the individual services, it was possible to create a logical framework for the service. In some cases two logical frameworks were developed, mainly to reflect pre-entry and post entry interventions. The logical framework model used is presented below.

INDICATORS

Indicators are defined as 'a qualitative or quantitative variable that allows the verification of changes produced by a development intervention relative to what was planned'. (OECD/DAC Glossary of Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management 2002). Each of the services was encouraged to review what data they are currently collecting, what data is available and which data could be used to verify change and to inform them if they were achieving their objectives. A set of indicators were created for each outcome and output indicators were also put in place.

BASELINE DATA

One of the key challenges experienced in the process in UCC was identifying baseline data on the indicators. Where is the service starting from? Baseline data is defined as 'data that describe the situation to be addressed by a programme or project and that serve as the starting point for measuring the performance of that programme or project'.

Once the logical framework was complete and the data sources identified the next step in the process was to put in place targets. A detailed logframe was created for all of the services which outlined the activities, outputs and outcomes, and targets were put in place at both output and outcome level.

Linked to this work stage was the need to support the teams in each of the services to monitor the data required at both output and outcome level. A basic monitoring tool was put in place using MS Excel, which provided a

FIGURE 2 -LOGICAL FRAMEWORK MODEL (SOURCE BINNENDIJK, 2000)
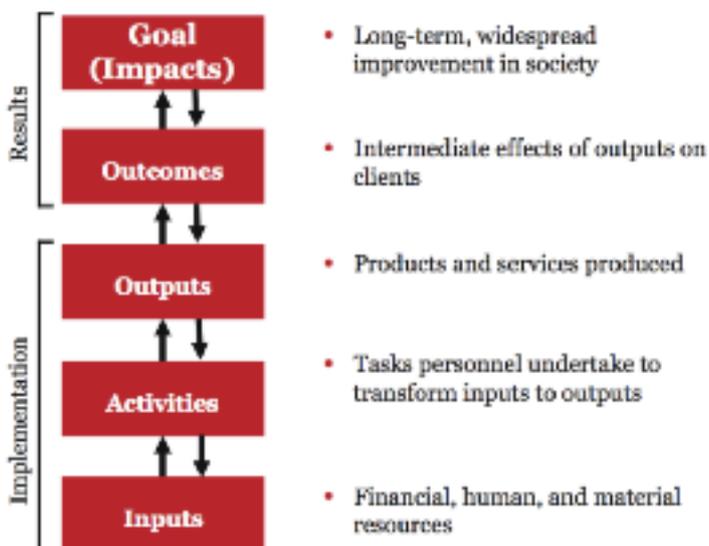
framework for recording key data. In some cases data that was being collected was no longer necessary and in many cases new procedures for collecting data had to be put in place to ensure that the service could accurately record and monitor the intervention.

TOWARDS AN OUTCOMES BASED EVALUATION

One of the main aims of the process with all of the Access Services was to create the foundations for an outcomes based evaluation in 2012. The services were provided with the framework and tools to ensure that the actual impact of the various interventions could be evaluated. There are now agreed baseline data in place fore all of the indicators and a monitoring tool to support the collection of data.

Key Challenges

There were a number of challenges faced during this process. These are articulated below as well as the solution arrived at through partnership between the service providers and the evaluation expert.

Issue One – All of the services had inconsistent mechanisms for recording and reporting information.

Solution – Once the staff and services had gone through the process of developing logical frameworks and identifying data to record, a simple monitoring tool to support the recording of data was developed.

Issue Two – Lack of, or inconsistent baseline data.

Solution – baseline data sources were identified for each outcome.

Issue Three – Lack of common language.

Solutions – Training was provided to all of the staff on the Results Based Management Framework and in particular the language used. By the end of the process all of the staff were familiar with and using the key terms, activities, outputs, outcomes, impacts, baseline data, indicators and targets and had a thorough understanding of what these mean.

Conclusions

The experience of the service managers within UCC PLUS[+], Mature Students Office and the Disability Support Service is that the framework is very helpful and is an effective way of planning, monitoring and building data for an outcomes evaluation in the future. The system is very easy to use and understand. The experience in the first year of using the framework is that there is excellent participation and engagement by all of the services. Service specific monitoring tools have been developed for each service, enabling them to record annual outputs and monitor outcome indicators.

Significantly the director of the Access Service expressed support for the framework and the process and included the implementation of the M&E system in the strategic plan for the Access Service.

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UCC PLUS[+] Programme (formerly Access Programme) working with linked schools seeks to target students and to provide motivational and educational assistance to them throughout their secondary schooling to enhance their ability to compete for third level places.

BIOGRAPHY

NIAMH M. KENNY

Niamh is one of the founding directors of Exodea Europe Consulting Limited which she established with Bill Thorne in 2004. Exodea has emerged as one of the leading socio-economic development consultancy companies in Ireland, specialising in social research. Niamh has a particular interest in monitoring and evaluation. She has undertaken professional training in Results Based Management with the World Bank and is a member of the European Evaluation Network.

Niamh has led on a wide range of projects focusing on educational disadvantage and access, including an evaluation of the National Adult Literacy Agency Distance Learning Service, an employment and training plan linked to the transfer of Dublin Institute of Technology to Grangegorman in Dublin's North Inner City and a Training and Education Strategy for Co. Cork VEC and South and East Cork Area Development.

Prior to establishing Exodea, Niamh was the Chief Executive Officer of Blackwater Resource Development. Blackwater is a multi-dimensional, rural development company delivering a suite of European and State socio-economic development programmes across an area of 60 km2 in the Republic of Ireland, with a total population of 62,000. During her term as CEO, Niamh successfully developed, devised and implemented a wide range of programmes including: LEADER, EQUAL, INTERREG IIIB North West Europe and INTERREG IIIB Atlantic Arc, ALTENER and Article 6 and Article 10. All of these initiatives were used to provide a tailored response to the locally agreed needs of the area, thereby increasing the level of social integration and improve the economic performance of a largely rural area.

Primary School Children 'GO 4IT' in Higher Ed

Name of presenters: Ms. Linda Barry and Ms. Anna Murphy
Organisation: Limerick Institute of Technology
Department: Access Service
The main focus of the proposal is: Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

During the academic year 2006 – 2007 the LIT Access Service began working in partnership with St. Munchin"s Family Resource Centre. St. Munchin's FRC is situated in St. Munchin"s parish which extends to include the local authority housing areas of Kileely, Ballynanty and Thomondgate which is situated in a designated RAPID area in the northside regeneration area of Limerick city. St. Munchin's is similar to other disadvantaged communities in that social exclusion (resulting from several contributing factors) continues to marginalise minority groups, thus increasing the socio-economic gap between rich and poor.

By working in partnership with St. Munchin's FRC the Limerick Institute of Technology Access Service has developed the 'GO 4IT ' programme. This initiative targets primary school children with academic potential from backgrounds where there is little or no tradition of third-level education.

Provide summary of main points of paper

This 'GO 4IT' programme is an inspirational example of a Higher Education Community Link which embraces the academic potential of primary school children within the Northside Regeneration Area of Limerick City. Parents and children from the local community are invited to experience the welcoming atmosphere of their local third level college -LIT.

St. Munchin's FRC in collaboration with the St. Munchin's Girls NS, St. Munchin's Boys NS, and Corpus Christy NS choose the participants. St. Munchin's FRC provide weekly transportation support and supervision of the participants.

A winning combination of activities engages participants across an eight week programme. Participants have the opportunity to complete homework with guided mentoring and assistance. This session is supported by current LIT student volunteers participating on the Access Initiative - 'Guided Initiative Voluntary Engagement' (GIVE). They are treated to a weekly formal dining experience which offers each participant a unique opportunity to sample a rich variety of freshly cooked food. The children then engage in a rich tapestry of active learning experiences across the academic and non academic departments of the Institute. Each week culminates with a variety of sporting activities designed to appeal to both the male and female participants.

The aspiration of this programme is that it will positively inspire, challenge and assist these children in their personal development and social integration skills. This is evident at the end of this programme when confident young students graduate in front of their families, staff from St.Munchin's FRC and LIT.

The feedback from this annual initiative is extremely positive with students eagerly anticipating a re-visit to LIT when they have progressed to second level education.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Interested parties including educators and community groups who engage in targeted access initiatives or who are involved in the development of same.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

The LIT Access Service and St. Munchin's Family Resource Centre have worked in collaboration since the academic year 2006-2007 to promote education to participants of the GO 4IT programme. Since GO 4IT's conception many modifications have been made in order to capitalise on the success of this collaborative approach. LIT Access Service wish to share with delegates the lessons learned from our experiences and the model which is now successfully delivered.

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

This targeted initiative has evolved over the past four years through continuous feedback from participants, family members and local and community educators. It is now a model which can be successfully adapted in any educational setting which promotes the opportunity of equal access to third level education.

UCC PLUS+ Orientation Programme: A Continuum of Support for the Under-Represented School Leaving Student

Name of presenter: Ms. Maeve Bent

Organisation: University College Cork

Department: UCC PLUS+

The main focus of the proposal is: Practice

Brief description of the background of the proposal:

The presentation will outline briefly the aims and objectives of the annual UCC PLUS+ Orientation Programme. It will argue that the rationale behind the programme continues to be critically important in the current social and economic period and is directly linked to the positive progression of the student.0

Provide summary of main points of paper:

A key feature of post-entry UCC PLUS+ support services, the Orientation Programme provides the school-leaving student with the opportunity to establish important academic links to their chosen programme of study, while also creating vital social-networks with other students.

They are encouraged to acquire particular skills that enable them to access relevant information and student services. In doing so they gain confidence and begin to become self-reliant. The Orientation Programme as a model of best practice remains at the forefront of Access student supports, allowing as it does, an insight for students into the processes and procedures involved in third level education. The result is an enhancement of the individuals' understanding of 'how college works' and this in turn relates directly to progression and retention of under-represented groups.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Access support personnel.
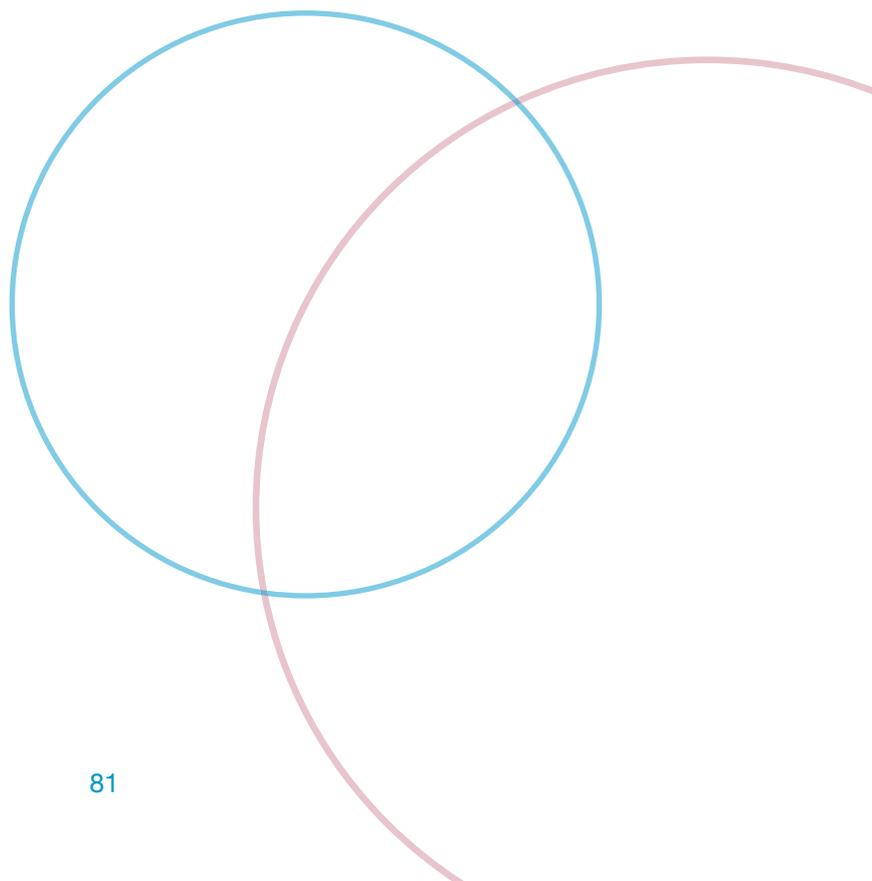
The Impact of Participation in a Week Long University Taster Programme on Second Level Student's Attitude Towards Education and Knowledge of Third Level

Name of presenters: Ms Olive Byrne and Ms Christine Moynihan
Organisation: University College Cork
Department: UCC PLUS+ Programme
The main focus of the proposal is: Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

The UCC PLUS+ "Easter School" is a week long university taster programme attended annually by over 200 fifth year and transition year students linked to the UCC PLUS+ programme. A study was carried out with the participants of Easter School 2009 to (a) look at the impact on participating on the programme at the attitude towards and knowledge of third level (b) to compare the knowledge and attitude of students from linked schools of third level, to those in non-linked schools.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

The UCC PLUS+ "Easter School" is a week long university taster programme attended annually by over 200 fifth year and transition year students linked to the UCC PLUS+ programme. The programme aims to provide students with an introduction to University life in the hope of encouraging and inspiring them to consider third level as a real option for them. It allows the students to develop relationships with UCC PLUS+ staff and receive advice to support decision-making re subject choices, course selection and career options. Easter School acquaints the students with the range of degree programmes on offer, the physical campus and the host of services and supports available.

The students who participated in the programme in 2009 were asked to complete a questionnaire on day one of the programme, and another questionnaire again on the final day. The aim of the questionnaires was to assess if there had been any change in knowledge regarding third level during the week, and also to assess if attendance at this week long event had an impact on students attitude towards education.

A control group of students who attend non-link schools and who did not attend the programme were also asked to complete the first questionnaire.

The paper looks at the positive impact attendance at a university taster programme had on this cohort of students. It also compares the responses to the survey for students from non-linked and linked schools and observes a number of noticeable differences in both attitude towards third level and knowledge of the third level system.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Practitioners, policy makers, school personnel.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

The impact of pre-entry activities on the knowledge and aspirations of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

ACCESS 21: Making Connections in the Border, Midland and Western Region and County Clare

Name of presenter: Ms. Imelda Byrne
Organisation: NUI Galway
Department: Access Programme Office
The main focus of the proposal is: Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

ACCESS 21 was a SIF 1 funded project; it was a collaborative project across the Border, Midland and Western region (BMW Region) and Co. Clare, designed to widen access and participation and promote lifelong learning. This paper looks at how the ACCESS 21 Partners – 7 institutions in 3 regions 'connected' to deliver on each partners commitment to National Objectives of equity of access and balanced regional development, placing third level education at the heart of the region's development.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

The purpose of the paper is to illustrate what ACCESS 21 achieved. The paper provides a brief overview of the forces that have shaped the work of ACCESS 21. This includes a description of the region, the rational behind SIF 1, an outline of the national strategies for widening access and participation and the specific aims and objectives of ACCESS 21. Particular attention is given to reporting on the local access courses as this is the mainstay of the work carried out by ACCESS 21. It also looks at the extent to which ACCESS 21 met its objectives and targets as well as those aspired to nationally under SIF 1 and by the HEA. It also summarises data collected and learning that has taken place as well as demonstrating the impact the work has had. The financial side of ACCESS 21 is also examined. Finally a summary of achievements is outlined, pertinent issues that emerged highlighted and solutions and proposed approaches to these issues is described.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Those interested in collaborative outreach Access initiatives and in particular collaborative delivery of Higher Education led Access Courses.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

Collaborative and innovative practice in designing and delivering outreach Access courses.

Please state the wider applicability/transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

Collaborative practice – the reality of 7 institutions connecting to plan, design and deliver educational opportunities for a widely dispensed rural population.

Class of 2014 – How a Focused Intervention in a Secondary School can Enhance Academic Achievement and Progression to Higher Education

Name of presenters: Ms. Elaine Byrnes and Ms. Deirdre O'Connor
Organisation: University of Limerick
Department: Access Office
The main focus of the proposal is: Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

The Class of 2014 is a Programme which works with secondary school students in St. Enda's Community School Limerick, which in recent years has had a low rate of transfer to higher education. The aim of the Programme is to increase the retention and attainment levels of Pupils thereby increasing transfer to Higher Education. The initiative will work with these first years throughout their second level education through a series of sustained, intensive interventions, such as in-school support, after school activities and summer programmes. This prolonged programme will enable the group of students to reach their full potential and complete the second level senior educational cycle and transfer to Higher Education. Importantly participants will also be involved in social and sporting activities within the local community. The series of interventions on the Programme will be devised and delivered in close collaboration with partners in the school and the local Community.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

Southill is recognised nationally as a community which has experienced economic and social disadvantage with little engagement by young people in the educational structures and high levels of unemployment, crime and social exclusion. This programme works the secondary school which services this community and can be divided into four core area – Community, Students, Parents and Teachers. Student interventions including life coaching, counselling, subject specific supports, after school framework, academic monitoring and interagency work will be discussed. Parent elements of intensive home visitation, life coaching, education awareness programme will be highlighted followed by the role of the programme in supporting teachers.

Overview of programme/school/community involvement will be presented with particular emphasis on school community engagement plan.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Fellow Access practitioners.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

Delegates will gain insight into a model of good practice being delivered in partnership with the school, parents, community which incorporates an interagency approach.

Specifically, delegates will learn about:

- a new model of enhancing participation and
- retention in secondary school.
- establishing a school/community engagement plan.
the achievements/barriers to date.

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

It is not possible to draw conclusions as yet. However to date, the Programme has contributed positively to the school environment and pupil progress. It can be reasonably drawn that it is enhancing the educational achievement of pupils. This model has been drawn in parts from international models of best practise and has been adjusted to fit the Irish context. If successful, it is hoped that it will be transferable to schools within the post primary sector.

Oral Language Development in the Early Years: Making the Right Connection?

Name of presenter: Dr. Tracey Connolly
Organisation: Pathways to Education Primary School Strand
Department: Access Department, UCC
The main focus of the proposal is: Research

Brief description of the background of the paper:

This paper will analyse a curriculum development model for inclusive education in the area of oral language which takes an interagency approach and is being developed with primary schools through Pathways to Education.

Provide summary of main points of paper

The development of oral language at an early age is essential for literacy development. Through Pathways to Education, an innovative primary school programme is being co-ordinated in developing oral language with the infant classes. The programme reflects best practice by complementing the formal education system through an integrated approach and shared vision.

Ten primary schools in the north west of Cork city are participating in this holistic programme which is child centred and reaches out to communities. The key concept is to add support to mainstream schooling. The programme takes a family literacy approach and comprises of sessions facilitated by speech and language therapists with infant class teachers and in the community with Adult Literacy Schemes which will support parents.

This paper will discuss the key features of this programme and how it is informed by educational research. The paper will analyse the strengths of the programme and its research findings to date as a model of educational and social inclusion.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Researchers, practitioners and policy makers.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

Educational research in the area of oral language development and literacy.

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

This programme is currently at its infancy however as a model of good practice for educational and social inclusion it has wider applicability and transferability.

Stepping Stones to IT Tallaght': An Overview of a Three-Day Summer School Offered to Mature Students Entering/Returning to Higher Education

Name of presenters: Ms Rosemary Cooper and Ms Marie Kielty
Organisation: Institute of Technology Tallaght
Department: Centre for Learning and Teaching/Careers Office
The main focus of the paper is: Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

The 'Stepping Stones to IT Tallaght' Summer School was an initiative designed under the SIF II Eastern Regional Alliance, Student Transitions project. The aim of the summer school was to ease the transition to higher education for mature applicants who may have been out of the education system for a number of years. The summer school was designed to address both personal and academic needs and to build confidence and motivation in adult learners.

Provide summary of main points of paper

The paper will outline the design of the summer school and how the needs of adults were analysed.

The original idea was conceived from a Study Skills workshop for adult learners that was designed in 2003 and subsequently enhanced each year to meet the diverse requirements of the student cohort.

The project team considered feedback from adults from numerous Study Skills workshops, and listened to academic staff about the skills required by first year learners. From our own professional experience within a Careers Service and a Centre for Learning and Teaching, a list of learning outcomes were compiled for the overall Summer School, and then individual learning outcomes for each individual component. The components were:

- Overview of academic skills
- Learning styles assessment (using Felder-Silverman model)
- Employability Skills
- Study skills – organisation, time management, note making, and report writing
- Emotional Intelligence assessment (using Bar-On EQi assessment)
- Real World Mathematics
- Personality type assessment (using Myers Briggs Type Indicator)
- Overview of college IT systems
- Academic English
- Presentation Skills
- Library Tour

At the end of the Summer School, participants were awarded a Certificate of Completion by the Registrar.

The paper will offer a reflection on the effectiveness of each session and its usefulness for the learner. We will also allude to the participant feedback received and the relevance of each topic covered. Finally we will then summarize with papers for future enhancements based on this pilot project.

The paper will draw on relevant literature, to include work by Tinto, Yorke and Longden, Prebble *et al.*, Quinn *et al.*, and Hassall.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Mature Student Officers, Access Officers, individuals responsible for first year student engagement and retention.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

Delegates can learn from two practitioners in different student support roles, collaborating in transition programme design, utilising two well known assessment tools (emotional intelligence (Emotional Quotient Inventory, and Myers Briggs Personality Type Indicator), and the value of blending these components into academic modules.

Delegates can also learn from the presenters about how designing and presenting such a programme can be so much more fun when delivered in a collaborative way.

Please state the wider applicability /transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

The "Stepping Stones" Summer School could be offered as a 'stand alone' programme within the community, within Industry, or cross collaboratively within academia.

A further Summer School has already been designed and delivered for graduating students who are 'Stepping Out' and making the transition to the workplace.

Experience gained:

• Delivering summer school to international cohort.

Lessons learnt:

• Timing of the programme0- very important.

• Intensity of delivery – engage with more staff for variety of delivery styles.

• Some participants interested in gaining academic credit (Minor Award) – will investigate this.

Service Learning in Action – Linking with the Community

Name of presenters: Deirdre Creedon and Kirsten Ni Neill
Organisation: Organisation: Cork Institute of Technology
Department: Access Office
The main focus of the proposal is: Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

The paper stems from a joint initiative between the CIT Access Office, CIT students, private industry, Junior Achievement and the Glen Community.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

The Paper will give an overview of the programme; when it began, who was involved, how it was established, etc. The outcomes of the programme will be presented and the learning involved for both the participants and the organisers. Our experience will be highlighted.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Access Practitioners, Lecturers, Community groups, second level school personnel.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

Delegates can:

- Identify the do's and don'ts of collaborative ventures.
- See the benefits of service learning
- Identify a programme which has successfully cast the net to the wider community using service learning to engage with communities at a pre-entry level.

'If Only it Could be Like This' – Creating Pathways to Higher Education Through Transformative Learning

Name of presenters: Ms Eleanor Dalton presenting – in collaboration with Maeve O'Grady and Mary Fenton

Organisation: Waterford Women's Centre- ACCESS 2000 (WWC) and Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT)

Department: Adult and Continuing Education

The main focus of the proposal is: Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

These are the thoughts of a participant of Waterford Institute of Technology's (WIT) Higher Certificate in Community Education and Development courses delivered by Waterford Women's Centre (WWC), a community development project, based in Waterford City.

The genesis of Community Education and Development courses in WIT was a strategic partnership between the Department of Adult Education and ACCESS 2000 through a New Opportunities for Women (NOW) initiative. The result of this partnership was the development of a suite of accredited courses in Community Education and Development which would enhance community activists and volunteers, particularly women, gain employment within their community.

In early 2004, a group of women engaged in a developmental educational programme in WWC sought educational progression that would maintain a particular way of learning and teaching. WWC requested WIT to be given the autonomy to deliver the Higher Certificate in Community Education and Development course to women. In 2004, WWC began the first centre-based delivery of the Higher Certificate in Community Education and Development. WWC works with women who experience multiple barriers and obstacles to participation in education and training i.e. 30% of the course participants left school with primary education only (primarily 40 + age group) and a further 55% without upper second level education which total 85% 'educationally disadvantaged'.

This paper proposes to describe a model of practice and partnership that opens up a *particularly transformative* progression pathway for women to third level. This model recognises the positive impact of locating the learning experience in a non-institutional environment and within a culture and ethos that critically reflects on the barriers to participation and works to remove these barriers. Inequality and power in society are examined through the lived experience of the learners and knowledge is created and then validated through theory. An innovative, creative and integrated model of delivery and assessment is continually being developed through the partnership with WIT.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

This paper critiques the innovative learning partnership between WWC in the delivery of WIT's Higher Certificate in Community Education and Development to women who heretofore had not engaged in higher education. It charts the evolution of the partnership between WWC and WIT, describes the unique features of the course delivery and recommends how this learning partnership could/should evolve in the future. It highlights how WWC has succeeded in removing obstacles to and providing pathways to third level courses for women by:

- Adapting the delivery of the course to meet the needs of the women.
- Creating the space and a safe learning environment for women to engage with new knowledge.
- Acknowledging the lived experience of the women.
- Facilitating the women to find their voice and allow them to be heard.
- Adopting an integrated approach to the course delivery of the course.
- Developing creative assessment strategies which are real to the women.
- Integrating the learning into everyday community work of the women.

This paper highlights the importance of engendering a supportive learning environment and culture which values collective and interdependent learning. It describes the women's journey of unlearning, dismantling conditioning and developing critical awareness, leadership skills and deep, rich and powerful learning within the group.

This paper shows that with a sensitivity to women and creativity in course delivery, WWC and WIT have succeeded in providing a real pathway to higher education to women who traditionally did not engage with higher education.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

- Higher Education Institutes, Universities and Institutes of Technology.
- HEA, IUA, Institutes of Technology of Ireland.
- Department of Education and Science.
- Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs.
- Community Groups and Community Project Managers.
- People interested in developing alternative access routes to higher education.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

This session will critique an innovative learning partnership between a community group (WWC) and Higher Education Institute (WIT) to remove barriers to participation to third level for those who traditionally would not participate and provide access to higher education within a safe environment.0

The programme described is unique and innovative in approach and ethos and aims to shift the balance of power in knowledge and learning from the lecturer to the group.

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

WWC believes that this model is widely applicable particularly in developing leadership in marginalised communities and challenging inequality in education and access to third level.

WWC has connections through a community project with Tanzania which has expressed an interest in the model – in particular the capacity building and consciousness raising potential in the approach to learning.

Good Practise in Supporting Vision Impaired Students is Good Practise for All

Name of presenter: Ms Linda Doran
Organisation: University College Cork
Department: Disability Support Service
The main focus of the proposal is: Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

This paper will look at the structures and supports that have been developed over a number of years to support Blind and Vision Impaired students in UCC. It will also look at how these supports can be expanded not just to support students with a Print Disability but to support the Diverse Student.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

- Building links with Blind and Vision Impaired students, their teachers and parents while the students are in 2nd level.

- Providing support for 2nd level vision impaired students to help them progress to 3rd level.

- Needs assessment of the student once they reach 3rd level.

- Liaison with Academic Departments, Library, Computer Centre etc to put in place supports for the students.

- Being accessible is about being aware.

- A Holistic Approach to Accessibility.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

- Lecturers
- Library Staff
- Computer Centre and Blackboard Staff

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

- Good practise in supporting Blind and Vision Impaired students in 3rd Level.

- A Holistic approach to Accessibility: Who is responsible?

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

Not every class or lecture will have students with a Vision Impairment however the key points of this paper can be applied to all students thus making any learning environment more accessible.

Access to 3rd-Level Education: Challenges to the Enhancement of Adult Education

Name of presenters: Ms Claire Dorrity and Ms Nicola Maxwell

Organisation: Pathways to Education, A Joint Access Initiative of University College Cork and Cork Institute of Technology

Department: Access Services

The main focus of the proposal is: Research

Brief description of the background of the paper:

Much of the research on education inequality in Ireland highlights the numerous and myriad barriers to education experienced by marginalised groups at all levels across the education sector. While several initiatives are taking place both nationally and locally to address this issue, a number of gaps remain which continue to hinder participation, particularly for those coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds. From interventions to date, it is clear that some progress is being made to ensure widening participation is achieved. Formulating policies and planning through the integration of a wide range of school based initiatives has been successful in tackling both numeracy and literacy problems while also increasing the retention rates of early school leavers. What is less clear, however, is the impact of initiatives such as community education and the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) and whether such initiatives are reaching their target groups. The research presented in this paper will look specifically at success of interventions in relation to increasing the participation rates of non-traditional learners, with a particular focus on those coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

The purpose of this paper is to look specifically at access related issues pertaining to adult non-traditional learners and highlight the specific complexities associated with this group of learners, the barriers to accessing education and the wide range of supports required to ensure increased participation. The paper is based on a study undertaken between April and December 2009, a joint initiative between CIT and UCC, which was conducted through the Strategic Innovation Fund (cycle 2) 'Connections Project'.

A number of issues are addressed in the study; firstly is the need to move beyond a 'deficit model of disadvantage' and the need to address educational inequality in a framework that challenges the language of disadvantage, secondly is the need to address educational inequality within the wider context of structural inequality, thirdly the need to recognise more flexible and interactive approaches to learning, and fourthly the need for more collaborative communication and consultation processes in representing communities that are persistently marginalised.

The study undertaken focused specifically on the Cork City area, incorporating a wide range of interviews with education providers and key stakeholders across the sector, while also encompassing survey data analysis from incoming mature students in UCC and CIT. A review of Census data on educational participation and a number of focus groups reflecting the experiences of adult learners were also incorporated into the research process. The emergent themes of the research are presented in this conference paper highlighting the need for the development of new and alternative approaches to learning that facilitates access and need for systemic and structural change that gives recognition to an education system that is distinct and open to all.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Education Providers and Key Stakeholders.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

Education Providers at All levels and those who have an interest in Educational Inequality.

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

The research aims to inform future access initiatives at local level while also having an impact in national initiatives outlined in the National Plan for Equity of Access.

Adult Student Motives for Accessing the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme

Name of presenter: Mr Laurenz Egan
Organisation: North Tipperary VEC
Department: Coláiste Éile, Adult Education Centre
The main focus of the proposal is: Research

Brief description of the background of the paper:

The aim of this research is to uncover learners' motivations to return to a second chance, government funded, adult education programme called the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) and to better understand the access issues encountered by such adults.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

This paper evidences the idiosyncratic nature of adult students and uncovers a multitude of motivating factors which influence the decisions of adult learners to participate in VTOS. A key finding of this research is that VTOS students are motivated both by the prospect of employment and by the prospect of further studies leading to employment. Obstacles to accessing VTOS are explored and the restrictive capacity of VTOS emerged as one of the greatest national obstacles. Many other obstacles emerged from within the student, the greatest of which was a lack of self-belief.

A series of conclusions and recommendations are presented, including; an increase in the capacity of VTOS to meet current demands, a review of financial incentives for grant assisted adult students, the establishment of Local Adult Learning Boards and the promotion of an ambassador students programme to further encourage word of mouth and reduce the obstacles of fear and self-doubt amongst potential students.

It is hoped that the findings of this research will further the discussion of interested parties on the following aspects of VTOS; widening participation, recruitment, admissions, retention, achievement and programme content.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Practitioners and policy makers in the area of Further Education and those in Higher Education with an interest in non-traditional learners.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

This paper emerged from studies on a Doctorate in Education programme, which is nearing a conclusion. The research paper summarises contextual and conceptual themes relevant to adult education and more specifically to the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme. A history and background to VTOS is presented followed by a summary of the methodological learning journey which arrived at the findings of the research. Findings specific to motivation, obstacles, access, age and gender are discussed with a view to improving access for marginalised adults to a formal learning scheme.

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

This research paper addresses obstacles to widening participation and evidences the views of hundreds of VTOS adult students nationally as well as the views of almost one hundred coordinators nationally who are the 'gatekeepers' to this second chance adult education programme. This research account is applicable to all educators involved with non traditional learners within and outside Ireland.

Progress to Third Level – Bringing it All Back Home

Name of presenter: Ms Eileen Geaney
Organisation: North Presentation Secondary School
Department: Home School Community Liaison
Address: Farranree, Cork
The main focus of the proposal is: Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

One of the key factors in determining whether a child progresses to third level education is the attitude and support of the parents. Strengthening our connections with parents is promoting the practice of partnership which requires that we put information, resources and power in the hands of those closest to the child, namely parents.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

College Access programmes need to engage with parents of target pupils to be more effective. This can be difficult for colleges to achieve. However, the Home School Community Liaison Coordinators already have established relationships with parents. These relationships can form the basis of collaboration between home, school and college.

The focus of the Home School Community Liaison Coordinator is working in partnership with parents, teachers, and other individuals and groups in the interest of the pupil's learning. Parents are supported on a one-to-one basis through home visitation, on a group basis through courses and on a community basis through the Local Education Committee.

Home visitation is a crucial element in building bonds of trust with families and is a unique outreach model by schools to parents. Home visitation is about building the parent as a person, a parent and an educator.

Encouraging parents to partake in school activities brings marginalised parents closer to their son/daughter's learning and empowers the parent to be involved in the decision making process around further education for their son/daughter.

Three examples of successful projects involving parents are:

- The Pathways to Education Study Skills Project was an example of a targeted project aimed at pupils and parents. Information was shared with parents through information sessions and weekly texting. Pupils were taught the basic skills of homework recording and parents oversaw its implementation at home.

- Parents Information Sessions held in school help to bridge the knowledge and accessibility gaps that parents can perceive to be obstacles to further education.

- Parents Programmes e.g. "Inroads" programme works directly with parents, building self esteem, promoting parents' development and further education opportunities for parents themselves.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Educationalists involved in access to and participation in third level education.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

The importance of the parental input in the area of access to third level education and how building relationships is the foundation to engaging and involving marginalised parents in their child's education.

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

Investing time and resources in promoting parental participation in Access Programmes benefits the parent, child, family and community. These benefits are relevant to an Irish and an international context.

Working in Partnership with Parents to Enhance Children's Participation in Education in a Disadvantaged Setting

Name of presenter: Dr. Marion Healy

Organisation: St. Vincent's Convent Primary School, Cork

The main focus of the proposal is: Research

Brief description of the background of the paper:

Having spent over three decades working in primary schools in disadvantaged settings, as a teacher, Home School Community Liaison Coordinator and Principal, I observed that partnership with parents in disadvantaged contexts can be difficult to realise.0I decided to research the subject and, through the University of Hull, completed a Masters degree (M.Ed.) in 1997 and a Doctorate (Ed. D.) in 2008. The paper will outline my findings from the study undertaken from the latter (Ed. D. 2008).

Provide summary of main points of paper:

Parental partnership in education is a statutory requirement under the Education Act, 1998, as well as being a stated policy aim of government and a recognised strategy to address educational disadvantage.0Parents in a disadvantaged setting often seem reluctant or unable to become involved in partnership with schools.0Arising from research conducted, the paper will explore the reasons underlying such difficulty and re-examine the idea of partnership to ensure inclusion for such 'invisible' parents.0The proposed paper will be in three parts.0The first part will present parental understandings of parent-school partnership in an Urban Band 2 school in the School Support Programme under the DEIS Action Plan for Educational Inclusion (DES 2005).0A key finding from this part of the research is that parents in this setting considered partnership important to enable them to understand more about the education system.0The second part will outline a partnership project jointly devised and implemented by parents and teachers as well as the lessons learned from the process and the ensuing implications for schools.0The third part will describe case studies with parents whose children may be at risk of educational disadvantage.0These parents gave a range of opinions and insights.0For example, they all hoped their children would finish second-level schooling but were less sure about third-level. They spoke of the difficulties and obstacles they faced as well as the huge (and often invisible) effort they invest in their children's education. Lessons learned will also be outlined here.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Educationalists interested in addressing educational disadvantage and in ensuring that young people stay in and benefit fully from the educational system for as long as possible.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

Parent-school partnership has different meanings for different people.0To ensure the inclusion of parents whose children may be at risk of educational disadvantage, partnership needs to be nurtured and differentiated.

This research shows that parents of children in a disadvantaged setting have high educational hopes for their children.0This does not always translate into educational success for the children.0Delegates may learn from the research findings why this is so.

Delegates interested in implementing partnership with parents in disadvantaged settings will hear of useful strategies they may employ in their efforts to implement this partnership.

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

Meanings of partnership in an educational context are rare in the literature.0The paper will add to available understandings and meanings.

The paper will show how government policy with regard to partnership is translated into practice in one school.0This could be interesting and informative for both Irish and international readers.

Difficulties are experienced worldwide in implementing partnership with lower socio-economic parents. The lessons learned from this research may be useful in contexts outside of Ireland where educational disadvantage exists.

Pathways to College: Technology at Second Level for Students with Disabilities

Name of presenter: Ms Carmel Hennessy
Organisation: Pathways to Education
Department: Access Office, Cork Institute of Technology
The main focus of the proposal is: Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

The Pathways to Education SIF II Access initiative aims to increase the participation of students with disabilities at third level and further education through the promotion of assistive technologies within the second level sector, in the Cork/Kerry region.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

This paper will outline the Pathways to Education Assistive Technology initiative which aims to increase the participation of students with disabilities in third level and further education through the promotion of assistive technologies at second level.

Assistive technology supports for students with disabilities are more widely available once those students reach third level. The project aims to raise awareness of the potential of assistive technologies within the learning environment so that post-primary students will both aspire to and achieve access to third level and further education. Awareness events and assistive technology training are developed and provided for the various stakeholders within the second level education sector including students, teachers, special needs assistants, parents, Special Education Needs Organisers, etc in the form of:

- Cluster Information Evenings
- Localised Training
- College Based Training
- School-Based Workshops
- Aspiration Raising Workshops

The paper explains the important links that have been made with the various disability organisations and their role in supporting the aims of the project to date. Finally conclusions and recommendations will be presented for best practice in the provision of assistive technology services that will enhance the transition of students with disabilities to third level and further education.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Policy makers and practitioners in the Disability/Access/Outreach/Assistive Technology arena.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

Delegates can expect to learn about the process of enhancing the transition of students with disabilities to third level and further education through the promotion of assistive technologies at second level.

Please state the wider applicability/transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

The model used in the Pathways to Education Assistive Technology strand can inform on best practice in the promotion of assistive technologies and thus the increase in independence of students with disabilities who have the potential to progress to third level and further education. It is a model that offers potential for future extension to the primary education sector.

Including People with Intellectual Disability in Third Level Education: Critical Reflections on Practice and Theory

Name of presenters: Dr. Máire Leane & Ms. Miriam Twomey
Organisation: Certificate in Contemporary Living Course Team, University College Cork
Department: Applied Social Studies, UCC
The main focus of the proposal is: Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

The Certificate in Contemporary Living (CCL) is a two-year full-time course designed to provide adults with intellectual disabilities with the learning experiences essential to the development of contemporary living skills.0It was developed and pioneered by the National Institute for Intellectual Disability (NIID) in TCD.0A pilot project delivering two modules from the CCL course to a group of 20 students with varying intellectual disabilities, was undertaken at UCC in 2009.0The pilot project received some funding from the Strategic Innovation Fund, Cycle 2.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

This presentation will consider both the practical and theoretical challenges thrown up by an initiative which seeks to provide education for people with intellectual disabilities in a third level setting.0The paper will begin with an overview of the key steps involved in the development and delivery of the CCL Pilot Project.0It will provide critical reflection on challenges encountered and strategies adopted in relation to; student recruitment and selection, liaison and relationships with parents and service providers, securing funding for the course, embedding the course on the UCC campus and planning for full course roll out.0

The second part of the paper will consider some of the moral and political questions which involvement in the CCL has raised for the authors.0The potential for the CCL, designed as an access initiative for people with intellectual disabilities, to become a vehicle, which reproduces class and ability based inequalities will be considered.0Critical consideration will also be given to the very real financial, cultural and political challenges which third level institutions will have to take on, if people with intellectual disabilities are to be given a genuine opportunity for inclusion in third level settings.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Educators, policymakers, administrators and service providers, concerned with the issue of access to third level educational settings for people with intellectual disabilities.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

This session will provide practical advice on the setting up of a pilot project to provide educational opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities in a third level setting.0Critical insights into the moral and political implications of such initiatives will also be provided.

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

The learning generated in this paper would be transferable to any third level institution in the Irish context and aspects of the material considered would be applicable to international contexts.

A Response to the National Skills Strategy Through Intensive Tuition Programmes for Adults with Low Functional Literacy and Numeracy Skills

Presenter: Ms Marian Lynch (National Co-ordinator for Dept. Of Education & Science ITABE Programme)
Organisation: County Dublin VEC, Department of Adult and Further Education
The main focus of the proposal is: Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

The programmes discussed in this paper are national adult literacy and numeracy initiatives developed in a partnership process by the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA), National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), the Dept. Of Education & Science (DES), the Dept. of Enterprise, Trade & Employment and FÁS, in response to needs identified through the National Skills strategy. Both programmes are co-ordinated nationally by Ms. Marian Lynch and hosted by County Dublin VEC.

This programme is an Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) led initiative delivered on a nationally basis throughout the 33 Vocational Educations Committees. It is a direct response to the call by the Department of Trade, Employment and Enterprise as part of the National Skills Strategy to provide educational opportunities for adults with basic literacy and numeracy needs through innovative intensive literacy tuition.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

The importance of intensive tuition opportunities in adult basic education:

- Until the introduction of both the Skills for Work and Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE) programmes adult literacy tuition was largely provided through weekly 2 hour sessions and based solely on the need of the individual.

- Needs Analysis (links to international research and the NSS):0The need to link learning outcomes not only to the individuals needs but also to those of the employer and community at large called for new initiatives.

- Prioritising the context and identifying target groups: Ensuring that all three domains were covered by an intensive tuition opportunity led to the development of 2 initiatives.0One by the DETE and FÁS and another by DES and IVEA.0The brining together of both national initiatives under the auspices of County Dublin VEC has led to an additional level of opportunity and effectiveness.

- Developing the first nationally recognised literacy skills assessment:0The challenge of providing a nationally used assessment tool for adult literacy practitioners was addressed by the ITABE programme.

- Clarifying the benefits: Identifying motivation factors for all involved – students, employers and providers.

- Addressing the issues of accreditation, transfer and progression: Recognising the landscape of provision and ensuring progression opportunities.

- Linking the two delivery initiatives (Skills for Work & ITABE): Combining co-ordination to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

- Evaluation outcomes.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

- Adult Education Managers and Practitioners
- Employers
- Adult Students (Education & Sociology)

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

- The extent of the problem of low skills across the domains: work, community and home.

- The importance of intensive tuition opportunities in addressing adult literacy and numeracy needs.

- The need for an inter-departmental and inter-agency approach in dealing with skills deficiencies.

- The need to tailor interventions to meet the needs of specific target groups and in specific contexts/domains.

- The identification of educational assumptions in relation to basic/key skills provision (results of the evaluation of the ITABE Pilot 2006).

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

- The importance of the partnership approach to developing educational interventions in the area of basic/key skills.

- The need to utilise a combined knowledge base when planning.

- The importance of skills assessment and guidance supported placement in meeting project outcomes.

Investigate, Participate, Celebrate …. Innovate: An Exploration of the Possible Replication of the Experience of Cork Lifelong Learning Festival

Name of presenters: Willie McAuliffe, Deputy Principal, Colaiste Stiofain Naofa & Chair Festival Organising Committee. Tina Neylon, Co-ordinator, Cork Lifelong Learning Festival.
Denis Barrett, Community Education Facilitator, City of Cork VEC & Committee Member.
Organisation: Cork Lifelong Learning Festival, Cork City Development Board
The main focus of the proposal is: Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

The festival has over seven years worked to overcome negative perceptions and attitudes towards participation in education, particularly in RAPID[63] areas – through celebration & through showcasing learning which is already taking place in community settings.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

The Lifelong Learning Festival was established 7 years ago. One of its core aims has been the promotion of a positive perception of education and learning.

Part of the rationale for this is to challenge negative perceptions, sometimes over generations, towards education and formal learning by having events that are fun, participative and involve people planning and acting collectively.

The festival offers the opportunity to celebrate and publicise participants' achievements in a public forum, and give positive affirmation to people's learning. By participating in a city-wide event which involves over 150 organisations, the achievements of an individual, or of a small group, gain affirmation in the world of lifelong learning. From the start the Community Education Networks have been at the heart of the festival. These networks are based in RAPID areas, where CSO statistics show under-representation at third level, low levels of completion at second level and a high incidence of adult literacy issues. Most of the schools in the areas are designated as DEIS schools by the Department of Education and Science.

Our paper will focus on the participation of Community Education Networks, supported by City of Cork VEC, which have been established in RAPID areas. In 2009 approximately one quarter of the events during the festival, over 250 events in total, were organised and presented by members of the community education networks. Events are organised by local providers of lifelong learning programmes for local people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities. A strength of some of the events we will showcase is the intergenerationality and interculturality of participants. The presentation will include examples of how the festival has provided a platform that has allowed individuals' learning achievements, a very private matter, to enter the public domain and to be celebrated by their community, and by the city.

The paper will be accompanied by a multimedia presentation & will have an interactive element.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Policy makers & practitioners.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

The value of celebration & fun in encouraging participation in education.

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

Cork's Lifelong Learning Festival is unique in Europe – the only event which showcases and celebrates learning across all age groups, interests and abilities. It is organised by a committee set up by Cork City Development Board and has grown exponentially from 65+ events over three days in 2004 to a week long festival with more than 250 different events in 2009. It involves statutory, voluntary, community and private organisations offering education & training in the city. All events are free and there is no charge to participate. The event is very cost effective as

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63 RAPID is the government programme aimed at improving the quality of life & opportunities for people living in disadvantaged areas. The acronym stands for Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment & Development. There are four RAPID areas in Cork City.

participating organisations provide their own events from within their resources, and the core budget for co-ordination and promotion is less than €70,000 p.a.

The people who live in RAPID areas face particular obstacles. The success of the festival, growing as quickly as it has done, demonstrates that this approach to the promotion of lifelong learning works in the context of Cork City in Ireland. The applicability and transferability of this model may offer a useful starting point for similar approaches to the promotion of learning in other contexts internationally.

Can we make the leap towards a National Guidance Service?

Name of presenter: Andrea McCarthy

Organisation: Cork City Adult Guidance Service

The main focus of the proposal is: Policy / Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

Over the past ten years the Adult Education Guidance Initiative has supported thousands of individuals to access education and progress with their chosen career path, particularly those who have been educationally disadvantaged for one reason or another. As we pick up the economic pieces perhaps it is time to revisit national guidance delivery as part of an overall support mechanism for change.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

- A brief review of history / purpose of AEGI, with particular reference to Cork.

- A recognised model of best practice in Europe - achievements of AEGI in relation to access o/progress in education.

- What is different about delivery of adult guidance to other guidance models?

- Partnership has been key to the success of the AEGI – highlighting connections that work

- The future of adult guidance in Ireland – fragmentation or cohesion?

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Adult Educators, Guidance Practitioners, Policy Makers.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

They will learn more about the development of a dedicated adult guidance service in Ireland over the past 10 years. Hopefully together we will question the need for a more joined up model of delivery and the importance of connecting up with other key providers.

Please state the wider applicability/transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

The AEGI story is a useful one for other countries interested in developing a dedicated adult guidance service. It is also useful for adult education provision in Ireland as it has been key in identifying gaps and barriers while insisting on a collaborative approach in enabling clients to access education.

A Review of Dyslexia Screening Tools Employed by Letterkenny IT Over the Past 5 Years

Name of presenter: Mr. Brian Mc Gonagle
Organisation: Letterkenny Institute of Technology
Department: Access Office
The main focus of the proposal is: Research

Brief description of the background of the paper:

This research was funded by the S.I.F. Cycle 1. This paper is part of the "Ascent" projects led by A.I.T. There are in total 6 pieces of research emerging from this project which establish best practice re. educational assessments.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

This paper explores the effectiveness of various dyslexia screening tools including "Quickscan", LADS (Lucid Adult Dyslexia Screening) and DAST (Dyslexia Adult Screening Test). The paper begins by establishing a definition of Dyslexia as currently used and accepted both nationally and internationally.

The "Quickscan" screening tool is explained and the results of 5 years screening – 2004/05 to present are outlined. A comparison of results of learners who have (not) hence come forward for further assessments and their rate of academic success on completion of their studies having received learning support from the Access Office are highlighted.

The LADS and DAST screening tools are then explained and their effectiveness as further screening tools are measured since 2007. A short note on the collaboration with AIT led Ascent project is then outlined.

Finally conclusions and recommendations for best practice in the development of a screening process for dyslexia learners are proposed.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Policy makers and practitioners in the Access/Disability area.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

Delegates can learn from the process LyIT has employed over the past 5 years so that lessons can help them develop best practice in their own work.

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

SIF demands best national practice. Our National practice is comparable to international standards.

Community Based Access Initiative in an urban setting: Challenges, Lessons and Outcomes

Name of presenter: Ms Miriam McNamee
Organisation: CPLN Area Partnership
Department: Education
The main focus of the proposal is: Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

CPLN Area Partnership (formerly Clondalkin Partnership) was established in 1995 to tackle disadvantage and social exclusion. Combating educational disadvantage has always been central to the partnerships vision and actions. Clondalkin (Dublin 22) has traditionally had low progression to third level. The national average based on 2006 analysis shows that 55 % of Irish students who complete leaving cert go on to third level. In Dublin 22 only 23% went on to third level education (HEA, 2006).

The *Access Clondalkin* project stems from a 2005 report by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) entitled *Progressing the Action Plan: Funding to Achieve Equity of Access to Higher Education.*

'There is a need to develop a good model of practice in holistic community initiatives to achieve equity of access. A pilot project should be initiated to explore and develop such a model (HEA, 2005 27-28).

Clondalkin was subsequently chosen to be part of a three year pilot community-based initiative (starting in school year 2006-07 and running to 2008-09). The project's work is holistic in nature and covers a number of strands:

- Community-wide collaboration
- Supports for students
- New facilities and educational activities
- Supports for parents
- Research and evaluation

Provide summary of main points of paper:

Attitudinal barriers and limited expectations, within a community, present challenges to accessing to third level education for a disadvantaged area like Clondalkin. This paper argues that increased access to third level can be facilitated as a collaborative community initiative. This values the local knowledge of the area as well as utilising the social capital of an area's groups. By collaborating with all agencies in a community, the message is strengthened and it enhances community participation. This enables and empowers the local community to take ownership of the outcomes of the project. The collaboration itself breaks down pre-existing attitudinal barriers for the community to third level. It also creates a greater awareness and understanding of third level education making the goal of increasing participation in third level from the area, more realistic and visible to the community. The framework which emerges from the pilot project is innovative, in how it draws together a collaborative model of ideas and resources. The pilot access project is based on the principle of social inclusion and lifelong learning. Taking an innovative approach to generating attitudinal change towards education, involves starting from infancy all the way through an individual's life, to ensure the message becomes a behavioural norm.

Building collaborative relationships between schools, community and third level institutes has its challenges. Challenges can include communication links, cooperation, and joint-action initiatives. This paper outlines these challenges as well as providing information on how the project addressed those challenges and challenged attitudes within the community.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Access Officers, Educationalists, Community Groups, Parents, Policy Makers.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

The process of developing a community based access initiative. The challenges of such an initiative from the pilot projects experience. How community based access initiatives can support existing initiatives from the Higher education institutes. The key elements of the initiative and the outcomes from one urban location.

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

The approach is transferable to other comparable urban areas which have also experienced traditionally low levels of progression to third level education. The project meets the strategic aims of the HEA'S strategic plan *The National Plan for Equity of access to higher education 2008-2013*. It is a practical example of implementing the EU White Paper on education and training *Towards The Learning Society* and the Irish Government National skills strategy *Tomorrow's skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy* in one locality.

Traveller Students and Third Level – Issues, Successes and Challenges

Name of presenter: Ms. Bernadette Murray N.T., B. Soc. Sc., B. Ed., Dip. In Sp. Ed., M.A.

Organisation: Department of Education and Science

The main focus of the proposal is: Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

Travellers, an ethnic group in Irish Society, are relative newcomers to the education system. Up until the mid-nineties, the majority of Travellers did not transfer to second-level school. Retention through Junior Cycle and onto Senior Cycle continues to pose challenges.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

- Historical Perspective : Reports : Commission on Itinerancy, Review Body Report, Task Force Report
- Transfer to Post-Primary; Challenges / Supports
- Initiatives: Traveller Access Programme, U.C.C. 1999-2009
- Identification of schools where Traveller Students were enrolled. Initiatives introduced by schools, school based/home based
- Intercultural Education : Training Programmes for whole-school staffs
- Differentiation in Education
- Literacy and Numeracy
- Long-Term Goals : Career Guidance
- Student Mentoring
- Involving Parents
- The Way Forward
- This perspective is based on the presenter's xperience in supporting young Travellers to access education at all levels over almost three decades.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Educators

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

Practical examples of initiatives that have worked to increase the participation of young Travellers in second level schools through a holistic approach to education.

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

The experience of Irish Travellers in the education system is similar to that of other economically disadvantaged groups. The issues for Travellers are compounded by the impact of institutionalised racism. The initiatives outlined above are transferable to other marginalised groups in Irish society.

Agents of Change Making the Connections

Name of presenter: Ms Ann O'Brien
Organisation: NUI Maynooth
Department: Access Office
The main focus of the proposal is: Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

This paper is drawn from the experience of practitioners over the past 12 years. Access Officers met initially in small groups to discuss their vision for the implementation of activities to engage with disadvantaged schools and communities. This network established itself as AMA (Access Made Accessible). The target group AMA members support is socio-economic school-leavers.

This network has become a strong force in the field of widening participation in Ireland and are represented on the Advisory Group to the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education.

It has been active in collaborating with this office and the Equality Studies Centre in UCD office to establish a Professional Development Course for Access Practitioners and is currently designing a website.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

- This paper will look at the evolvement of AMA and its current position in the field of widening participation and economic crisis.

- It will look at the role of networks as support mechanisms and seek parallel examples.

- It will examine the difficulties of collaboration, the demands of institutional loyalty against a commitment to social justice and colleagues in the field.

- It will question the future role of AMA as a mere support network for members or a network of change for promoting the widening participation agenda

## Please specify your target audience for this session:

Practitioners, Policy makers, Community colleagues and Teachers.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

The value of supportive networks to raise the profile of the work on the ground and the power of a collective voice for the sector.

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

AMA can act as a model of good practice in its structures, working groups and connections for individuals to form networks to support and develop the work they are engaged in.
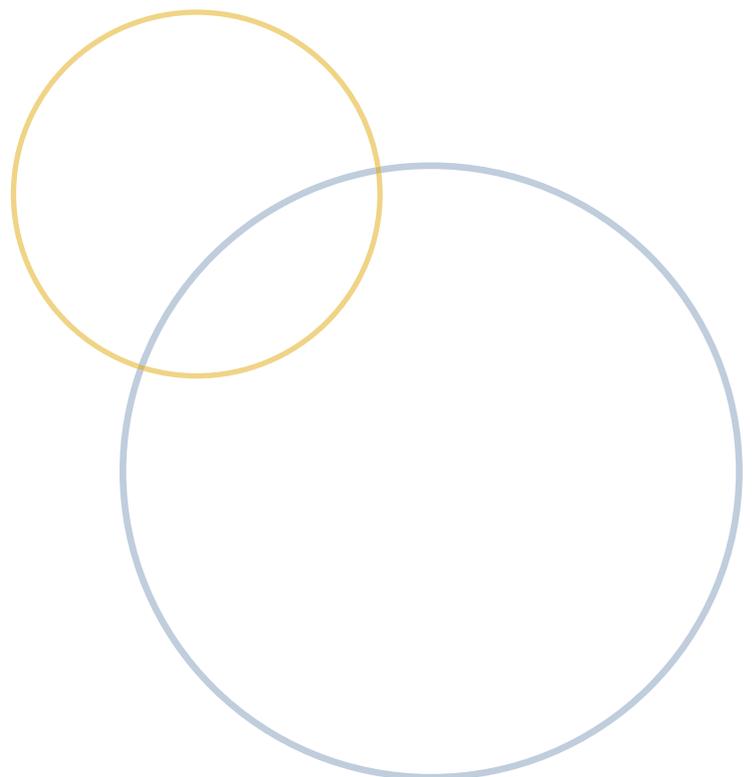
Our way or the highway? Analysing Non-Formal Education as an Alternative Provider of Higher Level Education

Name of presenter: Ms Niamh O'Reilly

Organisation: AONTAS

The main focus of the proposal is: Theory

Brief description of the background of the paper:

To share the theory behind my PhD research with the practical experience of the work of AONTAS to create a discussion regarding the value and benefits of non-formal education (methodologies and position in community) as a process for improving access to education, not merely as a stepping stone to formal education but as a legitimate method for providing a broader education service and providing alternative options to the current dominant system (i.e. formal).

Provide summary of main points of paper:

This paper will touch on a number of theoretical ideas and practical examples which focus on the value of non-formal adult education for creating a broader, more accessible education system. An overview of the main points covered is outlined below:

There is a huge untapped education service (non-formal education) that has a proven track record for reaching the most marginalized, it is ideally positioned to provide a continuous education service from basic – third level education. Examples from AONTAS members will be given to elaborate on this point.

There has been huge investment into increasing access to education but the number of individuals from lower income families participating has not been greatly increased, an alternative approach is needed[64]

It appears that when methods for improving access into education (particularly third level) education are explored, it is generally through the formal route rather than providing alternative methods for learning. A one size fits all approach predominates. Is this the only available method, could we search for new alternatives to this model and is non-formal education another way?

The current national qualification framework provides the opportunity to provide a more flexible education service that would facilitate using a variety of learning methodologies and centres. In theory all levels of education provision could be provided in a number of locations, we are no longer bound by the walls of institutions but by the limitations we have set for education delivery – can we change our thinking and practice?

Please specify your target audience for this session:

- Policy makers from the department of Education and Science
- University and IoTs access personnel
- Community Education group members
- Adult learners
- NQAI personnel.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

The aim of the session will be to challenge the current dominant thinking on higher education provision. Alternatives to the dominant model of provision will be offered and a rationale for this alternative will be offered. It is hoped that a dialogue centring on institutional attitudes to education provision will occur and the notion that the walls of the academy need not only control learning (or knowledge) and that true access means looking for alternative to the status quo, to challenge the current model and to be open to initiating a dialogue for an effective alternative to the current flawed model.

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

Experience gained:

- Overview of theory relating to the role of non-formal adult education for increasing access.
- A space to interrogate our perception of who should and can deliver education at higher level.
- An opportunity to reflect on case studies that illustrate points made throughout the paper and identify strengths and weaknesses.
- Examples of models at international level will also be discussed.

Lessons learned:

- This will be shaped by the individuals engagement with the material, it is hoped that it will inspire thoughts on viable alternatives to the dominant education system.

64 Byrne, D. *et al.* (2008) School Leavers' Survey Report 2007, ESRI, Dublin

Transition to University for Mature Nursing Students: Focus on Science

Name of presenter: Ms Mary O'Sullivan
Organisation: University College Cork
Department: Mature Student Office
The main focus of the proposal is: Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

Research in the Mature Student Office, UCC indicated an upward trend in the demand for tutorial support (both individual and group) in anatomy and physiology over a three year period 2004/5 – 2007/8. In 2008/9 the Mature Student Office set up a working group to explore the academic support needs of mature nursing students with a view to putting in place a tailored academic supports programme at the point of entry to the degree programme. The group comprised of staff from the School of Nursing, the Anatomy Dept and the Physiology Dept, the office of the Director of Access and the Mature Student Office. The working group identified three key areas of support need for the mature students as follows:

- Anatomy and Physiology (Science)
- Academic skills
- Culture of higher education

The Mature Student Office designed a three day programme based on the identified key needs in collaboration with the staff from the working group. The programme was run in September 2009 and was compulsory.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

This paper focuses on the development, delivery and evaluation of a pilot entry level support programme for mature nursing students in UCC.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Mature Student Officers and those who work with adult learners in 3rd level education.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

This session will demonstrate the positive outcomes of collaborative work practices in meeting the needs of mature students. It will give some guidelines in developing initiatives to bridge the academic skills gap at entry level for mature students in the nursing area.

The Role which Education Centres Play in Delivering Special Educational Technology Courses for Teachers

Name of presenter: Mr. John Phayer

Organisation: Mary Immaculate College - (Former post grad student)

Department: Education Department

The main focus of the proposal is: Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

The main purpose of this study focuses on describing the important role which Education Centres play in promoting and providing Information Communication Technology (I.C.T) in Special Educational Needs (S.E.N) courses and discussing ways how these centres can enhance their ICT in SEN support service. This theme evolved from findings provided by teachers who participated in an ICT in SEN course focusing on specialised educational software e.g. TextHelp, Mindjet Mindmanager, Inspiration and Kurzweil 3000 software which is used in a classroom context. The data for this study was extracted through the medium of questionnaires and interviews. The ICT in SEN course was delivered as part of a Continuing Professional Development programme organised in both an Education Centre and a post primary school over two blocks of 5 weeks (i.e. 10 weeks in total). Specific emphasis was placed on examining how teachers managed to learn Kurzweil 3000 because of its wide diversity of navigational tools that can be used in different classroom situations. As part of exploring the important role which Education Centres play in enhancing their ICT in SEN service, one particular study carried out to measure the importance of providing in-service tuition to teachers will also be discussed. Initially twenty one teachers signed up for the course of which fourteen fully participated in the programme. As a consequence of this in-service tuition, a number of themes evolved. One of the main findings of the study was that the location, the number and types of courses offered by Education Centres could be a contributing factor in a more positive uptake of these courses as outlined by the teachers. There was a strongly held view by the participants that the medium in which courses are advertised and promoted is critical for their continued interest. Teachers did indicate being unfamiliar with many of the most popular applications used in the field of Special Educational technology. Being able to make more practical use of the software, achieving a good working guide of I.C.T and identifying the most appropriate software to suit student needs are areas which

emerged as being quite important traits of a technology course from a teacher's perspective. Providing more appropriate I.C.T in S.E.N training seminars that are target specific for teachers in the use of this technology on a regular basis, the possibility of providing an information service which compares and contrasts the different types of other Assistive Technology software and how they are used in a school setting and also offering appropriate sources of journal type information could be used as a starting point in addressing teachers requirements. The possibility of offering mailing list / blogging / online chat facilities or even a drop in service could be the key in increasing teacher interest in taking up these courses and enhancing their knowledge in this field.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

The primary research question being asked in this study is "How can Education Centres continue to enhance the delivery of I.C.T in S.E.N courses specialising in Assistive Technology software for primary and post primary school teachers?"

As a consequence, a number of secondary questions evolved as follows:

- What are teacher's opinions about participating in ICT in SEN courses?

- What types of computer courses have they participated in the past?

- What other areas of ICT in SEN courses would teachers be interested in participating in the future?

- What difficulties do teachers encounter in obtaining information about specific Assistive Technology for Special Needs students?

- How can Education Centres improve their role in delivering additional ICT in SEN courses?

- What additional supports and services could be made available to support these teachers in the area of ICT in SEN?

Please specify your target audience for this session:

- Teachers – Primary school and Post Primary school level.
- Education Centre Directors.
- Assistive Technology course specialists.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

Delegates will learn about the following information:

(a) Examine the theme of Continuing Professional Development.

(b) Describe the background, the role and activities which Education Centres play in society.

(c) Briefly learn about Special Educational Technology software and the different types that are available in this field.

(d) Describe how the ICT in SEN course was delivered and emergent findings.

(e) Discuss the main difficulties affecting teachers in acquiring information about Special Educational Technology.

(f) How Education Centres can possibly improve their ICT in SEN service for teachers.

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

Identifying the problems affecting teachers who wish to use more Special Educational technology in a classroom and developing I.C.T. in S.E.N. courses that are target specific for them in using Assistive Technology software according to their teaching needs.

Identifying and developing a suitable framework which enables Education Centres to enhance their I.C.T in S.E.N service.

Helping teachers in overcoming barriers in using this technology by giving them the confidence needed and providing them with the necessary supports to use this technology more efficiently in a classroom context as a result of delivering this Continuing Professional Development tuition.

Was it Worth it? The Occupational Benefits of Getting a University Degree Later in Life as a Mature Student

Name of presenter: Dr Denis Staunton
Organisation: University College Cork
Department: Director of Access
The main focus of the proposal is: Research

Brief description of the background of the paper:

Over the last fifteen years Irish higher education has witnessed a dramatic change in the composition of its student body. Universities and colleges have not only opened their doors to previously under-represented socio-economic groups, but also to adults of varied ages, life experiences and life commitments. Therefore, higher education is no longer purely a learning experience for 17-22 year olds. There is a new cohort of students entering higher education; these students are over the age of 23 and are commonly defined as mature students.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

Most research to date in Ireland has focused on the obstacles faced by mature students in gaining entry to a university education. However, within recent years, the number of mature graduates entering the labour market has increased and we are now presented with the opportunity to investigate what happens to mature students after they graduate. What is known about their job pathways into a career? Do they get employment in areas related to their field of study? Do some mature graduates benefit more than others? Do third level qualifications combat social exclusion? Do age, gender and social class background affect their opportunities in the labour market? Do they believe that the sacrifices they made to acquire their qualification were worth it?

The research presented in this paper seeks to answer these questions and is based on the experiences of mature students who graduated from University College Cork (UCC) over a ten year period between the years 1993 to 2003.

With the opening up of access to higher education for mature students, it is assumed that their labour market prospects will be enhanced. This is undoubtedly true in many respects. However, the findings also highlight that the relationship between the access provision to higher education for mature students and equal opportunity access to the labour market is not as straightforward as the simple acquisition of a degree qualification may suggest. Factors such as age, gender, social class background, level of prior educational attainment, degree programme studied, type and level of degree awarded, geographical mobility and length of time in the labour market since graduation all influence occupational outcomes for mature graduates.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Practitioners; Policy makers, Researchers or those interested in Access for Mature Students.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

Report on a research project; evidence of where mature students go on after completing a degree and greater awareness of the transition from higher education to the labour market as experienced by mature students.

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

This was the first study of its kind in Ireland. It has a direct relevance to those providing guidance to potential mature students. It also is a demonstration of how access policy works in an Irish context.

New Technologies and Blended Learning in Community Music and Third Level Access and Outreach Programmes

Name of presenter: Julie Tiernan
Organisation: University of Limerick
Department: Music
The main focus of the proposal is: Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

The Nomad project aims to honour the music culture of the Traveller Community at the University of Limerick. Funded by the HEA (Higher Education Authority) the project facilitates community outreach programs, workshops and seminars and has a wide educational remit.

Community music projects are at the heart of Nomad's work. Creative music making allows the group and the individual express themselves without judgment.

In an attempt to 'bridge the gap' between community education and third level, Nomad has devised a Certificate in Music and Dance offered by distance and blended learning.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

This paper will attempt to address the following areas:

- Nomad's journey –
  Through working in the community the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance has gained a wealth of educational knowledge and recognised the need for developing a 3rd level qualification by distance and blended learning.

- Certificate in Music and Dance –
  Provide a description of the course and it's content, offer explanations and reasoning regarding the choice of modules.

- Modes of delivery –
  The notion of 'blended learning' will be discussed, outlining software and new technologies used in the delivery of the course. The blend of on and off-site music lessons combined with an online academic community has proved an effective method in engaging with non-traditional learners, allowing those involved to study from home.

- Reasons for choice –
  Through field research the chosen delivery modes were found to be the most effective.

  Colour coding used throughout course documentation increases organisation skills, a sharper impact and potentially time management as a result.

Articulate, the chosen package for lecture delivery, allows the learner to take lectures at their own pace, tested online classrooms showed that some students falling behind the pace in which material was delivered. With Articulate students can pause sessions and have a dictionary to hand.

Cost effective, user friendly and a bank of professional lectures can be stored. Potentially this can used in a variety of settings.

- Partnership –
  When working with non-traditional learners, partner-ships are essential, this paper will demonstrate through field research why.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Those interested in outreach, access, education, non-traditional learners and learning using new technologies.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

Delegates can expect to learn about community music, access and outreach, blended learning, the Traveller community and online communities.

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

Outreach and Access have always played an important role at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, with two outreach programmes Nomad and Sanctuary working in the community a wealth of educational knowledge has been gained. It is through this knowledge and experience that Nomad has championed a new Certificate in Music and Dance, modes of delivery have been devised to suit the non-traditional learner, rather then changing the curriculum. This working concept can be applied and transferred elsewhere; individual circumstances must be taken into account as not two experiences will ever prove to be the same.

An Award-Winning Educational Project that Provides Classes to Bright Students from Socio-Economic Disadvantaged Areas

Name of presenter: Ita Tobin / Eleanor Cooke
Organisation: Centre for Academic Achievement
Department: Centre for Academic Achievement, Access Service, Dublin City University
The main focus of the proposal is: Research

Brief description of the background of the paper:

Over 500 potentially gifted primary school students from disadvantaged areas have attended after-school courses in DCU. This is a joint project managed by the DCU ACCESS Service and the Irish Centre for Talented Youth. Students are given the opportunity to study fun practical subjects including architecture, forensics, neuroscience, zoology and much more. This paper summarises research carried out over the programme and the benefits of students to taking part in these courses.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

This research has found that the Centre of Academic Achievement has: improved many students' self-confidence and pride in their academic abilities; increased children's knowledge in a subject; changed some students' attitudes to learning; and made many students more interested in enrolling in DCU at third level.

The centre has also proved itself through this research to be a well-managed programme providing a vital service to the community as a result of the fun 'hands-on' and interesting course material it provides for the students who all thoroughly enjoyed taking part, learnt new things and want to come back again.

As a result of the research the classes have been extended in duration from four to six weeks per course. More follow up material has been given to the students each week to continue at home at the request of the parents. More links with the local schools to continue the students interest in the subjects studied at the CAA has also been recommended.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

- Education Professionals
- Staff from ACCESS Services in other Third Level Education Institutions
- Community / voluntary organisations involved in education initiatives
- Primary School Teachers
- Parents of academically talented students

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

- How to set up and manage a successful afterschool project for your students on a university campus.
- How to enrich students' learning experiences.
- How to motivate students to continue to study outside the school environment regardless of socio-economic profile.

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

The CAA after-school project has won major awards including the overall award at the 'Irish Times Dublin Living Awards 2007' as well as the winner of the 'Excellence in Education at Primary School level' Award and 'Excellence in Education at Third Level Award'. More recently the programme won the 'Effective Teaching Award 2009' at the Children Act Advisory Board award ceremony. It therefore serves as a good template for expansion to other ACCESS services nationwide or even be used as a model in other countries.

Engaging Travellers in Education

Name of presenter: Ms Patricia Twomey
Organisation: Cork Traveller Education Scheme
The main focus of the proposal is: Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

How we, as an organisation, have engaged Traveller men, women and girls in education and how this has impacted on the younger Travellers today.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

The origin of the organisation, the involvement of Travellers and non-Travellers in a support organisation, how we operate, the difference in approaches we make as opposed to those of other educational providers, the success we have had.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Mainstream education providers.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

How we successfully engaged a community which had traditionally not engaged in mainstream education – and how we succeeded where mainstream education facilitators had been unable to do so.

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

Example of good practice, successful engagement of a hard to reach minority community, the vital importance of having members of the minority community leading the programme of inclusion/engagement, emphasis of the importance of positive networking and the build up of trust between participants – providers and users.

Increasing the Culture of Learning in Cork - Realising an Aspirational Objectiven

Name of presenter: Marcela Whelan
Organisation: Cork City Learning Forum
Department: Community & Enterprise, Cork City Council
The main focus of the paper is: Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

On its establishment in 2002, the Cork City Development Board set 7 targets for the development of the City to 2012. One of these was to 'Increase the Culture of Learning in Cork'. This has resulted in the development of a range of successful learning promotion initiatives by the Cork City Learning Forum.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

To achieve the objective of increasing the culture of learning in Cork, Cork City Development Board gathered together all local stakeholders with an interest in learning - formal educators & policy-makers, but also community education providers, social support agencies, training groups, business organisations and learner representatives.

From this evolved Cork City Learning Forum, with a membership representing both the 80+ members and the 250 networks to which members belong. In this way information flows to and from the Forum, bringing both ideas for action and information on initiatives, whether (eg.) Chambers Ireland training funds, FÁS programmes, RAPID early learning plans or community-based courses.

As a result, Cork City Learning Forum has initiated two successful annual public engagement events: the Lifelong Learning Festival and Discovery interactive science exhibition. These encourage relaxed exploration of learning options, especially for those who do not perceive themselves as candidates for further/higher education. Peer showcases and the promotion of access initiatives at these events encourage changes to this perception.

Cork City Learning Forum also undertakes information dissemination and research activities - in 2003 a survey was conducted on access to FE/HE among mature students, and currently in development is a pack on best practise in school retention.

These initiatives harness the widest range of education expertise among those working to the same end in different organisations or in different sectors to develop collaborative approaches to encouraging access to and participation in education.

Result? A broader, more effective message: Cork is committed to fostering a culture of learning.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

Educators, Education policy-makers, Social Service agencies and Business groups.

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

Combining the ideas, expertise and resources from all agents with an interest in supporting access to education, retention, upskilling and the knowledge economy can positively influence the culture of learning in Cork.

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

The Cork City Learning Forum is possibly the only group drawing together all players in the city to influence learning uptake at all levels, for all people. Using the community development approach of bringing all stakeholders together as equals to seek solutions to a common issue, a number of local initiatives have been developed which have been very successful. With buy-in from senior personnel in similar agencies, this exemplar is fully transferable to other areas.

'Walking the Talk' Access and Professional Formation: Issues and Possibilities

Name of presenter: Dr Mary Wilson
Organisation: University College Cork
Department: Applied Social Studies
The main focus of the paper is: Research / Policy / Practice

Brief description of the background of the paper:

This research and its outcomes in terms of policy changes and best practice emerged during the Author's term as Course Director of the Bachelor of Social Work at University College Cork. This programme offers a combined undergraduate degree in social science and a professional license to practice as a social worker upon completion. The core philosophy of the course is reflected in the promotion of access and social inclusion as core values of the programme. The student cohort are mature or non-traditional students only and include those seeking a 'second chance' and those from disadvantaged backgrounds; life long learners; progression students; students with special needs and students from ethnic, cultural and other minorities. The average age of students in the graduate year 2008 year was 35years. The gender balance overall evidences that in the social work profession generally, with more women than men represented in the student cohort. Consequently of interest are identification, examination and dissemination of the processes involved in the actualisation of access and social inclusion in professional social work education and training.

Provide summary of main points of paper:

Professional formation is at the core of programmes which seek, 'to construct the professional'. This task may be enhanced or impeded by many issues including previous life and work experiences, professional accreditation criteria, field work agency values and institutional norms/ parameters regarding access and participation.

This paper will review the main issues and debates inherent in delivering professional social work education to non-traditional students. It will discuss the implications, dilemmas and solutions that arise in the application of access and social inclusion. As these issues are fundamental to the ethos and action on the Bachelor of Social Work at UCC, this programme will be used to provide examples of the debates, dilemmas and their resolution in practice.

Please specify your target audience for this session:

- Policy makers at Institutional level
- Colleagues who deliver courses which provide clinical or vocational training for the non-traditional cohort.
- Service users and/or interested others i.e. students

Please state briefly what delegates can learn from your session:

- At policy/institutional level to brief delegates with the narratives of personal, professional and practice that arise for students and staff of activating/delivering access and participation.
- Opportunities for dialogue and sharing strategies with delegates from courses which provide clinical or vocational training for the non-traditional cohort.
- Service users and/or students who may contribute to developing the discourse of access and participation.

Please state the wider applicability/ transferability of your paper in the Irish or international context (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned):

Research into professional formation and suitability to practice is at an early or under- developed stage in the Republic of Ireland. Other jurisdictions notably the USA, the UK and Nr Ireland have developed specific protocols to address the issues that can arise. The need for debate to develop clear policy guidelines on balancing access and participation with professional values and best practice is one that needs to be addressed as a matter of some urgency in view of the expected increase in participation by non-traditional students at third level.

About Pathways to Education

Pathways to Education is a partnership and joint access initiative between UCC and CIT funded through the Strategic Innovation Fund – Cycle 2. It has the specific aim of widening participation and increasing access to higher education. It builds upon the work already undertaken by the Access offices of UCC and CIT and work carried out in the wider body of each institution.

About UCC and CIT

University College Cork
Founded in 1845 UCC is one of the oldest institutes of higher learning in Ireland. The University has a current enrolment of almost 12,600 undergraduate students and some 3,600 at postgraduate level. There are 1,000 visiting students and almost 2,000 participating in Adult Education courses. The University has four constituent colleges. The aim of the Access service in UCC is to broaden the participation of under-represented groups so that UCC has a more inclusive and a more diverse student body that reflects Irish society at large.

Cork Institute of Technology
CIT comprises of two constituent Faculties and three constituent Colleges. CIT currently has in the region of 12,000 registered students with approximately 2,000 new entries year on year. Of these approximately 6,000 are full-time and the remaining are part-time. The CIT Access Service is committed to widening participation, increasing access and supporting positive educational outcomes for under-represented groups.

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