The image features a stylized illustration of a university hallway. In the foreground, a woman with short dark hair is shown in profile, looking towards the right. In the background, a woman with long dark hair is seated in a wheelchair, talking to a man with short dark hair who is standing and looking at a document. Another woman with long dark hair is standing behind the man, also looking at the document. The background shows a hallway with large windows and columns. The overall color palette is muted, with shades of olive green and brown.

HEA

Higher Education Authority
An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas

TOWARDS THE BEST EDUCATION FOR ALL

**AN EVALUATION OF ACCESS PROGRAMMES
IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN IRELAND**

HEA

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NATIONAL OFFICE FOR EQUITY OF ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

**TOWARDS THE BEST
EDUCATION FOR ALL:
AN EVALUATION OF ACCESS
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EDUCATION IN IRELAND**

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Michael Kelly, HEA Chairman

FOREWORD

Equality of opportunity in higher education is an important aim of public policy and a key strategic focus of the HEA. Although there remains some considerable way to go, substantial progress has been made in ensuring that students of all social, economic and cultural backgrounds can access and experience success in higher education. There is strong evidence of the benefits a higher education qualification brings to individuals, their families and communities, as well as to the wider economy. Access is not only a matter of social inclusion but also makes sound economic sense.

The HEA is therefore very pleased to publish this evaluation of access programmes in Irish higher education institutions. It provides an important step forward in our work to promote equality and the best education for all. In addition to providing a comprehensive framework of what works best with accompanying practical examples, the evaluation sets out recommendations for action by higher education institutions and policy-makers.

The evaluation also presents an eight-step implementation plan that will be pursued in partnership with the higher education institutions over the coming months. Implementation of the plan will be co-ordinated by the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education within the HEA. The establishment of the National Office has facilitated substantial progress in this area of policy over the past three years. This would not have been possible without the committed efforts of many people, within higher education institutions and other stakeholder bodies, combined with the determination of students with the support of their families and their communities.

This review helps to signpost the way ahead in continuing to broaden participation in higher education by under-represented groups. The HEA looks forward to working with the institutions and all other key partners in advancing this critically important agenda.

Michael Kelly,

Chairman, Higher Education Authority, September 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation proposes a framework for successful access programmes based on four criteria: policy, targeting, partnership and practice. It also identifies specific examples of good practice in the structure and content of existing access programmes.

Minimum criteria for an effective access programme

It is recommended that the minimum criteria for an effective access programme in the future are:

Policy and practice

1. A clear statement of the institution's access policy and how it relates to the corporate level strategy
2. Transparent information about the resources that are allocated to the access programme (including finance, personnel, accommodation)
3. A plan to provide systematic staff training on diversity and inclusion
4. A clear and specific set of targets for the admission and graduation of students from the under-represented groups that are identified by the National Office and a system of monitoring and measuring achievement of the targets
5. A focused programme designed to achieve the targets set. It should include:
 - pre-entry activities for students from all under-represented groups with special emphasis on working with teachers in targeted primary and junior cycle second-level schools and with community-based partnership groups
 - individual and group support for new entrants in their first year, including personal, social, financial and academic assistance where necessary
 - individual and group support as needed for students throughout their course, including advice on careers and post-graduate study.

Partnership

1. A clear statement of how the institution's access programme links with relevant partners in the community and how it relates to the corporate level community mission
2. A plan to involve staff of the institution actively in partnership with the community and other education sectors
3. A full agenda for action agreed between the institution and its partners in local communities, aimed at promoting clear routes of progression to higher education for targeted groups of learners
4. A commitment to engage students and their families, specialised expert bodies, community agencies and representative groups in planning and monitoring access programme activities.

Targeting

1. A clear and explicit plan to address the needs of all target groups at appropriate critical stages, based on research, needs analysis and consultation
2. A set of clear and specific access targets and timescales for admission and graduation of students from all target groups
3. A rigorous and systematic approach to data collection and analysis to monitor achievement of the targets set.

BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

As part of its action plan for 2005-2007 the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education has set the goal of developing a national framework of policies and initiatives to achieve equity of access. One of the main actions in support of this goal is to 'evaluate existing access programmes for the various under-represented groups: those who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students'. The action plan for equity of access focuses not only on students entering higher education, but also on participation, retention and completion.

In the period from September 2005 to June 2006 the National Office conducted an evaluation of access programmes in twenty-seven higher education institutions: universities, institutes of technology and associated colleges (for a list of the institutions, see Appendix 1). The aims of the evaluation were to:

- Identify the underlying principles and specific examples of good practice in the structure and content of existing access programmes
- Make recommendations about the development of a framework of policies and activities for successful access programmes
- Make recommendations about the development, at all education levels, of partnerships and collaboration to support access programmes
- Suggest a basis for agreeing and evaluating local and national access targets
- Recommend ways in which students, teachers, access officers, administrators and policy makers can participate actively in the evaluation of access programmes.

The evaluation builds on what has already been learned about access to higher education from earlier reviews, research and descriptions of practice. It takes account of current national policy and of the quantitative and qualitative information contained in the literature. However, it focuses not only on the past nor on the static present, but adopts a more dynamic approach by engaging practitioners in higher education institutions in undertaking self-evaluation of their access programmes according to objective criteria, with a view to consolidating successful practice and creating new platforms for progress.

This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for the future development of higher education access policy and practice in Ireland.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY USED IN THE EVALUATION REPORT

Access programme

The term ‘access programme’ as used in this evaluation includes all actions taken by higher education institutions to increase the participation of students from four specific under-represented target groups: students who experience socio-economic disadvantage, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students. The evaluation covers institutions’ access strategies, policies and practices as well as specific initiatives and activities that aim to increase the participation of the target groups.

Equity and equality

Terms such as ‘equity’, ‘equality’, ‘equal opportunity’ and ‘equality of outcomes’ are often used in the area of higher education policy and analysis. Some commentators suggest that ‘equity’ of access to higher education is a limited policy objective, falling short of the desired goal of ‘equality’, which is based on the principle of equal status for all citizens. The National Office, however, does not interpret ‘equity’ as a term that limits the scope of its work and adopts the broad understanding of the term proposed by Skilbeck and Connell (2000):

... the global, inclusive term of ‘equity’ ... refers to ... policies and procedures for enabling and encouraging groups in society at present under-represented ... to gain access to and demonstrate successful performance in higher education....

... achieving greater equity in higher education is a matter of extending opportunity to participate and progress and using all possible, ethically sound means to do so. Widening opportunity for and in higher education has many benefits in strengthening democracy, achieving economic and social progress, advancing human rights, and improving the efficiency, quality and performance of the educational system.

Ethnic minorities

This term is used in the evaluation study to include members of ethnic and cultural minorities – refugees, recent immigrants, migrant workers and people granted humanitarian leave to remain in the country – who are eligible to participate in higher education.

OUTLINE OF THE APPROACH USED IN THE EVALUATION

The evaluation was designed in consultation with the advisory group of practitioners and education partners appointed by the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education and was carried out by a team including staff of the National Office and an independent consultant. The evaluation methodology included the following steps:

- Reviewing recent Irish and international literature to identify the main criteria for successful access programmes
- Developing a self-evaluation instrument that institutions would use to assess their own access programmes
- Applying the self-evaluation instrument in the institutions to generate (mainly qualitative) data on current access programmes
- Analysing and discussing the results of the self-evaluation with policy makers and practitioners, and with access programme partners and participants
- Preparing the evaluation report.

It was decided to adopt a collaborative approach to the evaluation, with active contributions from programme participants, practitioners and policy makers to identify what is working well in access programmes and to share good practice. A self-evaluation approach was included so that higher education institutions would recognise where there are gaps in their practice and where they face challenges in implementing good practice. This approach is familiar to higher education institutions because it is already used in quality assurance processes, and it was adopted in this evaluation to foster ownership among the institutions of both the process and its findings and to encourage them to take responsibility for implementing the recommendations. It was hoped that the process of completing the collaborative self-evaluation would help to change thinking and practice within institutions by treating access as a mainstream, rather than a peripheral, issue.

Reviewing the literature to identify the main criteria for successful access programmes

The underlying assumption of this evaluation is that a great deal is already known about the issues surrounding equity of access to higher education in Ireland. In formulating and implementing its action plan for 2005-2007, the National Office sought to build on the findings of earlier studies and reports and also to integrate the large body of expert knowledge that has grown among practitioners involved in access programmes for all

under-represented groups in recent years. This evaluation represents another step in the process of identifying ‘what works’ to promote equity of access, assessing to what extent it is being implemented in practice, and ensuring that future developments in policy and practice are based on evidence of effectiveness, gathered using an objective framework for analysis.

At national policy level, there is a recognition of the need for ‘joined-up’ strategies to achieve educational inclusion, as expressed for example in the recent development of the *DEIS Action Plan for Educational Inclusion* (Department of Education and Science, 2005). The outgoing national Educational Disadvantage Committee, in its final report to the Minister for Education and Science, also proposed an integrated national strategy to achieve educational equality to bring about ‘an inclusive, diverse and dynamic learning society without barriers’ (Educational Disadvantage Committee, 2005).

While the focus of this evaluation project is current access programmes in higher education institutions including universities, institutes of technology and other publicly funded institutions, it is acknowledged that the institutions cannot achieve full equity of access by working in isolation from the communities they serve. The schools, further education and training and community sectors have a considerable contribution to make in implementing national access policies, and this evaluation includes an examination of the higher education institutions’ partnership with these sectors.

This evaluation takes account of what has already been learned from Irish and international literature about access to higher education for under-represented groups (*Background Document*, 2005). In essence, the evaluation starts where other studies have finished by identifying a framework of policies, activities and criteria for successful access programmes and by examining higher education institutions’ programmes according to these criteria to answer the question, *How well are we achieving equity of access to higher education for under-represented groups in Ireland in 2006?*

Developing an evaluation instrument for access programmes in higher education institutions

Following a literature review and consultation with practitioners, the evaluation team identified a framework of four criteria that distinguish successful access programmes in higher education institutions.

Framework of criteria for successful access programmes

- 1. Policy:** The institution is committed to the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion and implements its access policy through its mainstream strategic priorities, resource allocation and quality assurance processes.
- 2. Targeting:** The access programme is targeted at all under-represented groups, and the institution systematically monitors its performance for the admission and graduation of students from the target groups.
- 3. Partnership:** There is effective and productive engagement between the institution and all of the relevant people and agencies in the community, working together to achieve equity of access.
- 4. Practice:** The access programme includes a coherent and effective range of activities at the pre-entry, admission and in-course stages and promotes a teaching and learning environment that enhances equity of access.

For each of the criteria there is a list of indicators with four stages of progress for each indicator. By conducting an initial self-evaluation using these indicators, institutions have assessed how well they currently measure up on each of the criteria and what areas need further development. For higher education institutions the instrument is a self-evaluation tool, while for the National Office and the HEA it provides a framework of policy and practice guidelines for the successful delivery of access programmes. (The self-evaluation form is included in Appendix 2 and the guidelines for completing it are in Appendix 3.)

Applying the self-evaluation instrument in the institutions to generate data on current access programmes

The National Office contacted the registrars of the higher education institutions and asked them to evaluate their current access programmes using the self-evaluation instrument. They were encouraged to bring together senior management, academic and administrative

staff, admissions and access officers, disability and mature student support services, teaching and learning co-ordinators and student union welfare officers, to ensure that the views of all main practitioners in the institution were represented in the self-evaluation. They were also advised to seek the views of all other relevant stakeholders, for example by conducting representative focus groups including current, past and prospective students and their families, graduates, employers, community education workers, and teachers/principals of local schools and further education colleges. The institutions were asked to include specific evidence of their stage of progress for each criterion in a short report submitted with the completed self-evaluation form. In October 2005, there was a briefing meeting to explain the evaluation process and present the self-evaluation instrument to personnel from the higher education institutions.

All twenty-seven institutions completed and returned their self-evaluation forms and reports by the end of March 2006. Many institutions also submitted comprehensive supporting material to illustrate how their policies and practices aim to increase access to higher education for under-represented groups. In total, over three thousand pages of documentation were submitted, including institutions' strategic plans, reports and prospectus materials as well as extensive materials produced by access practitioners. It was clear from the reports that where the self-evaluation process was conducted in a systematic and inclusive way, it produced important benefits and insights for many institutions.

Analysing and discussing the results of the self-evaluation

The emerging findings of the self-evaluation were presented and discussed at meetings with the following groups of practitioners and policy makers:

- The advisory group appointed by the National Office
- Registrars of universities and institutes of technology
- Access practitioners from all higher education institutions
- Personnel from the Department of Education and Science
- The Higher Education Authority executive.

In addition, the evaluation team conducted three focus groups to gather the views of access programme participants and of other partners outside the institutions. The focus groups included the following participants:

1. Students and teachers from a second-level school that is designated disadvantaged
2. Principals, guidance counsellors and teachers from a number of second-level schools around the country that have links with the access programmes of one or more higher education institutions
3. Students of higher education institutions who have participated in the access programmes aimed at the target groups.

These meetings were a very useful way of balancing the ‘inside-out’ perspective of the higher education institutions as presented in the self-evaluation by gathering the views of people who look at the institutions from the “outside-in”. Appendix 4 includes a list of participants and an outline of the questions posed in each focus group.

Preparing the evaluation report

In preparing this report, the consultant has analysed the results of the self-evaluation carried out by the higher education institutions and the feedback from the consultative meetings and focus groups. The intention is to produce a practical framework of policy and activities for successful access programmes that will help both policy makers and practitioners to plan for the future. The report is in three sections. The first section outlines the principles that underpin successful access programmes and examines how these principles are being implemented in policy and practice by higher education institutions. The second section considers how effectively higher education institutions work in partnership with relevant people and agencies in the community to achieve greater access to higher education for under-represented groups. The third section explores how institutions set targets for their access programmes and how they monitor achievement of the targets.

Each section starts by presenting the elements of the framework which constitute the ‘benchmark’ for successful access programmes and describes what the evaluation found about how these elements are currently being implemented in practice in the institutions. The findings are discussed to highlight the strengths and weaknesses in current practice, the main factors that contribute to successful implementation and the main obstacles

to success. Finally, there are recommendations about how the framework of policy and practice can help higher education institutions to strengthen their approach so that effective access practice is embedded in their culture and about how it can influence national policy development.

This report does not attempt to present a comprehensive account of good practice in existing access programmes. Rather, it sets out a framework of guidelines drawn from the best of what is already happening in higher education institutions and from suggestions for improvement made by practitioners, participants and policy makers in the course of the evaluation. The National Office, recognising that it would be very valuable for institutions to be able to share the good practice that they reported in their self-evaluations, has proposed to registrars that they might make their reports and case studies available on their web sites with links to the HEA/National Office web site. The response to this suggestion has been positive and it is hoped that it might result in an extensive body of shared resources that would be of benefit to all of the institutions and to the National Office.

1. PUTTING PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE TO IMPLEMENT A SUCCESSFUL ACCESS PROGRAMME

There is strong evidence from research and policy literature that access programmes are most successful when there is a clear and coherent link between access policy and practice in higher education institutions. It is not enough for an institution just to state its commitment to the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion, but it must implement its access policy through its mainstream decision making, resource allocation and quality assurance processes. The access programme must then translate policy into a coherent and effective range of activities at the pre-entry, admission and in-course stages and promote a teaching and learning environment that enhances equity of access.

This section presents the *policy* and *practice* elements of a framework for successful access programmes and describes how these elements are being implemented by higher education institutions. It outlines some examples of good practice from the institutions' self-evaluation reports, and also shows where there are gaps and challenges that need to be addressed in the future. The recommendations set out what higher education institutions can do to improve their access policies and practices, and what needs to happen at national level to support institutions in implementing effective policies and practices.

Policy: Elements of a framework for successful access programmes

An access programme meets the criterion of having an effective policy framework if it demonstrates success on the following indicators:

- a) The institution implements the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion through its mainstream policy and strategy.
- b) The institution implements the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion through its allocation of resources to the access programme for students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students (the under-represented groups).
- c) The access programme for all under-represented groups has a high profile in the institution.
- d) The institution's systems and structures are designed to include a diverse student body, including in particular students from the under-represented groups.
- e) The staff of the institution are fully engaged in promoting equity of access.

Practice: Elements of a framework for successful access programmes

An access programme meets the criterion of having an effective framework of practice if it demonstrates success on the following indicators:

- a) The institution provides a programme of activities to raise the aspirations of students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students.
- b) The institution provides pre-entry activities for students from all under-represented groups.
- c) The admissions procedures of the institution provide a range of effective routes of access, transfer and progression for students from all under-represented groups.
- d) The teaching and learning environment of the institution is suited to the needs of all learners.
- e) The physical environment of the institution is suited to the needs of all learners.
- f) The institution provides on-course support for new entrants in the first term.
- g) The institution provides on-course support for students as they move through their course.
- h) The institution provides support for students in preparing for post-graduate and employment opportunities.

Putting principles into practice: What the evaluation found

While the evaluation was more qualitative than quantitative in approach, it is nevertheless interesting to examine the pattern of self-evaluation responses for each of the four criteria and twenty indicators that constitute the framework for successful access programmes. For each indicator, there are four stages of progress:

Stage 4: Yes (*Fully achieved*)

Stage 3: Yes, but (*Achieved to a significant extent, but not yet fully achieved*)

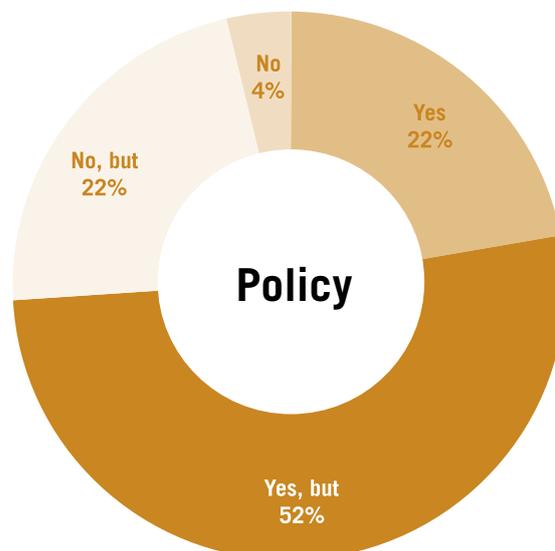
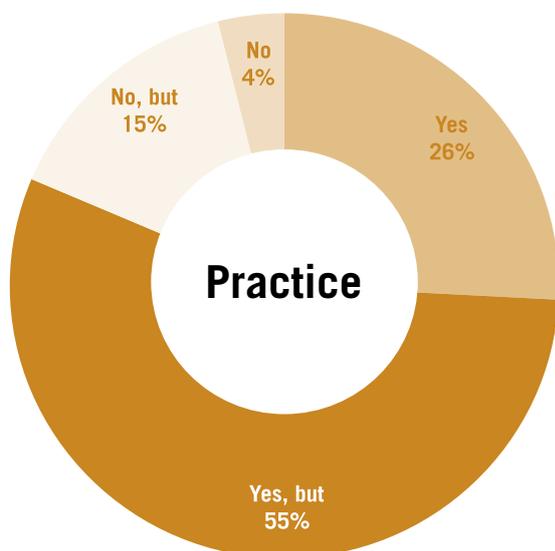
Stage 2: No, but (*Not achieved yet, but development work is in progress*)

Stage 1: No (*Not achieved yet*)

Table 1 shows the number of institutions that reported each stage of progress for the range of policy and practice indicators listed above.

Table 1: Stages of progress for *policy* and *practice* indicators

	Yes 4	Yes, but 3	No, but 2	No 1	
Criterion 1: Policy	Number of institutions (n=27)				Average
a	7	17	3	0	3.15
b	3	15	7	2	2.74
c	9	12	5	1	3.07
d	9	14	4	0	3.19
e	3	15	9	0	2.78
Average for criterion 1					2.99
Criterion 4: Practice					
a	6	13	7	1	2.89
b	4	17	3	3	2.81
c	7	15	5	0	3.07
d	6	18	3	0	3.11
e	5	16	5	1	2.93
f	10	13	4	0	3.22
g	9	16	2	0	3.26
h	8	14	5	0	3.11
Average for criterion 4					3.05



These figures show that practice is running ahead of policy in many institutions and that the majority of institutions have at least partly achieved many of the indicators for successful access programmes ('Yes'/'Yes, but'). However, almost all still have some way to go before they can say that they have fully implemented every aspect of the criteria. The evaluation found that, while policies and practices are evolving quite rapidly to embrace the principles of equity and diversity, very few institutions are yet in a position to say that they provide adequate resources - human, financial and physical - to implement their access policy fully for all of the under-represented target groups or that all staff are fully engaged in promoting equity of access.

From the self-evaluation reports, it is possible to identify good examples where institutions have put *policy* into *practice* in their access programmes and also to see where there are gaps and challenges that need to be addressed.

Access is part of mainstream equality policy and strategy

The self-evaluation reported many examples of good practice where access is part of the institution's mainstream equality policy. In these cases, principles of access and diversity are incorporated into the institution's systems and structures, HR strategy, staff development plan, teaching, learning and assessment policies, and quality assurance procedures. Many institutions designate a senior staff member who has responsibility for development and implementation of the access strategy, and each faculty or school sets targets for access and assigns responsibility for learning and development. The most successful access programmes have sufficient personnel and financial resources to plan, manage and deliver a comprehensive programme of activities effectively to all of the target groups. This happens when a significant proportion of core funding is allocated to access activities and extra resources are available through bursaries and fundraising or through private, voluntary and corporate partnerships. Another strong indicator of an institution's commitment to equity of access is when posts in the access area are established on a full-time and permanent basis and the access programme occupies high-quality office accommodation in a visible, accessible and central location.

Integrating the different strands of access

This evaluation encouraged institutions to look at their access programmes in a holistic way. Many institutions reported that it was the first time the different elements of their programme had been brought together and that the personnel involved had the opportunity to share experiences and undertake joint planning and monitoring of activities. This was seen as an important positive outcome of the evaluation. The access programme benefits from the combined insights and expertise of a bigger team of people. It also sends a clear message throughout the institution that ‘access is part of what we do, it is everybody’s business’, as one institution stated in its report. However there is a risk that if it is everybody’s business, it is effectively nobody’s business and some institutions have begun to recognise the need for more explicit integration of the different aspects of their access programme. One institution is in the process of recruiting a senior professional to oversee the further development of the programme and to play an overarching role in formulating access policy and implementation strategies to achieve full social inclusion. Another institution links seven major access strands, which include the access programme for socio-economically disadvantaged students; the mature students’ programme; the disability support service; the community education office; the adult education office; the open learning centre and a special outreach service for disadvantaged communities in Gaeltacht areas.

Systems and structures promote equity of access

Many institutions reported that they are changing their systems and structures to promote equity of access. The access programme is often linked with other aspects of service provision, for example outreach activities, student retention programmes, and student services such as learning support, careers and welfare. Where institutions have implemented module and semester structures, these are found to be more flexible and inclusive than traditional teaching arrangements. It was also found that the introduction of new modular systems has often prompted a constructive debate on access and diversity, with awareness training, induction programmes and specialised training provided for staff, thus promoting greater engagement in access issues. In addition, many institutions have set up specialist teaching and learning and support centres to support staff in introducing inclusive teaching and assessment methodologies, for example e-learning, problem-based learning, multimedia presentation and small group teaching. This helps to mainstream the access agenda, which in effect means that good practice for access becomes good practice for all learners throughout the institution.

Access activities at pre-entry, admission and in-course stages

In the area of programme content, most institutions report that their access programmes include a range of activities at the pre-entry, admission and in-course stages and that they promote a teaching and learning environment that enhances equity of access. Many pre-entry activities focus on socio-economic disadvantage, working with designated disadvantaged second-level schools to provide, for example, supplementary learning supports for prospective students; tutorials and organised homework clubs; holiday-time courses on campus (such as 'summer schools'); student-to-student mentoring; shadowing and orientation programmes. Some institutions also provide foundation courses for prospective students from the target groups, including in particular adults and international students. One institution has a peer-assisted learning programme for access students, coordinated by a mature post-graduate student.

Alternative routes of access, transfer and progression

In many institutions, the new national framework of qualifications is being implemented to provide effective access, transfer and progression routes, which are not specific to the target groups but are available to all learners. The national framework enables formal progression from the further education sector and includes procedures for recognition of prior learning, which is increasing access opportunities for students from under-represented groups. Some institutions also operate alternative routes of access, such as the HEAR scheme run by six universities and one institute of technology, where the entry requirements to courses are modified with the aim of admitting more learners from the under-represented groups. (This evaluation did not examine in detail the effectiveness of such access routes.) One institution is participating in a European project which is developing a model for the evaluation of experiential learning with the aim of helping more mature students to access higher education.

Promoting an inclusive learning and teaching environment

The self-evaluation reports contain many good examples of practice in the promotion of an inclusive learning and teaching environment, whereby all students in the institution are enabled to participate in all courses and there are no barriers - educational, cultural, physical or financial. Curriculum innovation and reform are common features of current practice in most institutions with a clear trend towards curricula based on learning outcomes and *constructive alignment* of assessment with learning outcomes. New modes and techniques of assessment are also being introduced to take account of learner diversity. Centres for teaching and learning are concerned with the quality of students'

learning experience and they help to develop institutional strategies to address retention and attrition issues. The level of institutional commitment to improving the mainstream learning and teaching environment is an important indicator of good practice in access programmes, and the following examples show some of the range of interventions that aim to achieve such improvement:

- Provision of courses on inclusion and diversity by quality promotion unit
- Appointment of Flexible Learning Officer
- Joint research project undertaken by teaching and learning office and access office to examine students' responses to current teaching and learning practices
- Project on supporting non-traditional groups in higher education is under way in four institutions: compiling case studies of practice in enhancing the learning experience for increasingly diverse student populations
- In some institutions, changing demographics and falling points for some courses have made it necessary to adapt the teaching and learning environment to suit diverse learners
- Continuous assessment including project work and presentations facilitate students with certain learning difficulties and support different learning styles
- *Meitheal* concept ensures that students quickly feel part of a learning community and see the benefits of shared aims and how to achieve these aims through teamwork.

Creating an accessible learning environment

The learning environment is made more inclusive when there is effective use of new learning technologies, for example Blackboard, MOODLE, CAN8 (a language learning computer program), and where course materials are provided in alternative accessible formats for students with disabilities. A commitment to creating an accessible physical environment is also a feature that characterises successful access programmes. This is achieved by applying universal design principles in new buildings and by carrying out accessibility audits and making necessary improvements in existing buildings. One institution has run a special programme of sports activities for students with disabilities with the aim of encouraging participation by the students in all aspects of college life.

Providing on-course support

Access programmes in many institutions focus mainly on providing support for students in their first term and throughout their course. Almost all institutions report that they offer a wide range of supports to ensure that students from the under-represented target groups benefit fully from their participation in higher education and achieve outcomes that are at least on a par with the rest of the student population. The supports fit into a number of main categories: learning supports, including diagnosis of learning needs and provision of supplementary or complementary tuition; funding assistance, for example help with paying for books, laptops, childcare, or transport; personal contact with access officer, tutor or mentor. Many institutions have also set up special structures such as committees and task forces to improve the induction and retention processes for all students. Some provide part-time jobs on campus for students who want to work. Special supports are often provided for students in their first year. In one institution, all first-year students are given the opportunity to be screened to discover their own unique learning profile and investigate how they learn best. In another, the writing and research skills service meets with all first-year students and provides one-to-one support where necessary.

Mentoring of students, whether by staff or peers, has proved to be a particularly effective way of providing post-entry support for students from the target groups. One institution has allocated a significant amount of resources to this aspect of its access programme and has found that providing student-centred, structured support on an individual basis helps access students to make the transition to higher education and to succeed in their studies. A team of dedicated project officers works on problem prevention, supporting students in identifying and resolving possible difficulties at critical stages of their first year. As a result of the positive relationship developed between the access service and students, many access students subsequently act as peer mentors, visiting second-level schools and assisting with pre-entry activities for incoming students. If a student decides to leave the institution, the access service organises an 'exit discussion' to check that the student has a career and education plan for the future and to organise referral to relevant support services, either in the institution or elsewhere.

In another institution, full-time professional student advisers work alongside academic, administrative and access staff to provide comprehensive support, guidance and monitoring for students in all programmes. The welcome and induction process has been refocused in recent years with large numbers of continuing students recruited and trained to guide and advise all new entrants on practical matters during their first few days in the institution.

Identifying gaps in current practice

Lack of institution-wide commitment to access

While the evaluation has found considerable strengths in current practice, with comments from various partners affirming to a large extent the institutions' own analysis of many successful aspects of their access programmes, there are also some perceived weaknesses that need to be addressed by institutions in the future. For example, even where the access programme in an institution is regarded as excellent, there is sometimes a perceived lack of support within individual departments or courses. There is also a widespread perception among access students that some higher education institutions, or some faculties, resist admitting access students because they fear that allowing students to enter on lower points will diminish the quality of the courses. In addition, access students say that they often have to counter the allegation that they are denying places to 'traditional' students. This perception can cause suspicion and resentment which can be difficult for the students to handle.

Some supports are inadequate for students' needs

While many institutions are regarded by students as accessible and welcoming, some lack essential provision to aid students with disabilities (e.g. software/ physical access/materials and textbooks in accessible formats). Teachers and students observed that some access programmes seem to work on the principle of *integration* (fitting the student to the programme) rather than *inclusion* (fitting the programme to the student), and they regard this as something that needs to change. Another issue is that even with the extra support provided by access programmes, financial worries can still dominate many students' lives, with institutions making assumptions that everyone can afford to pay for materials and other course 'extras' on demand. The cost of childcare and transport can also be major problems for some students, according to their personal circumstances.

Need for a greater emphasis on pre-entry activities

Students and teachers who have participated in access programmes strongly support the need for a greater emphasis on pre-entry activities, because many potential students are 'lost' by the time the access programme starts to work in a concentrated way with senior cycle second-level pupils. Therefore it is vital that access programmes work with young people from the target groups as early as possible in primary school or at the latest in the junior cycle of secondary school. In this way, access programmes will more effectively be able to target the most marginalised students from all under-represented groups.

Need for better information and communication

Some access programme participants said that they found it difficult to get adequate information about higher education opportunities in their second-level schools and they did not feel that their aspirations were supported by their teachers and guidance counsellors. This was not seen as the fault of the access programmes, but it was nonetheless an important issue for the students. The way in which the higher education institutions work with schools and communities is critical to the success of the access programme from the students' and teachers' point of view. Activities that provide hands-on experience of college life, for example shadowing days or summer schools, are considered by both students and teachers to be very helpful in breaking down the attitudinal and social barriers that often prevent students from seeing higher education as an option for them. It is seen as important to involve parents at an early stage so that they know what opportunities, choices and supports are available to their children. Access programmes also need to work with teachers, especially guidance counsellors, to raise awareness of access and to increase their expectations of their pupils. Students highlighted in particular the importance of good advice on subject choice at an early stage, sometimes even before transfer to second level.

Some parts of the access programmes have limited reach

In discussing alternative entry routes, teachers said that direct entry routes such as HEAR are useful but limited, because if a school is not linked to one of the seven participant institutions the scheme does not serve as a route of entry. There is also a view that many of the students entering through this scheme would have progressed to higher education anyway. Foundation courses are seen by teachers as an even more limited route of entry as only a very small number of the most disadvantaged students are able to participate and it involves an extra year of study after the Leaving Certificate before entry to higher education, which may be a barrier to some people.

Better support needed for mature students

Mature learners meanwhile consider preparatory courses in further education or outreach by higher education institutions to be very helpful in supporting their return to learning. However, they also stress the need for improved guidance for adults and for simplified and uniform application procedures. Mature students suggest that there should be a mature student officer in every college and that there is a need for more focused academic support in the first year, for example on research skills and essay writing, especially for people who are returning to learning.

Main challenges for institutions in implementing good practice

Mainstreaming access is not enough: targeted resources are needed

It can be seen from the above summary of current practice that most institutions have already begun to make good progress in providing access programmes based on principles of equity, diversity and inclusion. However, it is also clear from the self-evaluation reports that institutions face many challenges, both internal and external, in implementing good practice in their programmes. An important finding is that making access part of mainstream institutional policy is not enough: there is still a need for institutions to target resources and support to improve the position of under-represented groups. In some institutions, however, resources do not match the stated policy commitment to access and diversity: there is a lack of permanent staff, inadequate accommodation and a lack of appropriate secretarial, administrative and financial support for the effective operation of the access programme.

Access is just the first step

Responsibility towards the target students goes far beyond the delivery of access initiatives. To encourage the target groups into higher education and to integrate them into the college environment, it is important to satisfy not just their academic needs but also their social, cultural and personal needs. The target groups require a very supportive, student-centred environment which promotes learning and personal development. Expertise in access and diversity issues is sometimes concentrated in individuals such as access, disability and mature student officers rather than being spread throughout the institution.

Growing demand for service means that more resources are needed

Many institutions find that the demand for access-related services is growing faster than their resources permit. Institutes of technology say that they cater for large numbers of students from lower socio-economic groups and that their work at pre-entry level is currently restricted because of lack of personnel and resources. This is an issue for the allocation of resources both to the institution and *within* the institution. In addition, few institutions adopt a coordinated response to the career needs of students from the target groups, and existing careers services are sometimes inadequate to provide necessary advice and support for graduates transferring to employment or for those who wish to continue their studies to post-graduate or doctoral level.

Policy emphasis on research puts access at risk

One of the external obstacles to progress that was identified in the self-evaluation reports was the current national policy emphasis on research, which it is feared will put principles of access and diversity at risk. The likely effect of this policy is that a staff member's contribution to access will not be recognised for career advancement and more value is given to publication, research and systems skills. Some institutions have no formal induction or ongoing training for staff members concerning diversity issues and few incentives are offered for becoming involved in access activities.

Need for new forms of collaboration in institutions

Internally, institutions recognise that there is a need for more consistent collaboration between the access office, administrative staff and academic staff, working together in a new way in the design and implementation of their access strategy. This avoids the *silo* approach which has characterised many access programmes in the earlier stages of development. The self-evaluation shows that some institutions need to achieve major culture change to promote organisation-wide buy-in on implementing access policy. This level of change is challenging and slow, particularly in large 'traditional' institutions. While individual departments may make efforts to put systems and structures in place to support diversity and inclusion, there is not an agreed organisation-wide system in all institutions. It is time for access to move out of the *heroic* phase which characterises many educational innovations towards a more established professional stage of development. In many institutions, this movement has already begun.

Need to work more actively with ethnic minorities and Travellers

The self-evaluation found some significant gaps in the access programmes that are currently offered in higher education institutions. A major finding is that very few access programmes work systematically with ethnic minorities and Travellers and that most pre-entry activities concentrate largely on students who experience socio-economic obstacles. Other target groups are not routinely offered the opportunity to take part in such activities as summer schools or student shadowing schemes. Students with a disability are also at a disadvantage in institutions where there is no dedicated disability staff to provide learning support or assistive technology.

Recommendations

What can higher education institutions do to improve their access policies and practices?

Identify and address gaps in practice

Higher education institutions should regard the framework of policies and activities as a benchmark for successful access programmes, which they have already applied to assess their own stage of progress against objective criteria and indicators. Having identified any gaps in their own practice, institutions should now begin to find ways of addressing these gaps. It is strongly recommended that this be undertaken as a collaborative exercise, involving members of senior management, access practitioners and academic leaders, together with representatives from the target groups and external partner organisations. In particular, institutions should examine how they reward participation in access activities, for example in the promotion process for academic staff. They should also look at more systematic ways of gathering and analysing data about the outcomes of the access programme activities.

Implement national framework of qualifications

Access should not be considered an isolated issue, and this evaluation shows that mainstreaming good practice from the access programme can produce important benefits for the whole institution. For this reason institutions are encouraged to provide access, transfer and progression routes for students based on awards achieved within the national framework of qualifications and to provide a teaching and learning environment and a physical environment that is suited to the needs of all learners.

Minimum policy and practice criteria for an effective access programme

It is recommended that the minimum *policy* and *practice* criteria for an effective access programme in the future are:

1. A clear statement of the institution's access policy and how it relates to the corporate level strategy
2. Transparent information about the resources that are allocated to the access programme (including finance, personnel, accommodation)
3. A plan to provide systematic staff training on diversity and inclusion

4. A clear and specific set of targets for the admission and graduation of students from the under-represented groups that are identified by the National Office and a system of monitoring and measuring achievement of the targets
5. A focused programme designed to achieve the targets set. It should include:
 - pre-entry activities for students from all under-represented groups with special emphasis on working with teachers in targeted primary and junior cycle second-level schools and with community-based partnership groups
 - individual and group support for new entrants in their first year, including personal, social, financial and academic assistance where necessary
 - individual and group support as needed for students throughout their course, including advice on careers and post-graduate study.

What needs to happen at national level to support higher education institutions in implementing effective access policies and practices?

Support and consolidate what works

The practice in access programmes has been developmental, innovative and experimental, and the programmes appear to have delivered good results, based on the self-evaluation and on the views of external partners. An important message from the evaluation is that every effort should be made in future to support and consolidate what works, and not to focus exclusively on constant innovation. The findings of the evaluation show the extent of creativity and flexibility in access programmes. It is important to maintain this diversity and at the same time to provide a similar level of resources to all higher education institutions. It is not just the amount of resources but continuity that is at issue, because in the past many good initiatives have been discontinued when short-term project funding ended. The future grant allocation model should be based on the premise that since there is an existing body of good practice that has been examined mostly on a qualitative basis, it is important to maintain the qualitative dimension while also seeking to strengthen the institutional and national approaches to quantitative measurement. (There is further discussion of this topic in Section 3 of this report.)

Provide for continuity and targeting of resources

Access is a permanent feature of life in higher education institutions: there is a need for continuity in staffing to cover all of the target groups. The demand for service is growing all the time as student numbers grow. The issue needs to move further up the management agenda in some institutions. An access service cannot be built successfully when there is only one full-time post, with other staff being moved around to meet specific needs. There is a need for targeting within institutions' budget allocations to maintain a balance between student contact and other interventions that promote access, such as pre-entry programmes.

At national policy level, there are a number of important gaps that need to be addressed, including:

Definition of target groups

The self-evaluation was conducted at a time when definitions of the target groups were under discussion. Following almost two years of development and consultation, in April 2006 a detailed set of requirements on data collection and funding for under-represented groups was circulated by the HEA to higher education institutions within its remit. This will enable the collection of comprehensive information on access to higher education by students from under-represented groups, which is a key policy objective for the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education and the HEA. Implementation of the new approach is under discussion between the HEA and higher education institutions.

Student financial support

There are two main issues of concern: the availability of funding for part-time students, including students with a disability, on the same basis as full-time students and the need for greater coherence and coordination in arrangements for student financial support. Some developments are already under way to address these issues. In October 2005 the National Office published a *Review of Funding to Achieve Equity of Access to Higher Education*. Following this review, the National Office and the HEA are developing proposals for the support of part-time students. The National Office has made improvements in the

allocation and guidelines for student funding programmes within its remit. Work is also at an advanced stage on a new information campaign for students on the financial supports available to them in higher education. It is intended that the information will be available for students entering higher education in 2007. A new Student Support Bill is also currently being drafted by the Department of Education and Science. It is planned that administration of the student grant schemes will be improved by introducing guaranteed timeframes for payment of grants, an independent appeals procedure and more efficient arrangements for handling applications and making payments.

Students from ethnic minorities

The regulatory and administrative issues faced by some students from ethnic minorities place significant barriers to their participation in higher education. There is a need for clearer, more coherent and equitable national guidelines to help institutions deal with the needs of these students.

2. WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP TO ACHIEVE EQUITY OF ACCESS

Skilbeck (2000) states that:

... For further equity gains to be made in higher education, different kinds of actions will be required at all levels of the education system and in the wider society.... Obviously higher education agencies and institutions can have only part of the responsibility for all this but they need to address their roles and responsibilities in a wider framework.... The tertiary sector, in addition to attending to its own territory, needs to enlarge its role through a wide array of 'equity partnerships and extensions'.

The Action Group on Access to Third Level Education (2001) also acknowledged that higher education institutions alone cannot bring about the required improvement. The implementation of a coordinated framework of programmes requires collaboration between the National Office, higher education institutions, schools and further education centres, the Department of Education and Science and other relevant government departments, area partnerships, specialised expert bodies and agencies in the community and voluntary sectors.

This section presents the *partnership* elements of a framework for successful access programmes and describes how these elements are being implemented by higher education institutions. It outlines some examples of good practice from the institutions' self-evaluation reports and also shows where there are gaps and challenges that need to be addressed in the future. The recommendations set out what higher education institutions can do to improve their access partnership practices and what needs to happen at national level to support institutions in implementing effective partnership practices.

Partnership: Elements of a framework for successful access programmes

A successful access programme is based on effective and productive engagement between the institution and all of the relevant people and agencies in the community, working together to achieve equity of access. An access programme meets the criterion of having an effective framework of partnership practices if it demonstrates success on the following indicators:

- a) The institution works closely with the school system, community and specialist expert bodies; business and industry in well-coordinated and targeted strategies to improve opportunities for students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students

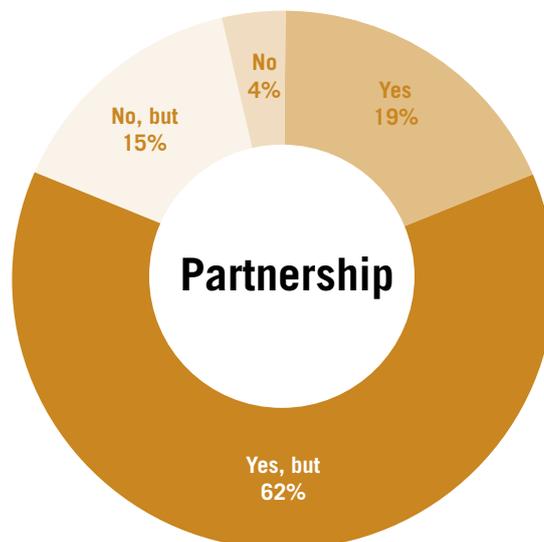
- b) Partnership is put into practice to produce concrete positive outcomes for students from the under-represented groups
- c) There is a good flow of information and communication among all of the partners in the institution and in the wider community.

Putting partnership into practice: What the evaluation found

Table 2 shows the number of institutions that reported each stage of progress for the partnership indicators listed above.

Table 2: Stages of progress for partnership indicators

	Yes 4	Yes, but 3	No, but 2	No 1	
Criterion 3: Partnership	Number of institutions (n=27)				Average
a	5	17	5	0	3
b	6	18	2	1	3.07
c	4	17	4	2	2.85
Average for criterion 3					2.98



These figures show that many institutions consider their partnership practices to be fairly well-developed. However, most recognise that they still have some work to do to reach out to specific target groups, especially Travellers and ethnic minorities. The evaluation found that sometimes the higher education institutions have a more positive view of their partnership practice than the supposed 'partners' do. It is nevertheless possible to identify from the self-evaluation reports good examples where institutions have implemented *partnership* in their access programmes and also to see where there are gaps and challenges that need to be addressed.

Active collaboration with partners to achieve common goals

The self-evaluation reports include many examples of good practice where partnership is a core value in the institutions' work and is demonstrated in active links with a range of community, voluntary, regeneration and development agencies, including community-based projects; networks of out-of-school services; local childcare committees; youth work organisations; local learning forum; local partnership agencies; education networks and education committees of city and county development boards. The following is a summary of good partnership practice across a range of institutions:

- Access campus to foster partnership with a local community in an area of social disadvantage
- Partnership with FETAC on recognition of awards for access
- Intercultural campus planned
- Education Disadvantage Centre established in 2001 to highlight the implications of social and economic disadvantage on education within the primary sector; is involved in a network for out-of-school services in conjunction with Barnardo's, National Youth Federation, Border Counties Childcare Committee, Children's Research Centre, Targeting Educational Disadvantage Project
- Centre for adult and continuing education offers programmes both on campus and in outreach centres: credit allowances and exemptions are available towards BA degree subjects
- Membership of city learning forum, education networks and education committee of city development board
- Partnership with local site of multinational pharmaceutical industry to increase the number of students from disadvantaged areas studying science

- Access officer is a member of all local partnership groups and a consortium of designated disadvantaged schools. Links with local businesses providing opportunities for students with disabilities. Links with career guidance personnel in schools.

Partnership with schools

Almost all institutions work with designated disadvantaged second-level schools, providing pre-entry supports for students and offering alternative routes of entry with reserved places for students from the linked schools, even if they do not meet the points requirement for their chosen courses. There is also a growing trend towards increased partnership with further education colleges, based on implementing access, transfer and progression routes within the national framework of qualifications, especially for mature students. Collaboration with primary schools is less widespread, however, with only a small number of institutions providing a primary schools' programme (see below). One institute of technology has a programme for sixth class primary school pupils 'Exploring education through art and music', developed in collaboration with home-school community liaison teachers. It also offered a programme for transition year students in ten schools, 'Exploring education through drama', but this was discontinued because of lack of funding. A college of education offers elective courses on educational disadvantage to familiarise final-year student teachers with the realities of teaching in designated disadvantaged schools; it also offers a Masters in Education with a special option in educational disadvantage, aimed at teachers in designated disadvantaged schools.

Working with primary schools

Some institutions have introduced activities such as sport and summer camps for primary school pupils, which have helped to raise educational aspirations by familiarising pupils with the college campus and introducing the idea of higher education as a real possibility for them. One institution also runs an extensive programme with forty designated disadvantaged schools in its area, most of which are primary schools. The institution provides structured professional development and networking opportunities for teachers and principals, as well as supporting school-based curriculum enhancement projects and facilitating teachers to undertake research. The programme encourages schools to set specific goals for their projects and to monitor their achievement of the goals each year.

Partnership with specialist disability agencies

In some institutions, a disability liaison officer works closely with specialist agencies that provide services to people with disabilities, and links have also been made with education and training programmes for young and adult Travellers. However, in most institutions these developments are in their infancy or are non-existent.

Partnership with business and industry

There are some good examples of practice in partnership with industry, including scholarship schemes that aim to increase the number of students from disadvantaged areas progressing to higher education, and other links with local businesses providing opportunities for students with disabilities. Two neighbouring institutions have teamed up with the local site of a multinational pharmaceutical company to promote greater uptake of science subjects in designated disadvantaged schools in the area, and the company will provide bursaries and career opportunities for students from the schools who go on to study science in higher education.

Communicating with partners

As part of the self-evaluation, some institutions convened groups of their external partners and asked them about their experience of dealing with the institution. This highlighted in particular the need for better communication, and some institutions have made a commitment that a community forum or partnership/consultative group established as part of the self-evaluation will be continued.

Partnership with other higher education institutions

Another aspect of partnership is the existence of formal and informal links between different higher education institutions, whether working on specific projects and initiatives or being part of local and regional consortia. There are some current examples of this kind of partnership, such as the HEAR scheme, but it appears that the opportunities for collaboration between institutions have not yet been fully exploited and that there is potential for further development in the future.

Identifying gaps in current practice

Some access programmes are too 'top down'

While there is broad agreement among the various partners that access programmes make a difference, particularly in supporting students who may not otherwise have gone to higher education, the evaluation found that many institutions are not fully aware of the potential of effective partnerships to strengthen their access programmes. Activities are sometimes planned and organised from the top down without considering the needs of the people they are aiming to attract. Materials such as college prospectuses are not always written in user-friendly language and presented in accessible formats. Some students have had the experience of getting information about access programmes in a random and unsystematic manner. College campuses can still appear to be unfriendly and forbidding places even to people who live in neighbouring areas. While much has been achieved in recent years to create a more welcoming environment, many learners from the under-represented groups still feel that they are 'lucky' to get a place rather than entitled to be there as a right.

Need to work with younger children

It is clear from the evaluation that for students and families who may not consider higher education as an option, getting them involved and participating in access activities at an early age is very important. It is very difficult for young people to have higher expectations for themselves than their parents or teachers have for them. Interventions in primary schools have a significant impact on raising the aspirations of parents and teachers, which seems to be a major factor in the young person's decision to progress to higher education. Activities such as projects and competitions in the junior cycle of second level also seem to be successful and influential in promoting an awareness of higher education opportunities among pupils and their families.

Support the work of schools and teachers in raising expectations

Since there is no doubt that schools play an important role in supporting the ambitions and aspirations of students, it is vital that higher education institutions work closely with schools and also with further and adult education centres to get the best possible outcomes for learners from the under-represented groups. Time and time again, students participating in the focus groups mentioned the influence of excellent teachers and the importance of getting good advice about subject choice as early as possible. When asked how colleges could improve their pre-entry access programmes, the students suggested

that colleges should provide high-quality and easily-understood information about course entry requirements to students early in their second-level education; organise and structure open days better to provide the kind of information that prospective students need; offer extra teaching in Leaving Certificate subjects earlier to improve the benefits gained by students.

Provide hands-on experience of college life

Second-level school principals and teachers generally find that their schools' links with higher education access programmes produce very positive outcomes for their pupils, and the more links there are, the wider students' horizons are. They particularly value outreach and on-campus activities that encourage familiarity by parents and students with the higher education environment. This helps to break the mystique that often surrounds 'going to college' in some communities. Making the culturally unfamiliar more accessible, for example through campus visits and achievement award ceremonies, spreads the message that 'higher education is for you and your family'. Higher education institutions need to take account of socio-cultural factors: by going to higher education young people can feel that they are leaving friends and family behind and can face difficult issues of identity and belonging, being 'neither one thing nor the other'.

Keep things open and flexible

One criticism voiced by schools is that in some ways it is now more difficult to make links with higher education institutions because schools are 'divided up' by access programme staff. Previously, schools could initiate links directly with colleges according to the needs and interests of their pupils and this was found to be very effective. They find it difficult to understand why higher education institutions are not linked to schools in their region and suggest that this is an example of the institutions having a one-sided approach to partnership. For many schools and further education colleges, links with the institutes of technology provide an important route of access for students doing the Leaving Certificate Applied and FETAC courses. The ladder of qualifications makes higher education a more attractive and accessible option for some students.

Engage students and teachers as role models

Role models are considered by many teachers and others who work among under-represented groups to be very important in inspiring others to participate in higher education. When the teachers themselves are from one of the under-represented groups, this sends a strong signal to other students about the education and career opportunities

that are open to them. However, the requirement to have Higher Level Irish in the Leaving Certificate is a significant barrier that prevents students from under-represented groups gaining access to primary teacher education. This is a major gap, because of the considerable influence that primary teachers can have on the educational aspirations of students and their families. Some principals and teachers expressed the view that apart from the problem with primary teacher education, certain other higher education institutions are 'not performing at all' to widen access and there are significant barriers particularly for students who want to study in dedicated institutions for the medical or legal professions.

Main challenges for institutions in implementing good practice

Need for continuity of resources to support partnership

Partnership with higher education institutions is especially important for the adult education and non-formal sectors, because they are outside the mainstream school system and learners need to be made aware of the opportunities and supports that are available to them through access programmes. However, some partnership activities between institutions and communities have been discontinued because of lack of funding. When short-term funded projects end, the strong relationships that institutions have developed with the community cannot continue and so they fail to deliver concrete positive outcomes for the target groups over the longer term. Also, although many institutions report significant collaboration with expert and representative groups to help assess the needs of the target groups and develop appropriate programmes, a lack of resources in the relevant area can sometimes mean that the individual student or prospective student gets very little attention.

Need to improve communications with partners in the community

Many institutions are aware that there is a need for improved communication with target groups, including more direct and effective contact through visits, on-campus sessions and outreach activities. They also recognise that it is valuable to obtain an external perspective on the effectiveness of partnerships, especially by involving adult learners and people from the non-formal sectors and Travellers groups. One approach that is suggested for higher education institutions is that they collaborate with all of the relevant partners and adopt a 'life-cycle' approach to access with appropriate interventions planned at different stages of the learners' life from pre-school to post-retirement. Such an approach would give a very useful focus to the institutions' partnership with families, communities, schools, voluntary organisations and workplaces in promoting access to lifelong learning for under-represented groups.

Need to foster collaboration, not competition among institutions

There is a concern among some institutions that the proposed new model of grant allocation for access based on student numbers will encourage more competition between higher education institutions and put an end to the collaborative approach that has been adopted, for example, in the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) scheme. Such a loss of partnership activities would be regarded by institutions as a retrograde step.

Recommendations

What can higher education institutions do to improve their partnership practice?

More active collaboration with local communities

Higher education institutions should be more active in their partnership with local and regional communities, seeing the promotion of access to higher education as a shared responsibility. Institutions need to collaborate closely with education and support personnel who work with the under-represented groups, applying for example a *life-cycle* approach to analysing the needs of learners and planning access programmes accordingly. However, the level of personal disadvantage is not only linked to areas of disadvantage and higher education institutions need to recognise the specific needs of individuals, especially mature students and students with a disability. They also need to seek more direct feedback from partners in the community about the way they organise access programmes and should avoid being too rigid in directing their relationships with partners, for example in the way schools are divided up between institutions.

Better communication with prospective students

Better communication about access programmes would benefit many prospective students. Institutions need to listen to prospective students, hear their fears and concerns, and provide the information they need to make decisions about their future. People should be made aware that higher education is their entitlement. Application forms and college prospectuses should be made more user-friendly and should provide a clearer explanation of different schemes such as HEAR, PLC route, mature student applications and of the range of supports that are available to students with a disability. Institutions also need to talk to schools, to student councils and to community groups before designing a programme of pre-entry activities, as it may need to be customised to the particular circumstances and profile of the potential students.

Work with younger pupils

Investing time and resources in working with school pupils at an earlier age, even in primary school, has been shown in the experience of some higher education institutions to produce major returns in terms of raised teacher expectations and increased pupil motivation. All institutions should explore efficient and effective ways of working with schools, teachers and out-of school support programmes to promote the idea that access to higher education is a realistic aspiration for all pupils. There are some very good existing models of practice that can be implemented by higher education institutions to supplement the work they are already doing with older second-level pupils as part of their access programmes.

Make course structures more responsive to learners' needs

Part-time study is a practical and flexible way of promoting increased access to higher education for under-represented groups, and institutions should explore the possibilities of offering courses in partnership with communities. There is also a need to make learning more accessible, for example by using distance learning and e-learning. Mature students should be supported more actively through the application process, and institutions should work closely with further and adult education centres that provide accredited 'bridging courses' from second level and further education to higher education. Post-graduate study for entry to certain professions should also be made more accessible for students from the under-represented groups, who should be supported to progress to the career of their choice.

Minimum partnership criteria for an effective access programme

It is recommended that the minimum *partnership* criteria for an effective access programme in the future are:

1. A clear statement of how the institution's access programme links with relevant partners in the community and how it relates to the corporate level community mission
2. A plan to involve staff of the institution actively in partnership with the community and other education sectors
3. A full agenda for action agreed between the institution and its partners in local communities, aimed at promoting clear routes of progression to higher education for targeted groups of learners

4. A commitment to engage students and their families, specialised expert bodies, community agencies and representative groups in planning and monitoring access programme activities.

What needs to happen at national level to support higher education institutions in implementing effective partnerships for access?

Provide financial support for part-time students

As stated in the 2005 review of access funding by the HEA, part-time students should be eligible for relevant financial support mechanisms in higher education on the same basis as full-time students. This is more than an issue of fees: other funds should also be extended on a pro-rata basis to part-time students, for example to support childcare and equipment costs and to support needs of students with a disability in part-time education.

Ensure that the funding model rewards collaboration

Structure the allocation of grants to institutions in such a way as to encourage greater collaboration with external partners and with other higher education institutions. Ensure that funding models do not reward competition at the expense of cooperation.

Continue to work with schools that serve under-represented groups

While it is recognised that there is a need to rationalise programmes that target educational disadvantage and inclusion, schools that serve areas of socio-economic disadvantage should continue to be included in access programmes even if they are not part of the new school support programme under the DEIS action plan. This is particularly important in ensuring increased participation in higher education by young people from groups identified in national studies as significantly under-represented in higher education (for example from semi/unskilled manual worker and non-manual worker socio-economic groups).

Schools should not be penalised for their success in promoting school completion and high attainment in Junior Certificate by being removed from all aspects of the school support programme. There is a continuing need for extra support to ensure that the advances made by schools are maintained through to performance in the Leaving Certificate and progression to higher education.

3. SETTING TARGETS FOR ACCESS AND MONITORING ACHIEVEMENT OF THE TARGETS

A successful access programme is targeted at students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students, and the institution systematically monitors its performance for the admission and graduation of students from all of the target groups.

This section presents the *targeting* elements of a framework for successful access programmes and describes how these elements are being implemented by higher education institutions. It outlines some examples of good practice from the institutions' self-evaluation reports and also shows where there are gaps and challenges that need to be addressed in the future. The recommendations set out what higher education institutions can do to improve their practices in setting and monitoring targets and what needs to happen at national level to support institutions in implementing effective practice.

Targeting: Elements of a framework for successful access programmes

An access programme meets the criterion of having an effective framework of targeting, target setting and monitoring if it demonstrates success on the following indicators:

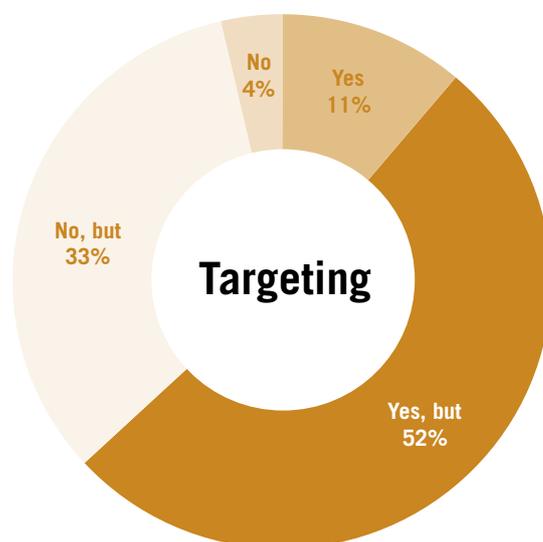
- (a) The institution has developed an access programme that is tailored to meet the needs of the targeted under-represented groups: students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students.
- (b) The institution's access programme works with the different target groups at each of the identified critical stages: pre-school and primary school; secondary school to Leaving Certificate; pre-entry to higher education; post-entry and progression to graduation; post-graduate and employment opportunities.
- (c) The institution has set specific targets and timescales for admission and graduation of students from all of the targeted under-represented groups.
- (d) The institution has a systematic approach to data gathering and analysis through which progress in meeting targets and timescales is measured.

Targeting and target setting in practice: What the evaluation found

Table 3 shows the number of institutions that reported each stage of progress for the targeting indicators listed above.

Table 3: Stages of progress for targeting indicators

	Yes 4	Yes, but 3	No, but 2	No 1	
Criterion 2: Targeting	Number of institutions (n=27)				Average
a	4	15	8	0	2.85
b	4	16	7	0	2.89
c	1	11	12	3	2.37
d	2	13	9	3	2.52
Average for criterion 2					2.66



These figures show that targeting is the weakest area of current practice, with large numbers of institutions reporting that they are still at an early stage of progress, especially in relation to setting specific targets and timescales for the admission and graduation of students from all of the under-represented groups. However, there are some examples of good practice from the self-evaluation.

Meeting the needs of all target groups

Most institutions have made better progress with some target groups than with others: there are many examples of good practice in working with students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, students with a disability, and mature students. However, very little progress has yet been made in increasing participation rates among members of the Traveller community. The situation with people from other ethnic minorities is somewhat similar, but there are many specific issues of eligibility and funding to be addressed here, some of which are outside the control of the institutions. This particular target group, more than any other, needs more precise definition.

Asking the target groups what they need

Access programmes are most effective when they are based on research and consultation so that they meet the needs of the target groups rather than being planned and delivered in a top-down way so that they meet the institution's own perception of what those needs might be. There is no substitute for close working partnerships between an institution and the communities it serves: outreach activities and personal contact have a significant impact on reaching target groups. There are some initiatives that aim to work more effectively with specific target groups. For example, some institutions have offered courses in community development which create progression routes for socio-economically disadvantaged adult learners, including Travellers. There are also good examples of targeting mature students through adult education centres, adult guidance service, FÁS and social welfare offices, area based partnerships, public libraries, careers exhibitions and study fairs. One institution has introduced a programme to meet the needs of migrant workers in association with the Migrant Rights Centre of Ireland; another has developed a system for measuring and ranking socio-economic disadvantage in collaboration with the local community partnership.

Working with target groups at critical stages

Most access programmes focus their pre-entry activities on second-level pupils, mainly those in the senior cycle, but there is a widespread view among teachers, students and people working with the under-represented groups that there is a need to start working with pupils and families at an earlier stage. A small number of institutions adopt a life-cycle approach, working with parents, children and teachers from early childhood onwards. One institution has established a long-term early learning initiative designed to work with families in disadvantaged inner-city areas and to provide support from birth to first job.

Promoting improved access to primary teacher education

Colleges of education can play an important role in preparing primary teachers who will build aspirations and encourage educational attainment among all primary school pupils. However, as discussed earlier, the requirements for entry to primary teacher education act as a barrier to people from the under-represented groups. One college of education has introduced a pilot scheme that aims to widen participation among students who are socio-economically disadvantaged.

Working with Travellers

While little progress has yet been made with attracting Travellers into full-time higher education, some institutions have begun to focus on outreach activities for adult Travellers. One institution is using the national framework of qualifications to promote the benefits of education with Traveller parents. Another has provided a programme based on Traveller music and culture. In time, it is hoped that such activities, combined with early intervention in the community and in primary schools, will produce results in terms of increased numbers of Travellers participating in higher education.

Target setting and monitoring

Although this is one of the indicators where the least progress has been made in higher education institutions, the self-evaluation reports show that work on target setting has begun and that most institutions are developing action plans consistent with the national access targets set by the Minister and the Higher Education Authority. The aim is that graduation rates for students from the target groups will be the same as for other students. Some institutions reported that they have already met national targets for the admission of specific under-represented groups. In others, the national targets have been exceeded and these institutions hope that the new grant allocation model will recognise and reward their success. As part of the self-evaluation, two institutions compared their performance on the admission of students from certain socio-economic groups with national data reported in a recent HEA/ESRI study.

Data gathering and analysis

It is clear from the self-evaluation reports that there is capability to gather data in all institutions through various information management systems and some are developing new data collection and reporting systems for access. There are a few good examples of practice in tracking the progress of access students for the purpose of comparison

with mainstream institution data. A number of institutions reported that their access programme is regularly reviewed as part of the mainstream institutional quality assurance process, and in some cases the effectiveness of specific programme activities is also systematically evaluated.

Identifying gaps in current practice

Very little data to demonstrate effectiveness of the programmes

The evaluation indicates that access programmes are working efficiently in that the range of activities is impressive; the staff are dedicated and hard-working; students and others who participate in the programmes are by and large satisfied with the service they receive; the available resources are well-managed. In short, access programmes appear to be 'doing things right'. However, since there is still a shortage of quantitative data that provide evidence about the relative effectiveness of different activities, it is difficult to show that they are 'doing the right things'.

Need for better tracking and monitoring systems

It is clear that there is a need to develop effective reporting structures and information systems that will support institutions in designing and implementing access programmes; in setting, monitoring and reviewing targets; in making more informed policy decisions based on the objective data and systematic analysis of the impact of interventions and in reviewing the effectiveness of programme initiatives. From the discussions with practitioners conducted as part of the evaluation, it seems that there is agreement about the need to improve practice in this area by developing a framework for regular and systematic evaluation of progress at institutional and national levels.

Students in the focus group pointed out that there is also a need for research on the reasons why students drop out of college, because access programmes are not just about getting people into courses, but also about supporting them to successful completion. They suggested that colleges should keep better records on the background of students and track the progress of access students through their courses, so that they are in a better position to analyse and improve the performance of access programmes.

Need to establish definitively what works

Some practitioners and policymakers expressed the view that self-evaluation has limited value and that there is a need for comparability across institutions to establish definitively what works and to find out where the most effective practice is happening. This requires a common approach to data collection, which is a major issue for the future.

Main challenges for institutions in implementing good practice

Defining the target groups

In their self-evaluation reports, many institutions say that they need further information and guidance from the National Office so that they can set appropriate admission and retention targets for all target groups. There has been continuing debate about definitions, especially of *disadvantage* and *disability*; there is also concern about the accuracy and comparability of information that may be collected using different definitions in different institutions. This concern is heightened in the light of the new grant allocation model, where the funds allocated will be based on the number of students admitted from each target group. As already noted in the previous section, this issue is being addressed at national level with the development of new guidelines for data collection by the HEA.

Meeting the needs of students from ethnic minorities

There are many complex issues about the status and eligibility of some members of ethnic minorities, including recent immigrants, migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers, and some institutions have had to come up with local solutions to meet the needs of applicants from these groups in the absence of clear national guidelines that cover all circumstances. The question of unaccompanied minors or young foreign nationals in the asylum-seeking process and the limits on their eligibility to progress their education is a growing concern in second-level schools, especially since these students are often very motivated towards progressing to higher education.

Encouraging greater participation in higher education by Travellers

Traditionally, retaining Traveller young people in second level has proved difficult but the experience of schools that participated in the focus groups is that a small but increasing number of Travellers are completing the Leaving Certificate and consequently the numbers progressing to higher education may start to rise if the right level of support is available. Teachers observed that settled Travellers are more likely to participate to the end of second-level education and that *portable accreditation* of achievement, for example

through the national framework of qualifications, is important in facilitating children and adults from nomadic families to complete their education. Higher education institutions need to recognise alternative routes of access, based on qualifications achieved within the national framework, to encourage greater participation by Travellers.

Devoting adequate resources to pre-entry activities

When resources are limited, access programmes tend to concentrate on supporting students at and shortly after the point of entry. This means that pre-entry activities are limited for most target groups, with priority given to students in designated disadvantaged second-level schools. This has especially been the case in institutes of technology. Institutions need to find ways of working effectively at the primary and pre-school stages to make the best use of their resources. There is also a need for greater links with school completion programmes, Youthreach and other youth training programmes.

Setting targets

This is the weakest area in the self-evaluation, with only one institution reporting that it has fully achieved the indicator of setting specific targets and timescales for the admission and graduation of students from all of the under-represented groups. In some institutions, targets are set for admission and graduation of students in the mainstream, but not for specific target groups. Many institutions have no targets in place at present, but there are plans to work towards the national targets identified by the Minister and by the National Office. Some institutions report that they have had to adjust their targets and timescales because of limited resources.

Systematic data collection and analysis

The evaluation shows significant gaps in institutions' approach to data collection and analysis. While most institutions presented a considerable amount of information about their access programme activities in the self-evaluation reports, there is little evidence that they have taken time to reflect on the data and to consider the policy implications. Much of the analysis in the reports is qualitative rather than quantitative. It appears that information about access is often gathered and analysed for institutional planning but it is seldom used systematically to set targets and timescales for improving access. The level of systematic target setting and monitoring can also vary between different parts of the access programme in the same institution, with more attention, for example, being paid to tracking the performance of mature students or students admitted under special

access routes than to monitoring students with a disability. In most institutions, there is little or no tracking of people who participate in pre-entry activities, so it is very difficult to say with any certainty which activities work best to promote increased access. Likewise, the retention and progression rates of students from the target groups are hardly ever compared with relevant statistical information for the wider student body to assess the effectiveness of on-course supports.

Recommendations

How can higher education institutions strengthen their approach to targeting, target setting and monitoring?

Make sure that the access programme is targeted at all under-represented groups

Institutions need to review their current access programmes to make sure that they are addressing the needs of all four target groups: students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students. Where they identify gaps, there is a need to revise, re-focus or extend the programme so that all target groups are included.

Work with the different target groups at the appropriate critical stages

As pointed out in Section 2, institutions need to collaborate with a range of other agencies in the community to ensure that they reach people from all of the target groups at the relevant stages in the educational life-cycle: pre-school, primary school, special schools for pupils with disabilities, junior cycle and senior cycle of second level, further and adult education, transfer to higher education, participation and progression to graduation, and progression to employment and post-graduate opportunities.

Set clear and specific access targets and monitor the achievement of these targets systematically and regularly

Institutions need to set, monitor and review targets for the admission and graduation of all under-represented groups as part of their continuing policy-making and planning processes. They need to use existing data and information resources, including the admissions information system, to support the design and implementation of their access

programmes. All access policy decisions should be based on objective data and on systematic analysis of the impact of interventions, and there should be coherent reporting structures within the institution to review the effectiveness of access programme initiatives. The access programme should be evaluated systematically as part of the institution's quality assurance system, which includes self-evaluation, peer review, publication of results and formulation of a quality improvement plan. There should be formal structures for the participation of learners in planning and evaluating access programme activities. There should also be procedures to identify and work systematically on any barriers that prevent access for specific under-represented groups.

Minimum targeting criteria for an effective access programme

1. A clear and explicit plan to address the needs of all target groups at appropriate critical stages, based on research, needs analysis and consultation
2. A set of clear and specific access targets and timescales for admission and graduation of students from all target groups
3. A rigorous and systematic approach to data collection and analysis to monitor achievement of the targets set.

What needs to happen at national level to support higher education institutions in targeting, target setting and monitoring?

Support capacity building in institutions

Use the new grant allocation model and the Strategic Innovation Fund to support capacity building in institutions and to foster good practice in data collection and analysis.

Repeat the self-evaluation exercise

Encourage institutions to repeat the self-evaluation exercise in about three years' time to check what further progress they have made against the benchmark for successful access programmes and against their own baseline performance. In the meantime, work with the institutions to develop a range of quantitative measures that can be included in the next self-evaluation.

CONCLUSION

This evaluation started by defining a framework of policies and activities for successful access programmes and then applied the framework to assess the current stage of progress in twenty-seven higher education institutions. The findings of the evaluation validate the framework, affirming that successful access programmes show strong performance on the four criteria of *policy*, *targeting*, *partnership* and *practice*. The self-evaluation was an intensive and extensive process, which many institutions found quite demanding of their time, energy and resources. However, they also said that it was valuable to take time out to reflect and to take a wider view of their access programmes, enabling them to see the ‘big picture’ and to identify gaps that they need to address in the future. Most institutions conducted the self-evaluation in a reflective, inclusive, open and honest way, incorporating consultation with partners outside the institution as well as involving senior management, access practitioners and administrators to provide a rounded perspective. In some institutions, the process was used to help colleagues plan for the future and make improvements in their access programmes.

The findings of the evaluation provide some answers to the question that was posed at the outset of the report, *How well are we promoting equity of access for under-represented groups to higher education in Ireland in 2006?* In short, “yes”, we seem to be doing quite well in some respects, “but” there are still some significant gaps. Access programmes often provide very good support for students once they enter their courses, but not all of them provide pre-entry activities for all target groups and very few work systematically with younger children and their families and teachers. Also, while the access programme might have a high profile within the institution, there is not always a good flow of communication with partners in the community. Many institutions have made good progress on changing their systems and structures to include diversity, but the approach to target setting and monitoring by data collection is not yet sufficiently well developed, so it is still very difficult to say just ‘how well’ we are doing on critical measures.

It is clear from the evaluation that access is beginning to move from the margins to the mainstream in many institutions. Good practice in access programmes has begun to infiltrate institutions’ approaches to teaching and learning and to student support. As access programmes mature, practitioners and policymakers need to adopt a more strategic and analytical approach, directing resources towards activities that are shown to be effective. There is a growing recognition that access cannot work if it is the role of only one person or small group: every aspect of the institution’s life needs to be infused with a consciousness of social responsibility. Finally, the evaluation has shown that a successful access programme is not about doing extraordinary things, but it is more about doing ordinary things extraordinarily well: things like partnership with communities;

pre-entry and post-entry support for students; improving the quality of the learning experience; paying attention to staff development needs; communicating the message of diversity and inclusion effectively both inside and outside the institution. Above all, success in access depends on listening to what people say and having sufficient humility to recognise that not all of the wisdom about access resides solely in higher education institutions.

RESPONSE OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY: PLAN TO IMPLEMENT THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EVALUATION

To ensure that the findings from the evaluation have full impact over the coming years, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) proposes to undertake the following steps during 2006-7 through the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education.

1. Request a three-year access plan from each institution

Following publication of this evaluation report, the HEA will request an access plan from each higher education institution. Each institution's plan will draw on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation. It will include targets for the next three years as well as a means to measure progress each year. Institutions will also be asked to develop ways of gathering and monitoring quantitative data on progress that can be used in the next evaluation.

2. Share experience and resources among institutions

A large resource of materials has been generated through the self-evaluation by each institution. The HEA will facilitate arrangements to make this material available on the web as a developmental resource.

3. Provide focused support to institutions in setting targets and data collection

The HEA will work to ensure that, where needed, resources are available to assist institutions in their work on target setting and data collection. This may include arrangements for a person or small team of advisers to be made available to institutions over a short period of time.

4. Monitor financial resources for access

The HEA will monitor the overall investment in equity of access to higher education to ensure that adequate resources are in place. Particular attention will be paid to core funding and strategic funding for access, and these will be on the agenda of regular budget meetings with institutions.

5. Set new national targets for access to higher education

In the coming months the HEA will introduce a national system that will enable higher education institutions to collect data on access to higher education. This will include new national targets to build upon those set in 2001.

6. Influence change in national policy on provision and support for part-time education

There is an urgent need for progress in provision and support for part-time education. The HEA will continue its work in this area, in particular with the Department of Education and Science.

7. Work with the rest of the education system

Drawing on the findings of the evaluation, the National Access Office will continue to work with the Department of Education and Science and partners at primary level, second level and in further education to ensure effective links within and across the education system. This includes work on effective bridging or preparatory courses.

8. Carry out another evaluation in 2009

The HEA will carry out another evaluation of access programmes in three years. The current evaluation will be treated as a benchmark and progress will be examined with reference to the findings of the 2006 evaluation. In the 2009 evaluation there will be a particular emphasis on the analysis of quantitative as well as qualitative data.

SELECTED REFERENCES

Legislation

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- *Regional Technical Colleges Act, 1992*
- *Dublin Institute of Technology Act, 1992*
- *Universities Act, 1997*
- *Education Act, 1998*
- *Employment Equality Act, 1998*
- *Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999*
- *Equal Status Act, 2000*
- *Education (Welfare) Act, 2000*

Government policy and reports

- *Report of Commission on the Points System, 1999*
- *National Development Plan 2000-2006*
- *Report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education, 2001*
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- *Moving beyond Educational Disadvantage: Report of Educational Disadvantage Committee, 2005*
- *National Action Plan Against Racism, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2005*

HEA publications

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- *Meeting the Equity Challenge in Higher Education: A Review of International Experience* (Skilbeck [with Connell], 2000 'short version')
- *College Entry in Focus: A Fourth National Survey of Access to Higher Education* (Clancy, 2001)
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- *Quality Assurance: A Reference System for Indicators and Evaluation Procedures* (Tavenas for EUA, 2003)
- *Social Class and Participation: Good Practice in Widening Access to Higher Education* (European Access Network, Universities UK, 2002)
- *Determining the Costs of Widening Participation: Report of a Pilot Study* (Universities UK, Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2002)
- *Equality in Education: An Examination of Community Based Youth Initiatives under the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme* (ADM, 2003)
- *A Whole New World: A Feminist Model of Community and Lifelong Learning*, (Parsons, S., O'Connor, J., and Conlon, C. Dublin, WERRC, UCD, 2003)
- *Learning Partnership: Promoting Learner Access for Women Through Models of Successful Community-University Partnership* (O'Connor, J., WERRC, UCD and the Gender Equality Unit, Department of Education and Science, 2004)
- *Joint Report of the Disability Support Service and New ERA Programme* (University College Dublin, Office of the Director of Access, 2004)
- *Connection, Continuity, Change - Lessons Learnt from Student Withdrawal* (Hurley, K., UCD, 2004)
- *Building Equality Through Education, Going Forward in Partnership* (Conference Report, ADM, 2004)

Unpublished material

- "Discussion Paper - Targeted Initiatives to Improve Access: Mapping the Present and Directions for the Future" (National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education, 2004)
- "Notes of Follow-up Meetings with Higher Education Institutions" (National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education, 2004)
- "Evaluation of Access Programmes: Background Paper" (National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education, 2005)

APPENDIX 1:

List of participating higher education institutions

1.	Dublin City University
2.	Mater Dei Institute of Education
3.	Mary Immaculate College of Education
4.	National College of Art and Design
5.	National College of Ireland
6.	National University of Ireland Galway
7.	National University of Ireland Maynooth
8.	St Patrick's College Drumcondra
9.	Trinity College Dublin
10.	University College Cork
11.	University College Dublin
12.	University of Limerick
13.	Dublin Institute of Technology
14.	Athlone Institute of Technology
15.	Institute of Technology Blanchardstown
16.	Institute of Technology Carlow
17.	Cork Institute of Technology
18.	Dundalk Institute of Technology
19.	Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology
20.	Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology
21.	Letterkenny Institute of Technology
22.	Limerick Institute of Technology
23.	Institute of Technology Sligo
24.	Institute of Technology Tallaght
25.	Tipperary Institute
26.	Institute of Technology Tralee
27.	Waterford Institute of Technology

APPENDIX 2: Self-evaluation form

Criterion 1: Policy The institution, at corporate level, is committed to the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion, and implements its access policy through its mainstream strategic priorities, resource allocation and quality assurance processes	Stage 4 YES	Stage 3 Yes, but	Stage 2 No but	Stage 1 NO
Indicators				
a) The institution implements the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion through its mainstream policy and strategy				
b) The institution implements the principles of equity, diversity, inclusion through its allocation of resources to the access programme for students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students				
c) The access programme for all under-represented groups has a high profile in the institution				
d) The institution's systems and structures are designed to include a diverse student body, including in particular the four identified under-represented groups and students who experience multiple disadvantages				
e) The staff of the institution are fully engaged in promoting equity of access				

Criterion 2: Targeting The access programme is targeted at students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students, and the institution systematically monitors its performance for the admission and graduation of students from all of the target groups	Stage 4 YES	Stage 3 Yes, but	Stage 2 No but	Stage 1 NO
Indicators				
a)The institution has developed an access programme that is tailored to meet the needs of the targeted under-represented groups: students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students				
b)The institution’s access programme works with the different target groups at each of the identified critical stages: pre-school and primary school; secondary school to Leaving Certificate; pre-entry to higher education; post-entry and progression to graduation; post-graduate and employment opportunities				
c)The institution has set specific targets and timescales for admission and graduation of students from all of the targeted under-represented groups				
d)The institution has a systematic approach to data gathering and analysis through which progress in meeting targets and timescales is measured				

Criterion 3: Partnership	Stage 4 YES	Stage 3 Yes, but	Stage 2 No but	Stage 1 NO
The institution engages effectively and productively with all of the relevant people and agencies in the community, working together to achieve equity of access				
Indicators				
(a)The institution works closely with the school system, community and specialist expert bodies and business/industry in well-coordinated and targeted strategies to improve opportunities for students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students				
(b)Partnership is put into practice to produce concrete positive outcomes for students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students				
(c)There is a good flow of information and communication among all of the partners in the institution and in the wider community.				

Criterion 4: Practice	Stage 4 YES	Stage 3 Yes, but	Stage 2 No but	Stage 1 NO
The institution provides a high quality and coherent programme of activities at the pre-entry, admission and in-course stages, which contribute to creating a teaching and learning environment that enhances equity of access				
Indicators				

a)The institution provides a programme of activities to raise the aspirations of students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students				
b)The institution provides pre-entry activities for students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students				
c)The admissions procedures of the institution provide a range of effective routes of access, transfer and progression for students from all under-represented groups				
d) The teaching and learning environment of the institution is suited to the needs of all learners				
e)The physical environment of the institution is suited to the needs of all learners				
f)The institution provides on-course support for new entrants in the first term				
g) The institution provides on-course support for students as they move through their course				
h) The institution provides support for students in preparing for post-graduate and employment opportunities				

APPENDIX 3

Guidelines for self-evaluation

In the self-evaluation form, there are four main criteria for successful access programmes, and for each criterion there is a series of indicators. Institutions are asked to assess their current stage of progress for each indicator using a four-point scale: 'yes', 'yes, but', 'no, but', 'no'.

Stage 4: YES

There is clear evidence that all of the above are fully achieved

Stage 3: Yes, but

There is clear evidence that the majority of the above are achieved to a significant extent, but not yet fully achieved. There are plans to improve on certain aspects (these aspects to be specified in report)

Stage 2: No, but

None of the above is fully achieved yet, but development work is already in progress or planning/negotiations/discussions are taking place on certain aspects (these aspects to be specified in report)

Stage 1: NO

None of the above is fully achieved yet

These guidelines list the evidence that institutions should provide to demonstrate progress on each of the indicators. It is a matter for each institution to decide what specific evidence they include.

Criterion 1: Policy

The institution, at corporate level, is committed to the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion, and implements its access policy through its mainstream strategic priorities, resource allocation and quality assurance processes.

Indicators and evidence

a) The institution implements the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion through its mainstream policy and strategy.

- The institution recognises that it benefits from including diversity and actively seeks to promote it in all aspects of practice throughout the institution.
 - Equity policies, programmes and issues always feature in strategic planning and in the exercise of institutional governance, management and leadership.
 - The institution incorporates the key principles of inclusion and equity into its strategy statement; human resources strategy (recruitment and appointment of relevant staff to specialist access roles); staff development plan; teaching, learning and assessment policies and practices, and quality assurance procedures.
 - The access programme is part of a holistic and integrated strategy for organisational development.
 - The institution's objectives for the inclusion of diversity are based on meeting the needs of all learners, as well as on maintaining or expanding student numbers.
 - The institution periodically reviews and evaluates its equity strategies at all levels and has established mechanisms to modify approaches appropriately in the light of experience.
 - The impact of introducing and implementing equity policies for the inclusion of students from the target groups is systematically examined in major areas such as admissions, teaching and learning, and assessment.
-

b) The institution implements the principles of equity, diversity, inclusion through its allocation of resources to the access programme for students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students.

- The access programme is mainstreamed within the institution and key posts are permanent.
 - Equity in access opportunities is placed in the mainstream of internal academic and resource decisions, including decisions on seeking and spending private funds.
 - Adequate resources, human, financial and physical, are provided by the institution to meet the targets set for the access programme:
 - there are sufficient personnel to plan, manage and deliver the programme effectively to all of the target groups
 - the budget allocated to the access programme is sufficient to enable a comprehensive set of activities to be offered, which are tailored to the needs of the target groups
 - the access programme and the staff involved have appropriate accommodation, facilities and equipment at their disposal to deliver the programme effectively.
-

c) The access programme for all under-represented groups has a high profile in the institution.

- The access programme is promoted widely inside and outside the institution, for example in printed documentation and websites.
 - Promotional material, including information on access policy and provision, is available in a range of accessible formats, to take account of the diverse needs of students from the target groups.
 - Staff and students are mobilised to raise consciousness, improve knowledge and understanding, counter prejudice and gain publicity for equity achievements.
 - There is close liaison between access personnel, senior management, administrative and academic staff in designing and implementing the access strategy.
-

d) The institution's systems and structures are designed to include a diverse student body, including in particular students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, mature students and students who experience multiple disadvantages.

- The institution has examined its admissions systems, student support structures, learning supports, teaching, learning and assessment structures and made the necessary changes and improvements to meet the needs of the target groups of under-represented students.
 - Good practice in teaching and learning, curriculum development and assessment is being developed and supported across the institution as a whole.
 - A broad range of flexible teaching and learning methodologies has been introduced to meet the diverse needs of all learners in all courses.
 - Students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students are always treated with sensitivity by all staff of the institution.
 - All courses in all faculties are open to students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students.
 - The institution has a clearly defined policy on the confidentiality and disclosure of students' information, which is communicated to applicants, students and staff.
 - Information regarding disciplinary and complaint procedures is available in accessible formats and communicated to all students.
 - The institution has in place a policy and procedures to deal with complaints from students, including those in the target groups.
-

e) The staff of the institution are fully engaged in promoting equity of access.

- All academic, administrative and support staff receive professional development on issues of promoting access, diversity and inclusion.
- Full use is made of incentives, staff training and other forms of encouragement and recognition to bring about a strong institution-wide commitment to equity of access.

- Induction and other relevant training programmes for all staff include diversity awareness training and training on specific services and support for students from all of the target groups.
- There is effective and inclusive collaboration within the institution (among senior management, admissions and access officers, disability and mature student support services, teaching and learning co-ordinators) in planning, managing and delivering activities to promote access of students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students.

Criterion 2: Targeting

The access programme is targeted at students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students, and the institution systematically monitors its performance for the admission and graduation of students from all of the target groups.

Indicators and evidence

- a) **The institution has developed an access programme that is tailored to meet the needs of the targeted under-represented groups: students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students.**
- The institution has carried out research, needs analysis and consultation to inform the development of its access programme for students from the four target groups.
 - The access programme targets socio-economically disadvantaged students in designated disadvantaged schools and individual students in other schools.
 - The access programme targets members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, working in collaboration with specialised expert bodies and representative groups.
 - The access programme targets students with a disability, working in consultation with students and their families, specialised expert bodies and representative groups.
 - The access programme targets mature students, working in consultation with students and their families, specialised expert bodies, community and representative groups.

- The access programme is sufficiently flexible and integrated to cater for students who experience multiple disadvantages and may belong to more than one of the target groups.

b) The institution's access programme works with the different target groups at each of the identified critical stages (as appropriate to the target group).

Critical stages	Target groups			
	S-E	T-E	Dis	Ma
• Pre-school	•	•	•	
• Primary school	•	•	•	
• Special schools for pupils with disabilities			•	
• Junior cycle of secondary school	•	•	•	
• Retention and achievement in Leaving Certificate	•	•	•	
• Transfer to higher education	•	•	•	•
• Participation and progression to graduation	•	•	•	•
• Employment and post-graduate opportunities	•	•	•	•

c) The institution has set specific targets and timescales for admission and graduation of students from all of the targeted under-represented groups

Target groups	Target set	Time-scale
• Students with a disability		
• Mature students: full-time		
• Mature students: part-time		
• Socio-economically disadvantaged students in designated disadvantaged schools		
• Socio-economically disadvantaged students in other schools		
• Students from the Traveller community		
• Students from ethnic minorities		

d) The institution has a systematic approach to data gathering and analysis through which progress in meeting targets and timescales can be measured.

- The institution has strong data and information capabilities and resources, including an admissions information system, which are used to support the design and implementation of its access programme.
- Targets for the admission and graduation of relevant groups are systematically established, monitored and reviewed.
- Policy decisions are based on objective data and on systematic analysis of the impact of interventions, and there are coherent reporting structures to review the effectiveness of access programme initiatives.
- The access programme is subject to evaluation within the institution's quality assurance system.
- Activities in the access programme are subject to regular external evaluation or peer review.
- There are formal structures for the involvement and participation of learners in planning and evaluating access programme initiatives.
- There are procedures in place to identify and work systematically on major barriers, bottlenecks and problem areas in relation to access for specific under-represented groups.

Criterion 3: Partnership

The institution engages effectively and productively with all of the relevant people and agencies in the community, working together to achieve equity of access.

Indicators and evidence

a) The institution works closely with the school system, community and professional bodies and business/industry in well-coordinated and targeted strategies to improve opportunities for students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students.

- The institution plays an active leadership role in promoting the value of learning in schools and communities.

- The institution is part of local consortia of primary and second-level schools, the community sector and further and higher education institutions, working to improve the rate of participation in higher education in all of the target groups.
 - The institution maintains active, effective and productive links with other education sectors, for example pre-school, primary, second level, further education, special education, adult and community education, work-based education and training.
 - A full agenda for action is agreed between the institution and its partners in local communities, aimed at promoting clear routes of progression to higher education for targeted groups of learners.
-

b) Partnership is put into practice to produce concrete positive outcomes for students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students.

- There is collaboration with the further education sector and recognition is granted for relevant qualifications achieved within the national framework of qualifications.
 - The institution collaborates with relevant specialist agencies in providing student support services for learners with disabilities.
 - Outreach programmes are offered for mature learners in urban and rural communities.
 - Programmes are provided on a part-time or outreach basis for people in the workforce who wish to gain access to higher education.
 - A full agenda for action is agreed between the institution and its partners in the community, aimed at promoting clear routes of progression to higher education for all targeted groups.
-

c) There is a good flow of information and communication among all of the partners in the institution and in the wider community.

- Learners from under-represented groups play an active role in partnership activities between the institution and the community.
- Participants in access programmes act as role models in their communities.

- The institution has engaged students and their families, specialised expert bodies, community agencies and representative groups in planning and monitoring access programme activities.
- The institution has sought the views of all relevant partners (students, families, community groups, schools and FE colleges, representative bodies for target groups) in completing this evaluation.

Criterion 4: Practice

The institution provides a high quality and coherent programme of activities at the pre-entry, admission and in-course stages, which contributes to creating a teaching and learning environment that enhances equity of access.

Indicators and evidence

a) The institution provides a programme of activities to raise the aspirations of students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students. The institution:

- Develops and maintains partnership schemes involving community organisations, schools, colleges and other public, voluntary and private sector agencies
- Prepares and distributes information packs and/or provides on-line information services for prospective students and families
- Delivers awareness events for prospective students, community groups, parents and families from all of the target groups
- Develops and maintains links with professionals working with the target groups, teachers, counsellors and others
- Provides student shadowing schemes or mentoring schemes
- Provides summer schools or similar events during other holiday periods for prospective students from all target groups
- Links with teacher education/tutor training programmes to promote a culture of high expectations in schools, colleges and other community and work-based centres of learning.

b) The institution provides pre-entry activities for students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students. It offers:

- Pre-entry guidance to prospective students from all of the target groups
 - Targeted supplementary learning supports to prospective students from the target groups, if required
 - Master classes on study and key skills for prospective students from all of the target groups
 - Taster courses and orientation programmes for all target groups
 - Accredited pre-admission/foundation course modules for all target groups
 - Community-based outreach programmes aimed at specific target groups of learners, for example mature students, members of Traveller and ethnic minority communities.
-

c) The admissions procedures of the institution provide a range of effective routes of access, transfer and progression for students from all under-represented groups. The institution:

- Has transparent and consistent processes to assess applications from target groups
- Assists applicants from the target groups through the CAO process
- Develops and manages direct entry schemes that accommodate the needs of the target groups
- Ensures that arrangements for enrolment, registration and orientation of new students include provision for accommodating the needs of students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students
- Provides alternative pathways of access for learners with diverse previous learning experiences, for example non-formal and informal experiential and work-based learning
- Provides a formal route of progression from the further education sector, developed in collaboration with institutions within that sector and based on the national framework of qualifications.

d) The teaching and learning environment in the institution is suited to the needs of all students.

- The curriculum of all courses is designed to include diversity of learners.
 - Programme specifications do not include any unnecessary barriers to students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, members of the Traveller community and ethnic minorities, students with a disability, and mature students.
 - Procedures are in place for reviewing the accessibility to all students of new and revised courses.
 - Teaching and learning methodologies take account of differences in the profiles of students (including, for example, previous educational experience and attainment, learning style, socio-economic background, physical, learning or sensory disability, membership of ethnic minority, multiple intelligences) and programmes are adapted as necessary to accommodate the needs of students.
 - The curriculum is structured so that all learners can progress through their courses at a pace that suits their personal circumstances, for example modular or semesterised courses.
 - Assessment methodologies for all courses are designed to enable all learners to demonstrate that they have met the required learning outcomes.
 - Appropriate alternative arrangements are in place for students who need to present evidence of their achievement in different formats.
 - Course materials are available in accessible formats.
-

e) The physical environment of the institution is suited to the needs of all students.

- An access audit has been conducted and a programme of remedial action is in place to ensure full accessibility of the physical environment to students with disabilities. All new buildings adhere to universal design principles.
- Universal design principles are incorporated into any building development or refurbishment programmes to ensure access to all buildings for students with disabilities.
- Procedures are in place to work with students from the target groups in identifying any support needs they may have in undertaking a course of study and in participating fully in the academic and social life of the institution.

f) The institution provides on-course support for new entrants from all of the target groups in the first term. It:

- Develops induction programme and starter packs
 - Develops and monitors a retention framework for first-year students
 - Develops a structure of exit interviews for student withdrawals to investigate reasons for leaving
 - Offers top-up courses as required by individuals or groups of students
 - Provides diagnostic testing as required to identify learning and learning support needs of students from the target groups
 - Offers generic support and guidance facilities to students from the target groups
 - Assigns and provides individual personal support to students from the target groups
 - Provides support to meet childcare and transport needs
 - Offers “buddying” and early warning systems
 - Advises on redesign of courses as necessary to meet learning needs of target groups
 - Ensures that internal communication systems are in place so that appropriate staff receive information about the needs of individual students in a clear, appropriate and timely way.
-

g) The institution provides on-course support for students from all of the target groups as they move through their course. It:

- Provides appropriate assistive technology throughout their course for all students who need it
- Provides mentoring and personal tutoring by staff
- Provides mentoring by students to other students from the target groups
- Provides support clinics for students from the target groups
- Provides funding information and debt management services if required
- Offers ‘job shops’ or helps students to find term-time work if they require it
- Supports students who have to re-sit examinations

- Works with academic departments to develop flexible assessment mechanisms that cater for diversity of learners
 - Employs sufficient personnel, with appropriate skills and expertise, to provide specialist advice and support to students with disabilities and to the staff who work with them.
-

h) The institution provides support for students from all of the target groups in preparing for post-graduate and employment opportunities. It:

- Provides advice and support for graduates who wish to continue to post-graduate or doctoral studies
- Offers management and other work-related skills development
- Provides careers education initiatives
- Ensures that students from the target groups have access to the institution's career services, work placement and student exchange programmes on the same basis as other students
- Provides career development advice
- Provides mentoring programme with local and regional businesses
- Helps to organise work experience placements if and as required.

APPENDIX 4

Focus group participants and questions

Focus group 1: Second-level students and teachers

Collinstown Park Community College

Neilstown, Dublin 22

Friday, 12 May 2006

Participants

Brian Fleming, Principal, Collinstown Park Community College

Pauline Duffy, Deputy Principal

Margaret Marren, Guidance Counsellor

Walter Doolin, Transition Year Coordinator

Students from Transition year, 5th and 6th year:

Alan, Anne Marie, Colin, Conor, Gerard, Graham, Joseph, Linda, Martin, Sarah, Tanya

Questions

1. What colleges have made links with your school?
2. What kind of access activities have you participated in?
3. How do you find the different programmes and activities?
4. Which aspects of the access programmes do you find most helpful or useful?
5. Do the colleges make it easy for you to participate in the programme?
6. How has the access programme helped you to make decisions about your future education career path?
7. Has it made any difference to the way you have approached studying for the Leaving Certificate?
8. What was the thing that helped you most in your decision to go to higher education?
9. What was the most important influence on your decision?
10. Did you have any problems dealing with higher education institutions?
11. Have you any suggestions for improving access programmes in the future?

12. Is there any advice you would offer to future students?
13. What is the most significant difference that access programmes have made to students in your school?

Focus group 2: Principals and teachers from second-level schools

TUI Head Office

Wednesday, 24 May 2006

Participants

John Mac Gabhann, Teachers Union of Ireland

Tim Hurley, Principal, St. Vincent's CBS Glasnevin, D.9

Mary Keane, Principal, St. Dominic's Secondary School, Navan Rd, D. 7

Willie O'Brien, Principal, St. James CBS, D.8

Noel Gildea, Principal, Riversdale Community College, Blanchardstown, D.15

Muriel Kinsella, Blakestown Community School, Blanchardstown

Pat O'Riordan, Principal, Abbey Community College, Wicklow

Paul Toal, Career Guidance Teacher, Lough Allen College, Leitrim

Tony Walsh, Mayfield Community School, Cork

Sean McCarthy, Principal, Listowel Community College, Co. Kerry

Brian Fleming, Principal, Collinstown Park Community School, Clondalkin, D.22

Tony Deffely, Career Guidance Teacher, Davitt College, Springfield, Castlebar Co. Mayo

Marian Fennell, Teacher, Jobstown Community College, Tallaght, D.24

Marie Fogarty, Career Guidance Teacher, St. Fergal's College, Rathdowney

General questions

1. Introduction: what colleges are you linked with; for how long; general comment on the experience; any specific issues you would like to discuss today?
2. What do you think is the most important factor in your students' decision to progress to higher education?
3. What are the concerns about higher education most often expressed by your students and their parents? How well are access programmes addressing these concerns?

Effectiveness of access programmes

4. Have access programmes made a tangible difference to students in your school? (Would the same number of students have gone to college whether there was an access programme or not?)
5. What activities/aspects of the access programmes do you consider most effective in raising the aspirations of students from your school?
6. Which activities do you think are most effective in widening access and participation of students from your school?
7. Do you think the colleges admissions procedures provide an appropriate range of routes of access, transfer and progression for your students?
8. How do the supports provided by access programmes complement/ duplicate additional resources being allocated through the DEIS programme or other school/ community programmes?

Partnership aspects of access programmes

9. Do you think that the colleges stated commitment to partnership with schools and communities is put into practice and produces concrete positive outcomes for your students?
10. Is there a good flow of information and communication between the institution and the wider community, including schools?
11. Do you think that schools linked with two or more colleges are getting a better choice of activities and entry opportunities than those only linked to one? (Are there any colleges you think you should be linked to but aren't?)

12. How do you think colleges should link with primary schools, at what stage should this start and what types of activities?

For the future

13. What challenges and opportunities are presented by increasing diversity in cultural and ethnic backgrounds of students?
14. Based on your experience of access programmes, what advice about going to college do you offer to your students?
15. Any improvements in access programmes you can suggest to colleges?

Focus group 3: Third-level students

Higher Education Authority

Brooklawn House

Tuesday, 6 June 2006

Participants

Anne Colgan,	St Patrick's College Drumcondra
Rosarii Moran,	St Patrick's College Drumcondra
Wendy Delaney,	Clondalkin Women's Group (UCD/WERRC outreach programme)
Rob Lowney,	UCD
Lindsey Doyle,	UCD
Liam Thornton,	UCC
Jonathan O Regan,	UCC
Richard O Connor,	UCC
Natasha Underhill,	UCC
Sarah Mayes,	TCD
Joan Foley,	St Patrick's College Drumcondra
Patricia Dunne,	St Patrick's College Drumcondra

Karena Stannett,	AIT
Vincent Walshe,	AIT
Paula McArdle,	ITT
David Culver,	TCD
Ciaran Walshe,	St Patrick's College Drumcondra
Loretta O'Brien,	DCU
Thomas Connole,	UL

General questions

1. Introduction: what higher education institution are you attending; for how long; general comment on the experience; any specific issues you would like to discuss today?
2. What do you think was the most important factor in your decision to progress to higher education?
3. What was the most important influence?
4. What concerns did you have about higher education before you went to college? How well has the access programme addressed these concerns?

Effectiveness of access programmes

5. How has the access programme helped you? What difference has it made to your life as a student?
6. What activities/aspects of the access programme do you consider most helpful, pre-entry/post entry?
7. Did you find it easy to get information about the access programme?

For the future

8. Based on your experience of access programmes, what advice about going to college would you offer to other students who might be thinking of going to college?
9. Any improvements in access programmes you can suggest to higher education institutions?

HEA MEMBERS

Chairman

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Higher Education Authority

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*Deputy Chairperson, Dean of Teaching
and Learning, UL*

Professor Tom Boylan

NUI Galway

Dr. Maurice Bric

Department of Modern History, UCD

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Head of Community Links Programme, DIT

Cllr. Maria Corrigan

*Member, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown
County Council*

Mr. Michael Cotter

School of Education Studies, DCU

Mr. Martin Cronin

Chief Executive, Forfás

Ms Doreen Delahunty

Business woman

Mr. Louis Dockery

Solicitor

Ms Sheila Drumm

*Principal, Dominican College, Sion Hill,
Co. Dublin*

Dr. Honor Fagan

Department of Sociology, NUIM

Mr. Colm Hamrogue

*President of the Union of Students
in Ireland*

Ms Carol Herron

*Home School Community Co-ordinator,
Co. Cavan VEC*

Dr. Pat Kelleher

former Director Cork IT

Mr. Patrick J. Kirby

Group Commercial Director, Alphyra

Professor Elizabeth Meehan

*Former Head, Institute of Governance,
Queen's University Belfast*

Professor Ciaran Murphy

*Department of Accounting, Finance
and Information Systems, UCC*

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