An Evaluation of the HEAR and DARE Supplementary Admission Routes to Higher Education

Commissioned by the DARE/HEAR Strategic Development Group

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List of Abbreviations

AHEAD	Association for Higher Education Access and Disability
CAO	Central Applications Office
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DARE	Disability Access Route to Education
DARE/HEAR SDG	DARE/HEAR Strategic Development Group
EAS	Educational Access Schemes
EPSEN Act 2004	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs
EU-SILC	EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
GUI	Growing up in Ireland
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEAR	Higher Education Access Route
HSE	Health Service Executive
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
IoTs	Institutes of Technology
IUA	Irish Universities Association
LVCP	Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE	National Council for Special Educational Needs
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
RGAM	Recurrent Grant Allocation Model
SIF	Strategic Innovation Fund
SOLAS	An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna
TLA	Third Level Allowance
WP	Widening Participation

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Executive Summary

This evaluation stems from an interest from those working on and administering the HEAR and DARE schemes into the effectiveness of the schemes in widening participation in higher education of under-represented groups. A focus of Irish Higher Education (HE) policy is orientated toward the objective of promoting equality of access to higher education, with particular targeted initiatives for under-represented groups. There has been extensive research conducted in Ireland on the issue of Widening Participation (WP), including various evaluative reports on access initiatives of recent years. In addition, universities and colleges have at times undertaken substantial research on their own access programmes and students. However, just three studies to date have focused on the experiences of the HEAR and DARE cohorts, programmes which have been in place in their current format since just 2009. This evaluation seeks address the gap in our knowledge of HEAR and DARE. The DARE/HEAR Strategic Development Group (SDG) has commissioned us to evaluate the following:

- To what extent do the schemes meet the target groups' requirements?
- How do the schemes contribute to the realisation of institutional and national targets? and
- What can be determined about the sustainability, scaleability and replicability of the schemes?

In terms of the data from which this evaluation is based, we adopt a mixed method approach, drawing on a range of existing administrative data sources collected by the HEAR and DARE schemes, the Central Applications Office (CAO) and the Higher Education Authority (HEA); alongside new qualitative data collection with HEAR and DARE students currently in higher education and a number of key internal and external stakeholders. The evaluation, in adopting a mixed method approach, draws on the strengths of these two methods to allow for a better understanding of the profile and experiences of school leavers who access the schemes.

Previous Research and Policy Context

Previous research has identified that under-performance at second level, inequalities in economic, social and cultural capitals across families, long-term processes of educational (dis)engagement, school effects and variation in school organisation and process including information and guidance, as well as the structure of the admission process and the high

stakes nature of the Leaving Certificate all contribute as barriers to accessing higher education. A number of recent reports also indicate that schools in Ireland (and internationally) vary in their effectiveness in delivering inclusion strategies for students with special educational needs at primary and second level education. A range of different legislative instruments have been enacted in Ireland that relate to widening the participation of marginalised groups, and to facilitate lifelong learning through the promotion of access and opportunities for all learners. Attempts have also and are currently being made to join-up existing pathways between second level, further and higher education; by means of improving the transition from second level to higher education for all students. Furthermore, the structure of the admission process which facilitates the transition from second level to third level has come under criticism due to the high stakes nature of the Leaving Certificate examination, and the admissions process to higher education, both of which have been identified as potential barriers for under-represented groups. An agreement between key partners in second level and in higher education has recently been reached on three future directions for reform in the transition from post-primary to higher education. More recently, preparations for the third National Plan (2014-2016) are well under way, through consultation and meetings with key stakeholders, set in the context of the significant change and reform of HE governance, structures and funding required by the National Strategy for Higher Education 2030 (HEA 2011b).

Ireland in Comparative Perspective

The HEAR and DARE schemes in their 'compensatory' approach to educational disadvantage are rather unique in comparative aspect (with the exception of schemes in Canada and Australia). Approaches to widening access to higher education in other institutional contexts can take different forms: a general policy approach targeting all categories of students, and/or measures focusing on different under-represented groups or alternatively – in most cases – a combination of both. However, within contexts for which entry to higher education is based on terminal examinations and some metric of attainment, there are few educational systems that address the under-representation of groups in the approach taken by the HEAR and DARE schemes. Furthermore, while other institutional contexts are guided by the use of indicators in order to monitor under-representation at national level in higher education; few systems adopt the range of economic, social and cultural indicators as adopted by the HEAR scheme. Existing compensatory approaches in

other institutional contexts for students with disabilities (such as in the case of Australia) do however, collect evidence of disability as part of the eligibility process.

In some countries, higher education systems adopt a general policy approach in addressing the under-representation of certain groups. In doing so, they strive for creating an egalitarian environment that provides equal opportunities for all to participate in higher education. The rationale being that this will have a positive impact not only on overall participation in higher education, but also on the number of students with disabilities and/or students from disadvantaged groups. While the majority of countries combine general policy actions with targeted measures, typically a greater number of countries concentrate on this more general approach. From the geographical perspective, the general policy approach is quite common in the Nordic countries, as in three of them – Denmark, Finland and Sweden – it is the main mechanism to address under-representation.

Regardless of the policy approach used to address the under-representation, few countries refer to quantitative targets to be reached. In Ireland for instance, the National Action Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013 sets very concrete objectives. In other contexts, (Finland) the aim of general policy approaches to widening participation seeks to increase participation of under-represented groups in line with their share in the entire population (for example proportional representation of the national population of migrants).

In a brief exploration of 'what work's' in widening access policy across diverse institutional contexts, it was evident that both the current direction of national policy with regard to access and participation in Higher Education, as well as key elements of the HEAR and DARE schemes, share aspects of 'what work's' across institutional contexts. Thus, the evaluation team was left with the impression that despite the fact that the schemes are very much in their infancy, there is scope for future development of the schemes. However, we have also highlighted a number of key areas that should be adapted within the schemes in their future development.

To what extent do the schemes contribute to the realisation of institutional targets?

The evaluation has explored institutional variation in current existing access initiatives but also in terms of current admissions policy and practice relating to DARE and HEAR. Through the evaluation, we have identified that HEIs differ substantially in terms of the

composition of the undergraduate student intake, the demand for courses that are offered, the degree of institutional selectivity, the funding structures (and their distribution) and institutional plans and goals. There is also considerable variation across institutions participating in the HEAR and DARE schemes in terms of the context within which targets are set and the groups that are being targeted, the definition and implementation of quotas, but also the range of access activities on offer, in terms of pre-entry, post-entry and post-HE transitions. While institutional targets around access policy are largely guided by the targets which are set by the National Access Office, wider institutional policy can also have a bearing on institutional targets, particularly when HEIs are physically located within a context of social disadvantage. Thus, as Bowes et al., (2013) identify as a measure of best practice, HEIs should have some degree of flexibility in terms of the type of student that it seeks to target and the ways in which participation by under-represented groups can be achieved.

As a result, there is considerable variation across institutions in the realisation of institutional targets. When quotas for HEAR and DARE cannot be met due to lower Leaving Certificate performance of the applicants, HEIs typically substitute across target groups (extending beyond HEAR and DARE to include mature students for example). Because of such variation, the implementation of HEAR and DARE has not had a greater impact. Further consideration of the possibility of a reduction in the minimum point thresholds for entry or greater use of the reduced points mechanism across institutions is required for the schemes to be more successful in targeting students with disabilities and/or disadvantaged applicants. Furthermore, HEAR is more successful than DARE in the realisation of institutional targets.

To what extent do the schemes contribute to the realisation of national targets?

Contextualising the schemes within the national context, the evaluation has identified that the national targets which seek to be achieved by the schemes are not stated in any documentation. Thus, in the first instance, the DARE/HEAR SDG should provide a plan of how both schemes seek to contribute to the realisation of national targets.

Contribution of HEAR to the realisation of national targets

We estimate the contribution of the HEAR scheme to the realisation of national targets through a consideration of CAO acceptances and the share of new entrants to HE. HEAR

eligible applicants represented 4.4% of all CAO acceptances in 2010 and this increased to 7.4% by 2012. In all, HEAR eligible applicants represented almost 5% of new entrants in 2010. The HEAR scheme emphasises that it offers places at *reduced points* to school leavers from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and the number of HEAR eligible new entrants who received While the number of eligible applicants who receive a reduced Leaving Certificate points offer over time has increased, HEAR reduced point applicants accounted for just 44% of HEAR eligible acceptances in 2010 and this had declined to 33% in 2012. Because there was a lack of consistency across HEIs in terms of what constitutes a HEAR offer (on or above the points and/or as reduced points offer), but also variation across HEIs in the use of the reduced points mechanism, the contribution of HEAR in improving the participation chances of school leavers is not fully realised.

The evaluation has identified a tension in the definition of disadvantage adopted in the national policy rhetoric and that used by the schemes, which makes it difficult to estimate the contribution of the schemes to the realisation of national targets. The HEAR scheme offers '*places at reduced points to school leavers from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds'*. This directly feeds into the *National Action Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education* which seeks to achieve an entry rate of at least 54 per cent for all socio-economic groups by 2020. However, while the *National Action Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education* defines socio-economic disadvantage in terms of a traditional measure of Socio-Economic Group (SEG) (specifically highlighting semi-skilled, unskilled manual workers and non-manual groups); the HEAR schemes adopt a more broad *additive/intersectional* definition of socio-economic disadvantage which includes socio-economic group as one possible indicator of a range of social and cultural indicators but for which eligibility is determined strongly by income. As a result of this disparity, some applicants from the HEA targeted socio-economic groups will not reach SEG eligibility because they are not screened as a result of the submission of missing or incomplete financial documentation, or because they exceed the HEAR income threshold. Thus, HEAR potentially has the effect of reducing the cohort of HEA socio-economic targeted groups to those who are most disadvantaged by selecting firstly on income, and secondly through the use of further indicators. In doing so, HEAR is likely to 'select-out' the more advantaged among the targeted SEG groups, and provides assistance in accessing higher education to those who are more disadvantaged within these groups.

The evaluation team was left with the impression that much has been achieved by HEAR in contributing to national targets. However, reconsideration of the policies and processes surrounding targets/quotas within and across participating HEIs and the admissions process (allocation of reduced point offers, consideration of streamlining minimum point thresholds in some ways, planning how HEAR can contribute to national targets) could further extend the contribution that HEAR is currently making. Furthermore, the DARE/HEAR SDG should consider improving communication and support for those groups who apply to the scheme but are more likely to submit incomplete applications (school leavers from lone parent families, school leavers born in EU countries). It may be that these groups are at a disadvantage in applying to the schemes through difficulties in accessing the necessary paperwork.

Contribution of DARE to the realisation of national targets

DARE eligible applicants represent 1.9% of all CAO acceptances in 2010 and this increased to 3.3% by 2012. In all, DARE eligible applicants represented almost 2% of new entrants in 2010. As with HEAR, the DARE scheme emphasises that it offers places at *reduced points* to school leavers with a disability. While the number of eligible applicants who receive a reduced Leaving Certificate points offer over time has increased, DARE reduced point applicants accounted for just 45% of DARE eligible acceptances and this had declined to 36% in 2012. Again, because there was a lack of consistency across HEIs in terms of what constitutes a DARE offer (on or above the points and/or reduced points eligible applications), but also variation across HEIs in the use of the reduced points mechanism, the contribution of DARE in improving the higher education participation chances of school leavers with a disability is not fully realised.

Likewise, a further tension is evident with regard to the definition of students with disabilities in the national policy rhetoric and that used by the schemes. While the National Access Plan sets specific targets around students with physical, sensory and multiple disabilities, the DARE scheme defines disability in a more inclusive manner, drawing on a range of disabilities which include but extend beyond physical, sensory and multiple disabilities. Further, students with disabilities who apply to the DARE scheme are assessed on the basis of the diagnosis/extent of their disability, rather than on the basis of disability per se. As a result, at times the DARE scheme has been criticised as adopting a medical approach. A second tension exists, as currently it is not possible to identify students with multiple

disabilities through DARE, as applicants are assessed on the basis of diagnosis of the primary disability. While applicants with physical and sensory disabilities fare well in terms of the submission of complete applications and/or eligibility for the schemes, it is the case that some students with physical or sensory disabilities do not access the scheme based on how their disability has been assessed.

We also estimate the number of DARE eligible applicants who have progressed to higher education among the 2010 cohort. While in all 1,025 DARE applicants made the transition to higher education, DARE eligible applicants constituted 45% of the total group. In all, DARE eligible applicants represent 12 per cent of the HEA target for students with a physical disability/impairment and 9 per cent of the HEA target for students who are deaf/hard of hearing and students and 10 per cent of the HEA target for students who are blind/visually impaired respectively for the academic year 2010/11.

The evaluation team were left with the impression that much has been achieved by DARE in the short time it has been in existence, and that it is clearly contributing to national targets. However, the scheme is very much in its infancy. The profile of DARE applicants and the schools that they come from (see below) suggests that the scheme is not reaching its potential in terms of targeting students with disabilities in second level schools. As well as reconsideration of the policies and processes surrounding targets/quotas within and across participating HEIs and the admissions process (allocation of reduced point offers, consideration of streamlining minimum point thresholds in some ways, planning how DARE can contribute to national targets) further outreach and pre-entry support provided by the scheme could lead to greater levels of success across all HEIs.

By way of improving the realisation of national access targets, HEAR and DARE should consider its role in the wider context of the future direction of Higher Education. The *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* highlights the future direction of HE in terms of

- Implementing a steering and performance based framework for the system governance of higher education in Ireland

- Entering into agreements between the HEA and HEIs around performance compacts with institutional key performance indicators reflecting their contribution to overall system objectives, which is aligned with funding.

Furthermore, the *Higher Education System Performance Framework 2014-2016* seeks to:

- promote access for disadvantaged groups and to put in place coherent pathways from second level education, from further education and other non-traditional entry routes.

The delivery of this goal will be achieved through the delivery and implementation of a new National Access Plan from 2014, aligned with national priorities and system indicators, but also through a review of institutional access plans to ensure measurable outcomes against the objectives of the new plan. With these ongoing developments, it seems timely that HEAR and DARE should publish a statement of how the schemes will contribute to the realisation of national targets. The evaluation team also recommend that ongoing collaboration and further agreement across institutions with regard to quotas and admission policy and practice be achieved, with a view to developing the next implementation of the schemes. Ongoing collaboration with key stakeholders including the National Access Office and the Department of Education and Skills are important for the future development of the schemes, and in the realisation of national targets.

To what extent do the schemes meet the target groups' requirements?

The evaluation sought to examine the extent to which the schemes meet the target groups' requirements through quantitative analyses of existing administrative data to determine the characteristics and outcomes of young people who apply to, participate in and progress through the HEAR and DARE schemes; and qualitative interviews and focus groups with HEAR and DARE students and internal and external stakeholders.

HEAR

Administrative data gathered by the scheme allowed an examination of the indicators at individual level among HEAR applicants. Analyses were undertaken at individual level using EU-SILC data to test the robustness of the indicators in the population. The analyses revealed that over half of all 16-22 year olds were living in families with incomes below the relevant

income thresholds[1]. This suggests that in the first instance, the scheme may be considered by half of all 16-22 year old school leavers. Given the high rates of eligibility based on income and medical card holding[2], and income and means-tested benefits[3]; further analyses were undertaken with the combination of these two indicators. The analyses reveal that the combination of these indicators indicate young people who are potentially first generation students, and are effective in reducing the risk of targeting resources at highly educated households. Nevertheless, even in households qualifying under these combinations anything between 30 and 35% contain parents or siblings educated to degree level or studying for a degree, or between 8.6% and 5.3% contain a parent who is educated to degree level or studying for a degree. While those administering the scheme are concerned about 'gaming' to a certain extent, it is likely that depending on the combination of indicators used to achieve eligibility, some young people will have greater resources (cultural, social) at their disposal than others and legitimately access the scheme. If most HEAR eligible applicants were drawn from this relatively well-educated pool it would suggest that HEAR may be targeting resources at those for whom educational expectations were already quite high.

In the internal and external stakeholder interviews and focus groups, there was considerable concern about the adequacy and sufficiency of the indicators used for HEAR. Typically, stakeholders were very concerned about the robustness of the approach in capturing educational disadvantage, and questions surrounding the verifiability of the indicators. Efforts have been made by those working on the HEAR scheme to verify the indicators, with ongoing communication with Government Departments and Agencies. However, the distinction between economic disadvantage and long-term educational disadvantage has been blurred because the reckonable income thresholds for eligibility to the HEAR scheme are considerably higher than the income thresholds for the higher education maintenance grant scheme. Furthermore, eligibility for the HEAR scheme is a two stage process, the first step of which is contingent on reaching the income threshold.

[1] Previous exploratory analyses not presented here also found that over half of households in the EU-SILC with dependent children had incomes below the relevant thresholds.
[2] 81% of HEAR Eligible applicants achieved eligibility with a combination of Income and Medical card with either SEG/DEIS or area.
[3] 56% of HEAR Eligible applicants achieved eligibility with a combination of Income and Welfare with either SEG/DEIS or area.

There is evidence that the HEAR scheme targets a more diverse profile of applicant than the typical CAO applicant, particularly in terms of country of birth or nationality, but also in the type of school that applicants have attended. More females than males apply to HEAR, and a greater share of applicants who were not born in Ireland or who do not have Irish nationality are attracted to the scheme, compared to the typical profile of CAO applicant. HEAR applicants are more likely to have attended vocational schools compared to applicants who use other admission routes, schools which typically have a greater composition of students from working class and unemployed households. When reducing the pool of applicants to those under 23, those who have not submitted a FETAC application, those who had sat at least 6 subjects in the Leaving Certificate and who submitted their choices to the CAO upon completion of registration; we find that half of all HEAR eligible applicants had previously attended a DEIS school compared to just 12% of CAO applicants. Finally, HEAR applicants have lower average Leaving Certificate attainment that the typical CAO applicant, but higher average attainment than those who apply to DARE. HEAR applicants are however more likely to achieve below average than average levels of attainment in the Leaving Certificate examination relative to all higher education applicants who do not access the schemes.

The administrative data indicate an increase in the share of complete applications that are received for HEAR over the period 2010-2012 (from 62% in 2010 to 71% in 2012). The share of HEAR applications as a percentage of all CAO applications has also increased over time from 9.5% in 2010 to 10.6% in 2012. Data released by the CAO indicate that the HEAR share of CAO applications continues to grow. Over the period 2010-2012, the percentage of HEAR applications that reach eligibility has increased. In 2010, 29% of all HEAR applications achieved eligibility and this increased to 46% in 2012. This pattern is also evident among HEAR applicants who submitted complete applications, with a substantial increase in eligibility from 46% in 2010 to 65% in 2012. Among the pool of applicants to the HEAR scheme, there was little evidence to suggest that those in more disadvantaged circumstances (using proxies such as attending DEIS schools, living in economically inactive or unemployed households, living in disadvantaged communities) are more likely to submit an incomplete application. There was however, evidence to suggest that some groups (applicants from lone parent families, school leavers born in EU countries) are at a disadvantage in applying to the scheme through difficulties in accessing the necessary paperwork, given that these groups are more likely to submit incomplete applications to HEAR.

Further, there is evidence to suggest that conditional on submission of a complete application, those born in the EU, lone parents, applicants who attended a vocational school and those living in the most disadvantaged areas are more likely to become eligible for the scheme, relative to their (less disadvantaged) counterparts. While the results presented here are generally positive and indicate less of bias (than expected among stakeholders) among applicants, attention should be placed on understanding why all else being equal, we find that females and applications from young people born outside of the EU are less likely to be eligible in 2012.

With regard to HEAR, 86% of mainstream second level schools submitted at least one application in 2010 and this grew to 88% by 2012. However, the analyses highlight that the share of applications for each of the schemes from outside mainstream second level schools is typically very low, but has increased from 1.8% in 2010 to 2.6% of all applications in 2012. This warrants further attention at wider system level, given that young people under the age of 23 also seek to access higher education from outside the mainstream sector. Furthermore, our analyses of the profile of schools that submit applications to HEAR points to an under-representation among vocational schools.

DARE

The DARE scheme targets a less diverse profile of applicant than the typical CAO applicant. More males than females apply to DARE, but the applicant cohort is less diverse in terms of nationality and country of birth than the typical CAO applicant. Attendance at both fee-paying second level schools and non-government funded fee-paying schools ('grind schools') is more evident among DARE eligible applicants than any other CAO applicant. 18% of DARE eligible applicants had attended a fee-paying school relative to just 9% of all CAO applicants, and a further 6% of DARE eligible applicants had attended a 'grind' school compared to just 4% of all CAO applicants. While the HEAR scheme draws significantly from and is over-represented in applications from DEIS schools; DARE eligible applicants attending DEIS schools remain under-represented (just 9% compared to 14% of all CAO applicants). On average, those who apply to higher education through the main entry route achieve higher average levels of attainment relative to those who apply through HEAR and DARE.

The share of applications to the DARE scheme has also increased substantially over the period 2010-2012. As total applications have increased, so too have complete applications, from 79% in 2010 to almost 82% in 2012. DARE eligible applications have also increased over this period from 41% of all applications in 2010 to 55% in 2012. The increasing eligibility rate is also evident when we consider only complete applications: from 52% of complete applications in 2010 to 68% of applications by 2012.

There are some interesting patterns in terms of the characteristics of applicants that submit incomplete applications. On average, such applications are submitted by older applicants, those without a third language exemption, applicants who have received a smaller number of supports at second level, those attending non-fee paying schools; and those attending vocational schools. These findings suggest that the application process may be biased against students with lower levels of financial resources, support or information necessary to access the documentation for application. There is however a *positive bias* in the application process toward those receiving a wide range of supports. More recently, students with physical or sensory disabilities are no longer significantly different in their likelihood to submit an incomplete application than students who disclose other disabilities.

When we consider the factors that are associated with eligibility for DARE among those who submit complete applications, we expect (and find) that few factors determine eligibility given that eligibility is dependent on the provision of evidence of a disability. However, we find that the type of school attended (fee-paying), the number of supports received at second level and the nature of the disability influence both the application process and eligibility for the scheme.

73% of mainstream second level schools submitted at least one application to DARE in 2010 and this grew to 78% by 2012. However, the analyses highlight that the share of applications for each of the schemes from outside mainstream second level schools is typically very low, but has increased from 1.8% in 2010 to 2.6% of all applications in 2012. As with DARE, this warrants further attention at wider system level, given that young people under the age of 23 with disabilities also seek to access higher education from outside the mainstream sector. Furthermore, smaller schools, DEIS schools, and vocational schools were less likely to submit applications to DARE, while those attending fee-paying schools, schools with greater NSEC supports and schools that offer the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP - schools typically with a greater middle class composition) are more likely to do so. The

school level analyses suggest that the intersection of disability and socio-economic disadvantage is likely to constrain school leavers in accessing the scheme. Based on the findings presented in Chapters four and five, it would appear that students with disabilities attending schools in more disadvantaged contexts do not have the same level of awareness, information and guidance in accessing the DARE scheme relative to students with disabilities in more disadvantaged contexts. As a result, we recommend changes to the DARE application and eligibility process and greater use of the reduced points mechanism alongside greater outreach to disability groups and under-represented school contexts in order to provide more equitable access to the scheme. The DARE scheme should address this issue in the immediate future and review its current policy and practice around the application process, and communication of the scheme.

CAO Choices of HEAR and DARE Applicants

We have identified that fields of study at higher education continue to be socially stratified in terms of socio-economic disadvantage and disability. In 2010, a review of the distribution of applicants by admission routes across fields of study identified HEAR eligible acceptances reached and surpassed at least 5% of the total acceptances across a number of fields, with the exception of Veterinary Medicine, Engineering/Technology, Pharmacy or Art and Design. DARE eligible applicants had a much lower representation across all fields.

We also considered the dynamic of application to and acceptances of courses by field of study for HEAR and DARE applicants. There was evidence of significant variation in rates of application and acceptances according to field of study. HEAR eligible applicants (predominately female) were typically over-represented in applications and acceptances to Arts and Social Sciences and Education, but under-represented in both applications to and acceptances of Engineering/Technology. DARE eligible applicants were also over-represented in both application to and acceptance of courses in Arts and Social Science courses. A consistent pattern emerged across both years, whereby DARE eligible applicants were under-represented in both application to and acceptance of courses in Education. With the Colleges of Education joining the DARE scheme in 2014 we expect to see an increase in applications and acceptances to Education Courses from DARE students. However, it was clear that while the numbers applying to some fields of study (particularly Medicine, Pharmacy and other Health Care courses, Engineering/Technology) have increased between 2010 and 2012, the number of applications remains small.

In both years, DARE eligible applicants draw on the greater flexibility provided in admissions, as this group had significantly higher application rates (8% compared to 6.6%) for courses which have an alternative/supplementary admissions mechanism (i.e. portfolio, interview) than other applicants. However, they were not more likely to accept such courses, compared to other CAO applicants. HEAR eligible applicants have increasingly become under-represented in both applications to and acceptance of courses that resulted in a minimum of 500 points as an entry requirement. DARE eligible applicants were under-represented in application rates to courses for which half of applicants who received a place had achieved at least 500 points in both years. However, in both years the DARE eligible group were over-represented in the acceptance of such courses. These divergent findings suggest differentiation in the use of the reduced points mechanism across courses and across fields.

In terms of CAO offers, it would appear that eligibility for the schemes results in more favourable outcomes. DARE eligible and HEAR eligible are significantly more likely to receive a CAO offer, than all CAO applicants. They are also significantly more likely to receive a first preference offer, an offer in a university and a Level 8 offer.

Participation in and Progression through Higher Education

Our analyses of the participation and progression chances of those who apply to the schemes suggest that HEAR and DARE eligible entrants to higher education are faring well relative to the wider cohort of higher education entrants. That is, HEAR and DARE eligible entrants are more likely to make the transition from acceptance of an offer to participation in higher education. Furthermore, while HEAR and DARE groups can be differentiated in progression patterns before previous attainment is taken into account, the analyses do not suggest that these groups are less likely to progress to second year. Rather, their progression patterns are very much in line with other higher education entrants.

Identity and relationships were a key theme across the interviews. For HEAR students there was a surprising comfort attached to being an access student, however, as previous research indicates, students were less likely to disclose their identity to ‘outsiders’. For some students with a disability their relationship was more complex, and depended on the type of disability. For some, there was no choice but to disclose. For others it was an identity best protected.

Respondents spoke at length about the targeted supports on offer from the access and disability offices and how these supports helped them navigate their way through higher education. For others who had less contact with the support services, it was often a comfort to know that support was there should they request it. The generic supports available to entrants was generally viewed positively by entrants, as was the shift in the learning environment in making the transition from secondary to higher education. Students were in general critical of their lecturers which had an impact on their learning.

What can be determined about the sustainability, scalability and replicability of the schemes?

A number of issues arose in terms of sustainability and the future direction of the schemes. Issues of sustainability were highlighted by internal and external stakeholders moreso than issues relating to scalability and replicability over the course of the fieldwork.

It was acknowledged that the schemes are very much in their infancy, and have been in operation for a short amount of time. Thus, there was the impression that the schemes are moving into a new phase of development. There was considerable evidence of collaboration across institutions, but ultimately collaboration was limited in its scope due to disparity issues relating to the setting of quotas and policy and practice pertaining to admissions and the allocation of reserved places.

In the first instance, there was a strong willingness by the internal stakeholders for the administration of the schemes to be relocated outside of the HEIs due to work pressures and concerns about displacement of outreach and post-entry support work. A central unit is currently the preferred model for the management of the scheme. However, external and internal stakeholders also argued that before such a development should arise, the indicators should be robust, and greater co-ordination across institutions in the quota-setting and allocation of places should be achieved before such relocation could take place.

The ongoing increase in the number of applications to the schemes, (an increase in complete applications, and an increase in eligibility as outlined above), is likely to place considerable ongoing pressure in terms of the administration of the schemes. Given that half of all 16-22 years olds are within the income limits, it is likely that demand for the schemes will continue. However, the question of sustainability persists. Despite the considerable structural change in

the past two years including the appointment of the DARE/HEAR co-ordinator and the establishment of the DARE/HEAR Executive, as well as operational efficiencies in the operational management of the schemes, internal stakeholders identified that there are significant challenges to the future operational sustainability of the schemes. Equity in the distribution of workload across individuals and across institutions is problematic where there are 35- 40 staff involved in the delivery of frontline operational tasks located across 18 HEIs nationwide and the CAO.

It was evident from the interviews with internal and external stakeholders that HEAR and DARE are also interested in building on and exploring additional synergies with other organisations with similar third level application assessment functions (e.g. Student Universal Support Ireland). Such synergies are likely to involve further changes in the current provision of HEAR and DARE.

The issue of the replicability of the schemes was also addressed in the interviews. In terms of HEAR, stakeholders were more likely to question the need to replicate the scheme across a more diverse set of institutions, given current inequalities across the sector. In general, greater consolidation in the range of current transition pathways to higher education for young adults was also viewed as a pressing issue for the sector.

Internal and external stakeholders highlighted the need to replicate the DARE scheme in particular across all higher education institutions. However, external stakeholders expressed concern about the issue of verification of disability, and the assessment of disability on the basis of need through a medicalised model. Others also identified the considerable degree of disconnect in policy across primary and post-primary; post-primary to higher education for pupils with disabilities/special educational needs (SEN). The reliance of diagnosis on accessing supports was deemed as a pressing issue for all sectors.

Recommendations

1. The future direction of HEAR and DARE should be mapped out within existing national and institutional higher education policy to include existing initiatives that seek to address social exclusion in the transition from second level to higher education. There are currently a number of tensions that exist between the schemes and the wider educational policy at primary and second level (such as DEIS action

plan, allocation of resources and reasonable accommodations for children with special educational needs) but also higher education (disconnect between income thresholds for the maintenance grant and income thresholds for HEAR) that should be further thought through in order to make the schemes more effective.

2. The positive impact of the schemes for those who successfully access the schemes is evident in the profile of applicants, but also through acceptance and participation rates, and in terms of progression outcomes. However, we recommend that serious consideration is given to the DARE scheme in addressing the gap in terms of the intersection between disability and social disadvantage. Greater outreach to disability groups and under-represented schools is likely to have a positive impact, as well as changes in the structure of the application and eligibility process which may currently deter some groups from applying to the scheme. However, ultimately, the evaluation questions the validity of the continued use of the requirement to provide evidence of disability in determining eligibility for DARE. While the scheme currently collects a personal statement from the applicant and a second level academic reference, this information is not used in the eligibility process.

3. The evaluation has identified considerable institutional variation which impacts directly on the success of both HEAR and DARE: greater alignment across institutions with regard to agreements around minimum entry points, quota setting and matriculation requirements is recommended. However, we also recommend that HEIs continue to have a degree of flexibility in the profile of applicants that they target. In doing so, greater collaboration and sharing of best practice among participating institutions will provide the DARE/HEAR SDG with solutions as to how to address concerns that the scheme may not facilitate the most disadvantaged groups as a result of the application process (in the case of DARE), concerns about rigid admission policies, practices and processes within and across institutions, including the suggested under-use of the reduced points mechanism. HEIs should also fufill their agreement around funding mechanisms for students who enter the schemes.

4. The evaluation team recommend the need for HEAR and DARE to provide a greater degree of flexibility in the transition to higher education, and advocate transparency and accessibility in pathways for young adults to access higher education. The

question of the target population for policies and practices in widening access is complex, but should be afforded greater consideration by HEAR and DARE. Current specific policies on widening access remain overly complex and structurally unequal (i.e. the role of FETAC). Migrant groups, members of the travelling community and young adults in the care of the State should not be discouraged in accessing higher education. Furthermore, the schemes should clearly identify the alternative pathways to higher education for their target groups. This is important, given that not all students with disabilities and students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds who apply to the schemes make the transition to higher education through the schemes.

5. We recommend that the Strategic Development Group continue their work around the evaluation of the schemes, in order to provide a clear evidence base of the impact of the schemes. We recommend the ongoing assessment of HEAR indicators, which could inform the future direction of the schemes, particularly with regard to indicators relating to income and household education levels. We recommend that the scheme consider collecting data on parental education levels not as an indicator, but for future research purposes.

6. Each of the HEAR and DARE participating institutions should further promote the uptake of pedagogies for fairness and widening participation among lecturing staff. We recommend that participating institutions review processes relating to teaching and learning at higher education for a diverse student body to encourage pedagogies and practice for fairness. Participating institutions should also consider how to encourage the adoption of pre- and post-entry supports across institutions, but also move beyond ‘Getting ready’ and ‘Staying in’ to include a systematic approach to ‘Getting on’.

    - *Getting ready (pre-entry interventions)*
    - *Staying in (post-entry supports)*
    - *Getting on (moving beyond higher education)*

Chapter 1: Introduction and Policy Context

1.1 Introduction

A focus of Irish Higher Education policy is orientated toward the objective of promoting equality of access to higher education, with particular targeted initiatives for under-represented groups. In June 2008 the Higher Education Authority[4] (HEA) National Access Office launched the *National Action Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education*, setting out targets and equity of access measures for the period 2008-2013. Those targets include an entry rate of at least 54 per cent for all socio-economic groups by 2020 and a doubling of the number of students in third level with sensory, physical and multiple disabilities by 2013. In addition to pre-existing access initiatives[5], a number of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have developed the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) and the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) to support students who are disadvantaged and students with a disability in accessing and progressing through higher education.

The *Higher Education Access Route* (HEAR) is a college and universities admissions scheme which offers places at reduced points to school leavers from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The scheme is limited to school leavers under the age of 23 as of January 1st of the year of entry, and those who have completed an Irish Leaving Certificate. As well as receiving a reduced points place, HEAR students may also receive a variety of academic, personal and social supports over the course of their studies. In 2013, 16 HEIs participate in the scheme to include the seven universities, three institutes of technology and a number of teacher training colleges and a private college. Each HEI can decide what supports it can offer depending on its policies, practices and the resources available to it. Introduced in 2000 and re-launched in 2009 with the DARE scheme, the HEAR route was extended from being offered only to DEIS[6] and HEI linked second level schools in 2008 (305 schools in all), to include all 730 second level schools in the Republic of Ireland in 2009.

[4] The HEA is the statutory body for higher education in Ireland.

[5] The continuation of some pre-existing initiatives alongside HEAR and DARE has led to considerable variation across institutions. Some HE institutions run separate access initiatives alongside HEAR and DARE, while others who previously had access initiatives aimed at school leavers absorbed these into HEAR and DARE.

[6] Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, was launched in 2005 and is the key Department of Education and Skills (DES) policy instrument to address educational disadvantage. The DEIS action plan focuses on addressing and prioritising the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities from pre-school through to second-level education. For more information on the DEIS action plan see (DES 2005; DES 2011; Weir et al., 2011).

The *Disability Access Route to Education* (DARE) is a college and university admissions scheme which offers places at reduced points to school leavers with disabilities. As with HEAR, the scheme is limited to school leavers with a disability under the age of 23 as of January 1st of the year of entry, and those who have completed an Irish Leaving Certificate. DARE was launched in 2009 and is offered to all students attending second level schools. All students with a disability, irrespective of whether they access higher education via the DARE admission route or not, are offered a variety of academic, personal and social supports while studying at third level. In 2013, 13 HEIs participate in the scheme, to include the seven universities, three institutes of technology, one teacher training college, and two colleges. Individual institutions may determine the nature and delivery of the support they offer students in accordance with their own policies and practices and subject to the availability of resources.

The main 'national' component of the schemes is that they are open to all young people under the age 23 who have completed a Leaving Certificate. Further, the participating HEIs adopt the use of common criteria to establish eligibility for the schemes. Applicants can apply for the schemes as part of the online Central Applications Office (CAO) third level application process, and are required to provide supplementary information in order to be deemed eligible for the scheme. For the HEAR scheme, applicants must meet a range of financial, social and cultural indicators to be considered for a reduced points place and extra college support. Information is required on the applicants home address, second level school, whether the applicant or their family is receipt of a medical card/GP card[7], whether the applicant is in the Care of the State, the number of family dependents in the household, the socio-economic group of parents to include information on parental employment, and detailed information on family financial circumstances. Supporting documentation is required relating to the family financial circumstances[8]. For the DARE scheme, supplementary information includes (i) a personal statement, (ii) a second level academic reference and, (iii) evidence of disability, through the submission of a form which is to be completed by an accepted Medical Consultant/Specialists.

[7] HEAR seeks permission to contact the Health Service Executive (HSE) directly to verify that the family is in receipt of a medical card.

[8] To include any of the following: P21, Notice of Assessment from the Revenue Commissioners, Tax Exemption Letter, Department of Family and Social Protection (DPS) Form or DPS Statement which is signed and stamped, Form RP50 Notification of Redundancy, Retirement Lump Sum Letter from Employer.

This report presents findings from the evaluation of the HEAR and DARE admission routes/schemes, and outlines the wider literature that sought to contextualise and guide the evaluation. This evaluation stems from an interest from those working on and administering the schemes into the effectiveness of HEAR and DARE in widening participation in higher education of under-represented groups. Thus, the HEAR/DARE Strategic Development Group (SDG) has commissioned us to evaluate the following:

- To what extent do the schemes meet the target groups' requirements?
- How do the schemes contribute to the realisation of institutional and national targets? and
- What can be determined about the sustainability, scaleability and replicability of the schemes?

The evaluation considers the HEAR and DARE schemes in the broad context of widening participation in higher education. In doing so, we seek to provide a comprehensive analysis of the characteristics, outcomes and third level experiences of those who pursue the HEAR and DARE schemes.

The remainder of this chapter sets out the broad policy context within which the evaluation is placed. Section 1.2 provides a brief overview of the expansion of higher education and the evolution of widening access policy. Sections 1.3 and 1.4 consider in more depth issues specific to students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with a disability respectively. Section 1.5 then places Ireland and widening participation initiatives in comparative aspect.

1.2 Expansion of Higher Education and Evolution of Access Schemes

In line with the international experience, Irish Higher Education (HE) has 'massified' growing from 20 per cent of 17-18 year olds entering HE in 1980 to 55 per cent by 2004 and more recently 60 per cent in 2007 (O'Connell, Clancy and McCoy 2006; Byrne, McCoy and Watson 2009). The rise in participation in HE has been partly explained by both increased retention at second level[9] and also, growing numbers of mature students entering the university sector (O'Connell *et al*., 2006). As well as increasing numbers participating in HE,

[9] The period from the 1980s to the mid 1990s saw a rapid expansion in second level completion rising from 60 per cent in 1980 to over 80 per cent in 1993. However the period since the late-mid 1990s has witnessed a relative plateau in second level completion rates (Byrne and Smyth 2010).

the sector has also experienced considerable structural change since the 1980s, given that students can now pursue Level 8 courses in the Institutes of Technology (IoTs) as well as in Universities. Recent enrolment trend data released by the HEA indicate a continued increase in absolute numbers entering both universities and IoTs for undergraduate study (HEA 2013).

As well as increasing overall participation rates, a key policy focus has been the equitable widening of participation in higher education for those groups currently under-represented. There has been extensive research on this topic (Skilbeck and Connell 2000; Osborne and Leith 2000; McGuire, Collins and Garavan 2003; O'Reilly 2008; Keane 2011a, 2011b; 2013), including various evaluative reports on access initiatives of recent years (HEA 2006; Philips and Eustace 2005; Murphy 2009; Denny, Doyle and O'Reilly 2010). In addition, universities and colleges have at times undertaken substantial research on their own access programmes and students (Keane 2009, 2011b; Kenny et al., 2010; TAP 2010; Pathways to Education 2010; UCC 2011; Dublin City University Access Scheme 2011; Share and Carroll 2013). Just three studies to date have focused on the experiences of the HEAR and DARE cohorts (Pathways to Education 2010; Denny, Doyle and O'Reilly 2010; Keane 2011a, 2011b).

Legislative developments

Furthermore, a range of different legislative instruments have been enacted in Ireland that relate to widening the participation of marginalised groups, and to facilitate lifelong learning through the promotion of access and opportunities for all learners including learners with special educational needs. These include the Universities Act (1997), the Institutes of Technology Act (1996), the Education Act (1998), the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act (1999), the Equal Status Act (2000, 2004), the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004) and the Disability Act (2005). Legislative requirements[10] and changing social norms, as well as the knock on effects of increased participation, integration and inclusion measures at second level, are likely to have exercised significant influence over the number of students from under-represented groups applying,

[10] More recently, legislation attempts to increase commitment to the inclusion of people with disabilities across all sectors of the education system. Cumulatively, these acts have supported people with disabilities in achieving their right to: an appropriate education for people with disabilities; be heard and to have fair representation; appeal; fair and equitable assessment and resources. In line with changes in legislation, there is now a growing research literature in Ireland pertaining to the experiences of students with a disability across education sectors.

enrolling and completing higher education. This is particularly relevant for students with disabilities, as under the Equal Status Act (2000) HEIs have a legal imperative to do all that is reasonable to encourage, welcome, accommodate and support students with disabilities.

Evolution of Widening Access Policy

The evolution of widening access policy has been developed in greater length elsewhere (Bernard 2006; O'Reilly 2008); its formal origins date back to the *Report of the Steering Committee on the Future Development of Higher Education* (HEA 1995). Student grant schemes[11] to facilitate economic disadvantage have been in place since the early 1970s, and further funding schemes have been supported by both the State and by the European Union. Equitable access to higher education emerged consistently as an issue in Ireland in the 1990s, with policies aimed at tackling social inclusion through education as well as the wider goal of supporting lifelong learning for all. The Third Level Allowance (TLA) was introduced around this time[12]. The Student Assistance Fund was introduced in 1994 and a fund for students experiencing particular or unexpected financial hardship. A dedicated Fund for Students with a Disability was also introduced in 1994. The Fund for Students with a Disability is allocated to students with a disability who require additional supports and services in further or higher education. The fund is also available to Irish students attending higher education in the United Kingdom. Colleges apply for funding for individuals or groups of students to the National Access Office.

Further reference to widening access increasingly appeared in education policy documents over the 1990s including the Green Paper on Education (DES 1992) and White Paper on Education (DES 1995), where a recommendation was made for third level institutions to develop links with designated disadvantaged schools. Later, the Commission on the Points System (1999) recommended an increase in the quota for disadvantaged students to ensure proportional representation. The 1995 Report of the Steering Committee on the Future

[11] Three educational maintenance grant schemes currently are used to assist students with the costs of attending higher education. These include the Higher Education Grant Scheme, the Vocational Education Committees' Scholarship Scheme and the Third Level Maintenance Grant Scheme for Trainees. Each scheme is overseen by the Department of Education and Skills, and all students who meet the eligibility criteria are awarded a grant.

[12] The 'Third Level Allowance' was expanded to include second level and further education studies in 1998, at which point it was renamed the 'Back to Education Allowance'. Unemployed persons, single parents or people with disabilities, aged 21 or over, who are in receipt of social welfare payments for twelve months or more are eligible to apply for funding which is not means-tested and is not affected by maintenance grant payments. Recipients were also entitled to a 'Cost of Education Allowance', payable at the start of each academic year.

Development of Higher Education highlighted considerable disparities by socio-economic group in access to higher education and as noted by Bernard (2006), recommended 'establishing a pool of reserved places for students from disadvantaged backgrounds' (HEA 1995: 77). Further, in that year, fees for full-time undergraduate students were abolished. Up until 1996, students and their parents had to pay tuition fees, with low income families eligible for tuition fees and, under certain conditions, maintenance grants. Since the 'Free Fees' Initiative first instituted in 1996, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) covers the cost of tuition fees of first-time, full-time undergraduate students pursuing a programme of at least two years' duration. The scheme does not, however, cover the fees charged by institutions for registration, examinations and student services which have increased substantially in recent years.

Attempts have also been made to join-up pathways between second level, further and higher education. The 1999 Qualifications Act, which established the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), aimed to create access, transfer and progression between all parts of an education system. In 2000, the Millennium Partnership Fund was introduced within area partnerships to promote participation in further and higher education. At the time of writing, significant reform of the further education sector is under way, with a new co-ordinating body SOLAS. SOLAS, in partnership with the 16 new Education and Training Boards, will be responsible for integration, co-ordination and funding the range of training and further education programmes around Ireland.

Funding Widening Access

Funding for institutions with respect to access and widening participation is operationalised via the Recurrent Grant Allocation Model (RGAM). Since 2011, Equal Access Data have been used to fully implement the access element of the RGAM for universities, as well as phase one of access funding for the IoT (HEA 2013). This funding supports access and lifelong learning initiatives, including outreach programmes and post-entry supports.

In 1996, the HEA introduced a 'Targeted Initiative' programme to widen access within the institutions in its remit. The scheme, which later became the 'Strategic Initiatives Scheme', made funding available to HEIs (on a competitive basis) to raise the participation of students from lower socio-economic groups (see Osborne and Leith, 2000; Keane 2013; National Access Office website for nominal amounts). Universities and other HEA-funded institutions could submit proposals annually for funding under a number of headings, one of which

sought to promote access to higher education. Funding for the scheme was drawn from the annual block grant for institutions that is managed by the HEA. In 1999 the Department of Education and Science began providing additional funding for access and retention to the Institutes of Technology. In the same year, a new element to the higher education grant, the 'top-up' grant, was made available to students from families with particularly low incomes[13].

The Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) was introduced in 2006 and 2008 (Cycle 1 and Cycle 11) as an important way of addressing the HE objectives in the National Development Plan (2007-2013)[14]. The scheme explicitly sought to promote and reward inter-institutional collaboration and innovation and the formation of strategic alliances, with a key objective being to support access, retain and progress (HEA 2008; Government of Ireland 2007). SIF funds were withheld in 2009, as a result of the global economic downturn and the severe deterioration in Irish public finances. As part of SIF, the Irish Universities Association (IUA) received funding for HEAR and DARE in SIF cycles I and II (HEA 2013b). The final project received a Mid Term Evaluation Rating of 3, meaning that it was deemed that the project progressed satisfactorily and was recommended to warrant streamlining within the relevant institutions and possibly sectorally or system-wide (Government of Ireland 2010). Later Hyland (2011) also recommends that the programmes be expanded across the HE sector: '*The HEAR and DARE access schemes should be further developed to ensure that those from traditionally under-represented groups, and students with disabilities will continue to be given special consideration and to be eligible for a reserved quota of places in higher education outside the allocation of places for school-leavers*' (Hyland 2011: 26).

Development of the National Access Office

Following a recommendation by Osborne and Leith (2000), in 2001 the Action Group on Access to Higher Education recommended the establishment of a dedicated national office to co-ordinate existing access work and to develop and implement a national framework of measures to increase participation in higher education by disadvantaged groups, including students with a disability. At this time, Skilbeck (2001) noted that there 'was a need for system-wide and institution-specific policies and strategies to accommodate equity groups, of

[13] This scheme assists grant applicants from households who are in receipt of certain long-term social welfare payments. If eligible students receive an additional 'top-up' amount to the standard maintenance grant.
[14] For detailed overview of SIF see HEA (2013b) Strategic Innovation Fund: Outputs & Outcomes

whom those from the lowest socio-economic categories are the prime, but not the only target' (Skilbeck 2001: 142 in Bernard 2006:25). The National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education was established in the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in 2003 and has a remit to work with all publicly funded institutions. A review of funding for higher education '*Progressing the action plan: Funding to achieve equity of access in higher education*' was published by the HEA in 2005. The review suggested that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are overly dependent on income from paid employment to meet the costs of going to college, with a concern about the subsequent impact on retention and examination performance (McCoy et al., 2009). The report also highlighted the fragmented nature of available funding, the absence of ongoing review of the programmes, and evidence of overlap and duplication between several of the funds (Action Group, 2001). The group recommended that a dedicated unit be set up to develop a co-ordinated national strategy on access and to consolidate and expand access funding.

Since its inception, the aim of the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education has been to facilitate educational access for groups who are under-represented in higher education – those who are disadvantaged socially, economically and culturally, mature students and students with a disability (HEA 2009a). In recent years, two major reports have been published relating specifically to access: the *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013* (HEA 2008) and the *Mid Term Review of National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013* (HEA 2011a). The *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013* (2008) emphasised setting targets to improve under-representation, funding, mainstreaming and embedding access policy within institutions, as well as the importance of post-entry supports.

The National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education also manages the Fund for Students with a Disability and the Millennium Partnership Fund, and monitors expenditure on access in HE institutions. In addition, a number of publications which highlight findings from the Equal Access Survey have been published (HEA 2010, 2012, 2013). More recently, the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (HEA 2011) emphasised the need 'to fund higher education in a sustainable and equitable manner that will guarantee wider participation and fairness of access' (HEA: 2011b: 4). Keane (2013) reports that preparations for the third National Plan (2014-2016) are well under way, through consultation and meetings with key stakeholders, set in the context of the significant change and reform of HE governance, structures and funding required by the National Strategy for Higher Education 2030 (HEA

2011b). Six possible goals are set out in a background document of the National Access Office in preparation for the 2014-2016 National Plan:

- Restating the rationale for access;
- Focusing on building a 'joined-up' education system with comprehensive pathways of access;
- Building on initiatives for equality of access for certain groups;
- Focusing on developing an inclusive student experience for all in HE (including continuous professional development for academics);
- Developing a robust evidence base for policy and practice, including data and targets, for entry, progression, and into employment;
- Developing financial resources to support access.

Mature students, ethnic minorities including members of the travelling community, students with a disability and students from disadvantaged backgrounds have all been identified by previous research as requiring specific policy interventions in terms of improving their access to HE (Skilbeck & Connell, 2000). Increasingly, research has highlighted that such 'categories' of student are not mutually exclusive (Hesketh 1999; McCoy et al., 2009; Bernard 2006) and access cannot be regarded as a 'catch-all' term. Furthermore, the concept of 'access' in itself has also been problematised, with the distinction drawn between accessing, progressing and moving beyond higher education (Osborne 2003) but also pre-entry supports (Milburn 2012):

- *Getting ready*: interventions in schools, even as early as primary or pre-school, but generally in the later years of secondary school
- *Getting in:* support at point of application; admissions procedures; use of contextual data to identify students with the potential to succeed
- *Staying in*: measures to encourage retention, through academic, social or financial support
- *Getting on*: ways in which universities help students be equipped and ready to move into the labour market or further study when they graduate

As Osborne (2003) states:

> *'improving access is one thing, but ensuring progression both within and beyond higher education is another. It is clear that many more people in Europe now benefit*

> *from increased and wider participation. However, gains may not be as widespread as champions of access would wish, and equity in terms of entry to higher education is differentially spread' (2003: 18)*

Other Relevant Policy Issues and Directions

More recently, the structure of the admission process which facilitates the transition from second level to third level has come under criticism due to the high stakes nature of the Leaving Certificate examination, and the admissions process to higher education, both of which have been identified as potential barriers for under-represented groups (Hyland 2011, Smyth and Calvert 2011; Smyth, Banks and Calvert 2011; Smyth and Banks 2012). An agreement between key partners in second level and in higher education has recently been reached on three future directions for reform in the transition from primary to post-primary. These include (i) attempts to reduce any problematic predictability in the Leaving Certificate examination; (ii) attempts to reduce the number of grading bands used in the Leaving Certificate examination, and (iii) a commitment to review and reduce the number of programme offerings for a broad undergraduate entry to Level 8 honours Bachelor degree programmes, but also to ensure a mixed portfolio of programmes with denominated and generic entry. The changes agreed will be implemented on a phased basis for fifth year students who commence the Leaving Certificate cycle in 2014.

A number of recent reports also indicate that schools in Ireland (and internationally) vary in their effectiveness in delivering inclusion strategies for students with special educational needs at second level. This is true in the case of access to the curriculum (O'Mara et al., 2012), inclusive assessment (Douglas et al., 2012), but also the transition from primary to second level (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2013). Rix et al., (2013) in a review of the continuum of educational provision for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) point to the problematic conceptualisation and categorisation of children with special educational needs and the range of definitions and the broad number of categories used to identify those children who fell within its remit. In their international review, they identify that the Irish definition is at the medical end of a medical-social divide, and its use of categories is more extensive than that of nearly all the other countries in their study. However, they also point out that those countries that have moved closer to a social model definition were still faced with the challenge of how to provide appropriate support within a mainstream system that

caused so many pupils difficulty. Furthermore, they argue that Irish system encourages approaches to managing resources and supports that could be bureaucratic and in the interests of staff and settings rather than learners. In their research, they found that the system did not help overcome negative attitudes towards pupils with special educational needs, nor did it help the reconfiguration of how ability and disability are understood. They also identified that resource allocation has a strong association with diagnostic labels which once applied, tend to stay in place, so as to maintain access to resources, but as a result maintains the concept of and focus upon disability. Despite the introduction of the General Allocation Model at primary level for those with high incidence disabilities, many of the stakeholders they spoke to were concerned with the focus upon achieving a quantity of additional teaching/resource hours rather than considering the quality of those hours. While this provided protection for the rights of individual children, teachers, parents and health professionals often described how at times and in some contexts, it could also maintain poor educational practices.

1.3: Students from Disadvantaged Backgrounds

Increasing participation in higher education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds has been a focus of educational policy since the 1990s. There is now a well established literature that focuses on the under-representation of certain socio-economic and social class groups in higher education. This literature typically points to remarkable stability in social class and socio-economic inequalities in education over time and the powerful influence of educational attainment on a range of post-school outcomes (Clancy 1982, 1988, 2001; Breen and Whelan 1993; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Whelan and Hannan 1999; Smyth 1999; Clancy and Wall 2002; Whelan and Layte 2002; McGuire, Collins and Garavan 2003; O'Connell et al. 2006a, 2006b; McCoy et al. 2010; Byrne and Smyth 2010; McCoy and Smyth 2011; Byrne and McCoy 2013). While there has been an overall increase in the participation of most socio-economic groups in higher education - with the exception of the 'other non-manual group' - research has consistently identified that certain groups such as higher professionals and farmers still account for a higher proportion of new entrants than their share of the population (O'Connell et al., 2006).

The University sector has also been found to comprise a larger proportion of middle-class students than the Institute of Technology sector (McCoy and Smyth 2011). Furthermore, social differentiation across the sector remains, as almost half of students attending

Universities come from the Employer and Manager and the Professional groups (see Table 1.1 taken from HEA 2013a).

Table 1.1 Distribution of full time new entrants by Socio-Economic Group by Sector 2011/12

	Universities	**Institutes of Technology**
Employers and Mangers	21.1	16.0
Higher Professional	15.1	5.5
Lower Professional	11.4	6.6
Non-Manual	9.2	9.4
Manual Skilled	9.5	15.1
Semi-Skilled	4.5	6.8
Own Account Workers	7.7	9.2
Farmers	8.0	7.0
Agricultural Workers	0.7	1.0
All others gainfully occupied and unknown	11.1	20.1

Source: Equal Access Data HEA (2013:87)

1.4: *Students with a Disability*

Internationally, the 1990s saw a 'marked increase in participation in higher education by students with a disability' (HEA 2000:42). There has been considerable increase in the numbers of new entrants in Irish higher education with a disability, from 1.1% of the total undergraduate population in the academic year 1998/9 to 5.1% in 2011/12 (AHEAD 2004, 2009, 2012). The proportion is higher in the IoT sector than in the University sector (4.7% versus 3.6%). The share of students with a disability as part of the total student population has also increased from 0.7% in 1993/94 to 4% in 2011/12.,

Recent HEA records (2013a) indicate that 5.5% of new entrants in 2011/12 report having a disability. The largest number of respondents who indicated a disability, reported a Learning Difficulty, at 46%, followed by those with a Psychological/Emotional condition (17.2%). 9.1% reported blindness, deafness, severe vision or hearing impairment while a further 10.6% indicated a physical condition. The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2008) set out a target for the number of students with sensory, physical and multiple disabilities in higher education to be doubled by 2013 from 0.9% of full-time students in 1998 to 1.8% in 2006. It also set out a policy objective for the HE participation rates of people with disabilities to be increased through greater opportunities and supports. The report indicates that by 2005-2007, the national target for participation of students with a

disability had been exceeded; in the case of disability, the actual participation rate achieved in 2005 was 3.2%, substantially higher than the target of 1.8%.

The social model of disability, as developed by Oliver (1990) and Barnes (1991), has been immensely important in shifting the focus of disability research from cataloguing individual deficits to developing a better understanding of the multiple social, political and cultural barriers which exclude and marginalise disabled people (see also Cullinan, Gannon and Lyons 2011a, 2011b;)[15]. In the Irish context, research on the operation of barriers for students with impairments in higher education is currently in its infancy (see for example Kenny, McNeela and Shevlin 2001; Shevlin, Kenny and McNeela 2004a; 2004b; Hanafin et al., 2006; O'Brien et al., 2009). Research in the UK suggests that an increase in the numbers of students with disabilities is particularly evident among those who are more socially advantaged (Barnes 1991, Riddell and Weedon 2006) and those with a specific learning disability. However, this literature also argues that students with a range of disabilities often face a variety of other difficulties in participating in HE (see for example Madriaga 2007 with regard to the educational experiences of students with dyslexia; Oliffe et al., to the experiences of depression among male university students and Williams 2001 on chronic illness). Shevlin *et al*. (2004) note that there is a lack of research in Ireland concerning the higher education experience for students with a disability. However, they attribute the historically low participation rates by students with disabilities noted in HEIs to a number of factors including low expectations traditionally associated with people with disabilities in first and second level education, and subsequent lack of interest in/and or failure to qualify for third level education. This work highlights considerable institutional obstacles to participation; inequitable social structures which limit access and success, as well as inadequate conceptualisations of people with disabilities which influence educational policies and practices (Shevlin, Kenny and McNeela, 2004). Furthermore, Riddell et al., (2005) have documented how benefits can be small and career prospects vulnerable for students who declare their disability upon registration, not to mention fear of stigma or overall dis-identification with a disability status.

[15]A number of studies in the Irish context have highlighted the disadvantaged position of adults with a disability (Gannon and Munley 2009; Gannon 2010, Gannon and Nolan 2010; Nolan and Gannon 2004, 2005, 2006; Watson and Nolan 2011).

1.5 Empirical Studies of Educational Disadvantage

This section provides a summary of the empirical literature to date on the processes of educational disadvantage, with reference to structural issues that impact on students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with a disability.

The transition from school to higher education

Earlier studies of the transition beyond school identified that one of the greatest barriers for those from lower socio-economic groups in Ireland accessing higher education is economic (Lynch and O'Riordan 1998)[16]. There is now a body of research that points to how financial issues may deter disadvantaged groups from both entering and progression through higher education (see Healy et al., 1999; McCoy et al., 2009; McCoy, Byrne et al., 2010; McCoy and Byrne 2011 in the Irish context, Ozga and Sukhnandan 1998; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Callender and Jackson 2005 in the UK). The research points to higher levels of debt aversion in school leavers from more disadvantaged backgrounds, leading to a greater reluctance to borrow to fund HE, but also a tendency to over-estimation of the direct costs of going to college. Recent research in Ireland identified that a lack of information about the financial aspects of college, the supports available and eligibility for these supports, and the likely costs of college were found to be especially problematic barriers for the children of 'lower non-manual' workers. The financial barrier is likely to have become more pressing of late as recent economic conditions are likely to further restrict the ability of these and other students to fund their studies through part-time employment (McCoy, Byrne et al., 2010), with implications for the HEAR programme in particular. There are also concerns that those most disadvantaged have been displaced by the new 'poor middle class'.

Research in the Irish context has also pointed to considerable school effects (Smyth and Hannan 2007; Byrne 2009) in the transition from school to higher education. That is, entry varies in relation to the background characteristics of students (in terms of gender, social class and prior ability) along with the '*institutional habitus*' of the school, and that successful entry to tertiary education is related to general academic effectiveness in the school (Smyth and Hannan 2007). This research indicates that students attending schools with a middle class

[16] They also highlighted the importance of social and cultural factors, and the experience of being a first generation higher education student.

student intake are more likely to go on to higher education, even when accounting for their own social class background. School organisation and process has also been identified in school effects, including the degree of differentiation in the curriculum and the approach to ability grouping or tracking in sorting and selecting students across subject groupings and the social composition of the student body.

Beyond financial factors, research has also considered the broader contexts of decision about higher education (Ball et al., 2002 in UK; Smyth and Banks 2012; McCoy and Byrne 2011) pointing to the social dimensions and constraints within which decision making occurs. Smyth and Banks (2012) argue that decisions about whether to go on to higher education are found to reflect three sets of processes: individual *habitus*; the institutional habitus of the school, as reflected in the amount and type of guidance provided; and young people's own agency – namely, the conscious process whereby students seek out information on different options and evaluate these alternatives. Information about the college application process, assistance with discerning among the range of choices on offer and critically assessing where their interests and aptitudes lie has implications not just for entry but also for successful college engagement and completion. This body of recent research suggests that access to such information is also socially stratified. More recently, the issue of college admission has attracted considerable attention (Soares 2012 in the US and Gorard et al., 2006; Zimdars 2010 in the UK; Hoare and Johnston 2011; Hyland 2011; Smyth and Calvert 2011 in Ireland). Common across the research from these diverse institutional contexts are concerns with selective admissions processes and 'cramming' for an exam for college entry.

Disproportionately low representation in selective higher education (higher status universities) has also been identified as contributing to inequalities of access for certain under-represented groups (see Stevens 2007 in the US and Boliver 2011 in the UK). Such studies also highlight the social dimension of decision-making. That is, inequalities in higher education tend to be the combined product of the choices applicants make on the one hand and the admission decisions taken by universities on the other. OECD (2008) recommended a number of measures for opening-up entrance procedures to tertiary education, emphasising the need to evaluate success in college more expansively than by grade point average.

Likewise, in the Irish context, McCoy and Byrne (2011) also argue that higher education entry must be viewed as the outcome of a longer-term process of educational engagement. Educational experiences, particularly in secondary school, play a central role in the longer-

term educational trajectories of young people. Such findings are in line with research that has been conducted in the UK. Raffe et al., (2006), for example, find that class differences in entry to higher education can largely be attributed to class differences in achieving the qualifications for entry to higher education. Gorard et al., (2006) in the UK also highlight what they term as 'dispositional barriers' defined as 'an individual's motivation and attitudes to learning which may be caused by a lack of learning opportunities or poor previous educational experiences' (Gorard et al., 2006:5). Various studies (Chowdry et al., 2008; Marcenaro-Gutierrez, Galindo-Rueda and Vignoles, 2008; Anders, 2012) have reinforced this view, arguing that while issues such as social class may impact on levels of educational attainment, it is a young person's performance at 11 or 16 and their subsequent decision to pass into Level 3 study (especially A Levels) that largely dictates behaviour at 18.

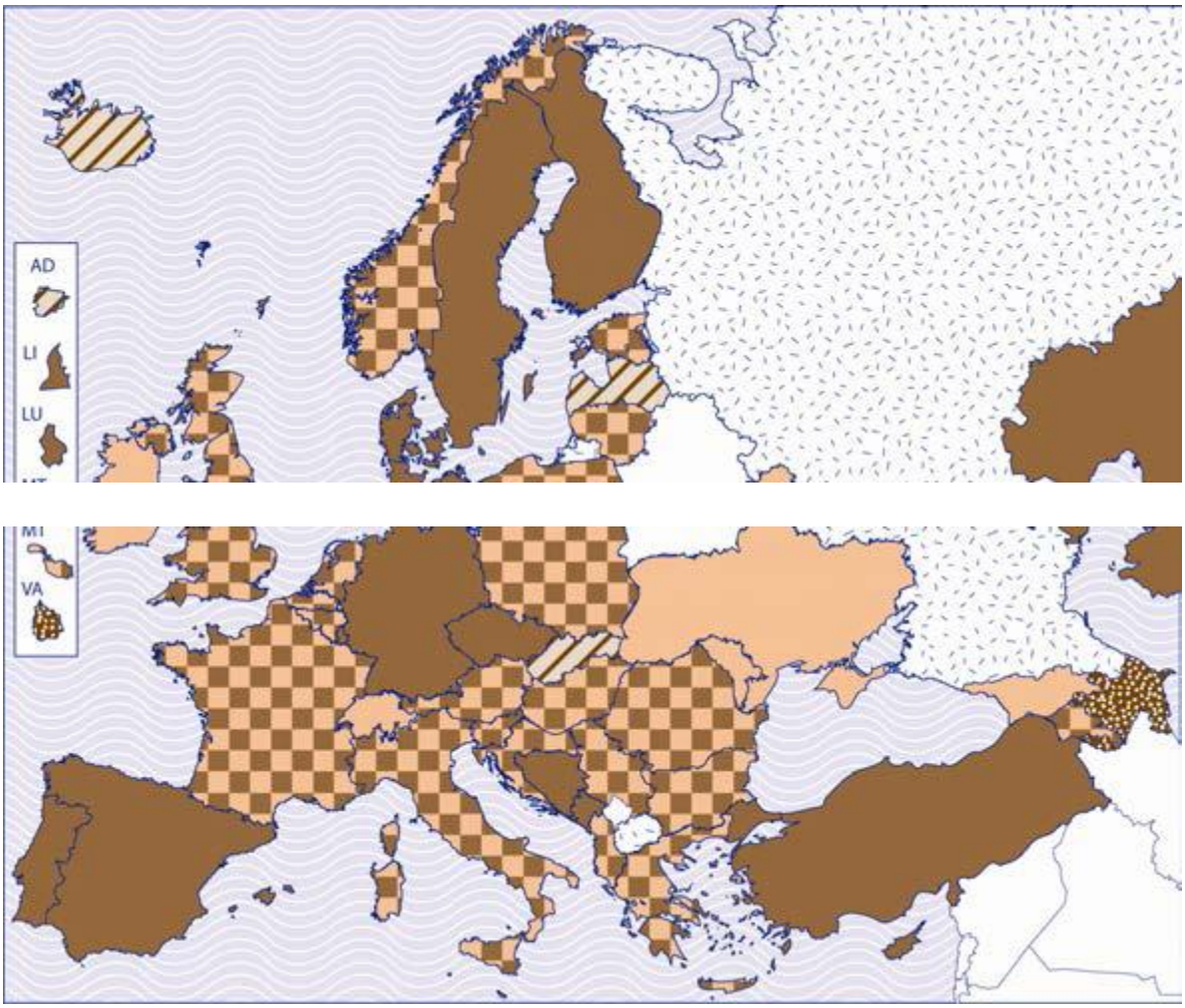
Earlier processes of educational disadvantage

Research clearly demonstrates that social differentiation in educational outcomes is evident at much earlier stages of formal education (see Smyth and McCoy 2009; McCoy, Byrne and Banks 2012). There is now a greater understanding of the earlier processes of educational disadvantage, and how the structure and organisation of schooling can contribute to educational inequality in itself. Recent research has led to a better understanding of the educational careers of a diverse group of students. We now know that in Ireland children with special educational needs (SEN) like school less than their peers without SEN in mainstream settings and have significantly lower reading scores and maths scores relative to their peers who do not have special educational needs (McCoy, Byrne and Banks 2012; McCoy and Banks 2012). Both academic engagement and social engagement play a central role in explaining the broader school engagement of children with special educational needs (McCoy and Banks 2012) as well as the institutional barriers facing these young people. Work in progress suggests that teachers and parents have lower educational expectations of 9 year old children with special educational needs, even when they achieve the same (mid-high) levels of attainment as their peers (Byrne, Banks and McCoy in progress). While there are limited studies in the Irish context on experience of children with SEN in making the transition from primary to second level education, Barne-Holmes et al., (2013) find that perceptions of discontinuity, tension and anticipation in making the transition is influenced by the diagnosis of a special educational need, which impacts on the academic and person life of the child.

1.6: Widening Access Policy in Comparative Aspect

Approaches to widening access to higher education in other institutional contexts can take different forms: a general policy approach targeting all categories of students, or measures focusing on different under-represented groups, or alternatively – in most cases – a combination of both (EACEA 2010, 2012). Figure 1.1 provides a summary of widening participation policy across Europe as measured by ECEA (2010, 2012). According to their report, almost all countries work towards the goal of widening participation in higher education, as laid down in the Bologna documents. Only four countries (Andorra, Iceland, Latvia and Slovakia) do not reflect this goal in their higher education policy.

Figure 1.1: National Policy Approaches to Widening Participation in Higher Education 2010-2011



Source: ECEA 2012

Light Brown Countries: Under-represented groups are identified and targeted measures are taken to counteract under-representation.
Dark Brown Countries: There is a general policy approach to increase and widen participation.
Spotted Countries: Implementation of an alternative approach.
Striped Countries: Countries not reflecting the goal of widening participation in their HE policy.
White Countries: Data not available
Checked Countries: Mix of targeting and general policy to increase and widen participation.

General Policy Approaches

In some countries, higher education systems adopt a general policy approach in addressing the under-representation of certain groups. In doing so, they strive for creating an egalitarian environment that provides equal opportunities for all to participate in higher education, the rationale being that this will have a positive impact not only on overall participation in higher education, but also on the number of students from disadvantaged groups. While the majority of countries combine general policy actions with targeted measures, 13 countries concentrate on this more general approach. From the geographical perspective, the general policy approach is quite common in the Nordic countries, as in three of them – Denmark, Finland and Sweden – it is the main mechanism to address under-representation.

However, a large number of countries have alternative routes to higher education for non-traditional candidates (Liechtenstein, UK, Spain, Portugal, France, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Luxembourg, Czech Republic, Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Malta) including short-cycle and vocational or professional programmes, but also flexible higher education provision (Italy). Other countries report that their higher education systems have become more open towards the recognition of learning outcomes acquired outside formal learning contexts (e.g. France, Germany, Italy and Sweden), which can also be seen as an adjustment likely to enhance the participation in higher education.

Efforts to achieve equity in higher education are sometimes complemented by actions in other parts of education systems. Such approaches mainly take place at upper secondary level and can, for instance, include guidance and counselling services targeting upper secondary graduates (the Czech Republic, France and the Netherlands). Their aim is to ensure that pupils make informed choices about their further career and consider higher education as one

of possible options. Preparatory programmes for higher education candidates (which are referred to by the Czech Republic) also fall under this category of measures.

Several countries indicating a general policy approach to widening participation also referred to financial arrangements they have put in place (Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Romania and Slovenia). These countries highlight that the system of fees and financial support available for students are intended to allow all those interested in higher education to embark on studies at this level regardless of their socio-economic status or situation. Alongside financial measures, countries reporting a general policy approach often make reference to structural changes in their higher education systems. In doing so, the aim of these measures is to attract a wider range of societal groups, including groups that have been under-represented in the past.

Policy approaches targeting specific under-represented groups

ECEA (2012) identified five higher education systems (Georgia, Ireland, Moldova, Switzerland and Ukraine) that concentrate on targeted measures, rather than general policy actions or the combination of both approaches. Thus, Ireland is characterised in this typology as approaching widening access through specific targeting approaches.

The report identified that targeted actions typically cover different categories of students. The ECEA (2012) report and the European Commission (2011) reports show that students with disabilities are the most common group targeted by specific measures (around half of countries refer to this category of students). Typically, such measures seek to adapt the higher education study environment to offer greater inclusion. The second most common category of students targeted by specific measures is the category of those whose socio-economic situation is likely to be a barrier to higher education studies. These students are often eligible for various forms of financial support, in particular grants and subsidies, aiming to address economic barriers. In some systems (e.g. Scotland), students with lower socio-economic status are also targeted by special guidance and counselling services as well as preparatory programmes aiming to improve their chances of entering higher education and succeeding in it.

However, outside of this cluster, Greece, Cyprus and Romania also reserve a number of places for certain members of their designated under-represented. Bulgaria simplifies admission procedures to higher education for certain socially excluded disadvantaged groups.

Hungary offers extra points to non-traditional students (defined as those above 25 years) and other under-represented social groups in the admission process.

Beyond Europe, Australia whose admission and selection process of students for higher education is similar to that of Ireland (see Boland and Mulrennan 2011), operates the Educational Access Schemes (EAS) which are designed to provide assistance to students who have faced educational disadvantage through year 11 and/or 12. Typically, the EAS programme allows entry to higher education for students with a lower ATAR (HSC performance score) than the usual ATAR cut off. This system also seeks evidence of educational disadvantage including evidence of disability (educational impact statement, medical certificates/reports, record of school attendance) for those making the transition to higher education.

Regardless of the policy approach used to address the under-representation, ECEA (2012) identified that a limited number of countries (e.g. Armenia, Austria, Ireland, Finland and Norway) refer to quantitative targets to be reached. In Ireland for instance, the National Action Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013 sets very concrete objectives, stating that all socio-economic groups should have entry rates of at least 54 per cent by 2020, the number of students in third level with sensory, physical and multiple disabilities should be doubled by 2013, and mature students should comprise at least 20 per cent of total full-time entrants by 2013. In other contexts, (Finland) the aim of general policy approaches to widening participation is to increase participation of under-represented groups in line with their share in the entire population (for example the national population of migrants).

European widening access policy drivers

EU policy on higher education has been dominated by the Bologna Process. The overarching aim of the Bologna Process is to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) based on international co-operation and academic exchange that is attractive to European students and staff as well as to students and staff from other parts of the world. The main emphasis of the Bologna Process has been on developing a common framework of qualifications and quality assurance. Although the social dimension was not initially emphasised, since 2001 a

commitment has been made to fostering greater social equality with regard to higher education participation (the Prague Communiqué). The EHEA (2012) highlights that up until 2007, there had been little progress made in terms of the social dimension and subsequently a common goal was agreed that 'students [should be] able to complete their studies' (pg 73). In 2007, the ministers also agreed to report on the progress made on this goal and in 2009 decided to set measurable targets "for widening overall participation and increasing participation of under-represented groups" with a goal of achieving them by 2020 " (pg 73). More recent Communiqués have highlighted that very few countries have set specific targets related to the social dimension, and monitoring of the participation of underrepresented groups has not yet been developed to any significant degree. Eurydice reports also indicate that while special measures to assist specific groups based on socio-economic status, gender, disability, ethnicity, etc. exist in many countries, these are rarely a central element of higher education policy. The Working Group on the Social Dimension has the responsibility to oversee the social dimension in higher education and collect examples of good practice in this area. The second meeting of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning Working Group was held in Dublin in April 2013[17].

There has been considerable progress in the Bologna process in terms of bringing Higher Education systems together (harmonisation of degree systems, quality assurance, the development of the qualifications framework and student mobility). However, the report highlights areas where 'supplementary effort' is required. Progress has generally been slow in the area of access, and there is limited data on widening participation as well as variation across countries with regard to who is an 'under-represented student'. The diversity of the groups who remain under-represented in higher education and the complexity of factors which may hinder their educational progress suggest that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution to the persistent challenge of widening participation, and no one single measure that can be used with confidence to target those who might benefit from outreach activities and additional support (Riddell et al., forthcoming).

Evaluation of widening participation initiatives

A number of recent studies in the UK and beyond point to 'what works' in terms of widening participation measures (Gorard et al., 2006; NESSE 2012; Bowes et al., 2013a; Bowes et al.,

[17] For more information see http://www.ehea.info/news-details.aspx?ArticleId=309

2013b; Moore, Sanders and Higham 2013; Moore, Mountfield-Zimdars and Wiggans 2013; Riddell et al., forthcoming). To date, evaluation of widening participation initiatives in the Irish context is limited. Unlike in other institutional contexts, access to statistical data on widening participation is limited. For example, in the UK statistical data on widening participation is gathered by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) for each higher education institution in the UK, based on a range of widening participation indicators. Bowes et al., (2013a) recommend that rigorous and consistent evaluation of WP interventions is necessary to establish programme effectiveness, while acknowledging challenges around the design and instigation of such evaluative methods.

In their evaluation of a single institution access programme Denny et al (2010) identify positive treatment effects of an access programme in an Irish university on first year exam performance, progression to second year and final year graduation rates, with the impact often stronger for students who came in with higher levels of attainment in the Leaving Certificate. In their study, they find similar patterns of results for students that entered through the regular system and the 'affirmative action' group i.e. the students that entered with lower Leaving Certificate points/reduced points. They also find that changes in the financial package available to access students over the years of their study did not affect the success of access students, and on this basis, they tentatively conclude that the non-financial supports available to students may be more important than the financial ones. Their overall conclusion is that access programs can be an effective means of improving academic outcomes for socio-economically disadvantaged students.

Bowes and colleagues (2013) were commissioned to deliver six national case studies (Australia, the Netherlands, Norway, Republic of Ireland, South Africa and the United States of America) that attempt to understand what works to widen participation and enhance student success in HE around the world[18]. Despite the structural, socio-cultural and economic differences between the institutional contexts, Bowes and colleagues identified clear similarities in the way in which the education systems are organised and the factors that have been identified as inhibiting or facilitating educational attainment and progression to HE. These include:

[18] See the link to each of the studies in question
http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2013/wpeffectiveness/?utm_source=HELOA+List

- Selectivity and stratification in the school sector which is often accompanied by differential attainment levels at both primary and second level.
- Social class remains a key determinant of educational attainment at school level and access to HE, and is carried through higher parental education levels, attendance at middle class schools, positive experiences of school, completion of compulsory education, achievement of minimum entry requirements for entry to higher education, achievement of minimum entry requirements for entry to selective higher education, have knowledge and confidence to make informed decision-making around higher education.
- Structural differentiation in the set up of further and higher education systems contributes to socially stratified outcomes.
- Alternative entry mechanisms to facilitate access to higher education can promote the participation of more diverse groups of students. Such mechanisms include accreditation of prior learning and labour market experiences, effective pathways between FE and HE, flexibility within the HE sector, the provision of access and foundation courses to support students with below entry requirements.
- Reforms in school organisation and process at second level have been used in several countries as a means of improving educational attainment and HE readinesss.

In terms of the impact and effectiveness of Widening Participation (WP) policies and interventions, Bowes et al., (2013) highlight how:

- Policy frameworks that support dialogue and collaboration between governments, the appointed bodies tasked with ensuring WP policy delivery an HEIs are advantageous. Synergy between legislation, policy guidelines and institutional activity, WP is much more likely to be effective and goal-orientated and less likely to be fragmented
- Compacts or agreement between governments and provides which outline how funding will contribute to national indicators on WP are helping to ensure that national policy objectives and institutional missions are broadly aligned.
- Performance based funding models for WP are becoming the norm and are essentially policy levers for ensuring that funding rewards institutions that are recruiting and retaining target groups. They indicate that this type of funding model is most likely to reward institutions with high numbers of target group students, which may be more favourable to institutions with open admission policies. However, the researchers also

warn that interventions are most likely to retain focus when there is a relative degree of institutional freedom regarding whom to target, when to target and with what type of activity. Other institutional contexts with student loans also provide performance based rewards for students (i.e. conversion of loans into student grants on successful completion).

- The success of WP interventions depends on consistent and rigorous evaluation, the provision of student financial support, funding available for outreach and access activities.
- They highlight approaches that have proven to be particularly effective in raising access to HE among target groups, which include consortiums and partnerships across educational sectors, pedagogical revision, supplementary admission routes, access and foundation courses, study skills support and information, and advice and guidance.
- While the researchers found that a range of retention activities have proven to be effective, they argue that a range of pre and post-entry support delivered together have the biggest impact. Pre-entry supports include orientation courses, taster days and residential schools. Post-entry supports include first year orientation programmes, ongoing pastoral support, study skill workshops, peer mentoring schemes, and opportunities to explore learning styles as well as access to careers advice.

1.7 Summary

This chapter has offered a summary of the HEAR and DARE schemes, an overview of the expansion of higher education and of widening access policy in the Irish context. In doing so, we highlight disparities in current participation rates in higher education of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with a disability, and provide an overview of the key mechanisms through which such inequalities occur. This brief review of European and international policy has highlighted how different institutional contexts seek to promote widening access, using a range of diverse approaches. Within this broader context, HEAR and DARE represent compensatory but innovative and unique approaches to widening participation. We have highlighted how institutional policy has more recently been informed by policy at European level, and highlight the work of Riddell et al., *forthcoming* who suggests that there is no 'one-size-fits all' approach to the solution of widening access, but also no one single measure that can be used with complete confidence to target those who are

under-represented. Finally, we have provided a summary of the literature which seeks to identify ‘what works’ in widening participation.

The remainder of the report is set out as follows; Chapter 2 provides an overview of the data that was used to inform this evaluation, and the methodology employed. Chapter 3 then focuses on the HEAR scheme, with particular focus on issues relating to application and eligibility, as well as stakeholder perspectives of the scheme. In doing so, we consider the profile of school leavers who apply, submit documentation and are deemed eligible for the scheme. Chapter 4 provides an overview of issues relating to application and eligibility for the DARE scheme, and highlight key issues as raised by stakeholders. As with HEAR, the profile of school leavers who apply, submit documentation and are deemed eligible for the scheme is explored. Chapter 5 then provides a profile of the schools from which HEAR and DARE applications are received. Chapter 6 highlights the higher education decision making of HEAR and DARE applicants through an exploration of their CAO choices and offers and acceptances. The final empirical chapter, Chapter 7, considers participation in and progression through higher education for HEAR and DARE eligible applicants relative to all other Higher Education entrants. The higher education experiences of HEAR and DARE students are also analysed. Finally, Chapter 8 provides a summary of the findings of the evaluation, and highlights conclusions and key policy recommendations.

Chapter 2: Data and Methodology

2.1 Introduction

In terms of the data from which this evaluation is based, we adopt a mixed method approach, drawing on a range of existing administrative data sources, alongside new qualitative data collection with HEAR and DARE students currently in higher education and a number of key internal and external stakeholders. The evaluation, in adopting a mixed method approach, draws on the strengths of these two methods to allow for a better understanding of the following:

- Do the schemes meet the target groups' requirements?
- How do the schemes contribute to the realisation of institutional and national targets? and
- What can be determined about the sustainability, scaleability and replicability of the schemes?

As a means of addressing the questions, the study specifically asked:

- What are the baseline application and eligibility rates for each of the schemes from 2010-2012, and how does the profile of applicants differ from all remaining CAO applicants? Furthermore, what can tell about the application process from the pool of applicants specifically with regard to the submission of incomplete applications and probability of eligibility?
- How do stakeholders perceive the schemes?
- What type of schools were applications received from between 2010 and 2012? Are some schools more likely to submit applications, or a greater number of applications, to the schemes compared to other schools?
- Do the CAO choices of HEAR and DARE applicants differ from all remaining CAO applicants in terms of course levels, fields of study and the types of courses that applicants apply for? Do the outcomes of HEAR and DARE applicants differ from all remaining CAO in terms of receiving any CAO offer, receiving a first preference offer, in the types of courses that final offers that applicants accept? Furthermore, how does the processing of applications vary across institutions participating in the schemes?

- How do HEAR and DARE applicants fare in terms of participation in progression through higher education? How do HEAR and DARE eligible applicants who successfully make the transition to higher education with the help of the schemes view their higher education experiences?

2.2 Data Sources

Quantitative Data

We use four main administrative datasets to attempt to answer the research questions outlined above. The first two sets of data comprise the existing administrative data from each of the HEAR and DARE schemes; as these data come from the HEAR and DARE forms filled out by applicants, we refer to them as the 'Form data'. These data facilitate an examination of the institutional and national uptake of HEAR and DARE programmes across institutions 2010-2012. Particular attention is paid to rates of application and eligibility, how this has changed over time at a national level but also across institutions. These datasets will also allow a consideration of changes in the characteristics of applicants to HEAR and DARE over time, as well as an understanding of the workings of the indicators used in confirming eligibility for the schemes.

While providing insights into the workings of the indicators and the characteristics of applicants, the Form data on its own does not offer insights into how HEAR and DARE students differ from the national population in terms of previous school attainment, Central Applications Office (CAO) choice processes, uptake of higher education and educational choices and attainment at higher education. Thus, the existing HEAR and DARE Form datasets have been merged with a third dataset, the national CAO data for the years 2010-2012, in order to compare the processes involved in making the transition from school into higher education with students who have not accessed the schemes.

Fourthly, data from the HEA relating to higher education progression and attainment of all new entrants for 2010 allows a more detailed like-with-like comparison of HEAR and DARE new entrants relative to all CAO new entrants. These data also allow a comparison of trajectories through higher education with the national new entrant cohort. In doing so, we can identify the progression and retention rates of HEAR and DARE students relative to all students, and consider the impact of the schemes. A key advantage of drawing on these administrative data is that they offer information at the population level to include all

applicants to higher education, and all higher education participants. Increasingly, such data is being used to consider trends and deconstruct the transition from second level to higher education in other institutional contexts (see for example Raffe and Croxford *forthcoming*; Boliver 2011).

Finally, in places it was useful to consider the general population of school-leaving age, and not just those who applied to the CAO. For these analyses, we used the Research Micro File of the Irish component of the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) data, which were kindly made available to use by the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

All data have been anonymised in order to protect the identity of individual students. The research has been given ethics approval at the National University of Ireland Maynooth the Marino Institute of Education and Dublin Institute of Technology.

Institutional Case Studies

Statistics relating to a range of demographic variables and institutional documents on widening access and provision for students with disabilities were gathered and analysed for each of the 16 HEAR and 13 DARE institutions. 11 institutions participate in both HEAR and DARE. In order to interpret the wider landscape within which HEAR and DARE are placed, interviews were undertaken with key staff working in Access and Disability services across the institutions, as well as interviews with Registrars or Admissions staff when possible. In total 21 key informant interviews were carried out with 27 individuals across 10 institutions.

Table 2.1 summarises the characteristics of each of the HEAR/DARE institutions. There are significant differences in the proportion of students disclosing a disability, from 0.6%-5.4% of the undergraduate student intake in 2011/12[19], with University of Limerick (UL) having the highest student intake and St Patrick's College of Education having the least. While the majority of HEAR/DARE institutions accept FETAC applications, there is considerable variation across institutions in the conditions of acceptance and in the types of courses that FETAC applicants can apply to.

[19] Based on figures published by AHEAD (2012) for the academic year 2011/12.

Table 2.1: Key Characteristics of each of the HEAR/DARE Institutions

HEI	Institution Type	Undergraduate Intake[20]	% Age 17-22	% Age 23+	% Disability	Offer Level 7/6	FETAC Entry[21]	Undergraduate Access
UCC	University	3,846	91.0	9.0	4.6	No	Yes.	HEAR & DARE
UCD	University	4,013	90.0	10.0	2.9	No	Yes	Pre-existing schemes morphed into HEAR and DARE
DCU	University	2,023	88.3	11.7	3.8	No	Yes	Local Access programme 1st priority; HEAR & DARE
NUIG	University	3,017	90.5	9.5	2.5	No	Yes	Local Access Scheme; HEAR & DARE
UL	University	2,104	89.7	10.3	3.8	Yes	Yes	Local Access Scheme HEAR & DARE
TCD	University	2,882	90.2	9.8	5.4	Yes	Not Accepted	Local Access programme, HEAR & DARE
NUIM	University	1,849	84.5	15.5	4.4	No	Yes	Existing schemes morphed into HEAR and DARE
St Patrick's College	College of Education	614	87.5	12.5	0.6	No	Yes	HEAR
Mary Immaculate	College of Education	735	89.4	10.6	1.4	No	Yes	HEAR
Mater Dei	College of Education	119	88.2	11.8	3.2	No	Yes	HEAR & DARE
CICE	College of Education	Entry included in 6 above				No	Not Accepted	HEAR
NC Ireland	College	Non HEA Funded Institution				Yes		HEAR & DARE
DIT	Institute of Technology	3,609			5.5	Yes	Yes	HEAR & DARE
Pontifical University Maynooth	Pontifical University	77			Missing	No	Yes	HEAR & DARE
Marino Institute of Education	College of Education	128			Missing	No	Not Accepted	HEAR
St Angela's Sligo	College	131	84.0	16.0	2.1	No	Yes	HEAR
AIT	Institute of Technology	1,188	71.9	28.1	4.9	Yes	Yes	DARE
CIT	Institute of Technology	1,743	90.1	9.9	4.0	Yes	Yes	DARE

[20] Total new entrant undergraduate intake is based on Department of Education and Skills data 2011/12.
[21] Based on data provided by the CAO in 2012 http://www2.cao.ie/otherinfo/PlcAltMathsEtcchart.pdf

Each of the HEAR/DARE institutions acknowledge LCVP link modules, but there is considerable variation in the consideration of Foundation level Maths and Irish across institutions. Further, HEAR/DARE institutions do not consider Leaving Certificate Applied, and just one considers PLC on an individual basis.

Qualitative Data

As part of the evaluation, the study sought to elicit opinions and views about the HEAR and DARE schemes, and so, open-ended interviews and focus groups have been conducted with current HEAR and DARE students across the participating institutions as well as with a range of key stakeholders. Qualitative social research methods are particularly relevant to this evaluation as they explore how individuals construct the world around them, and interpret their experience (Creswell 1994). A balance between individual interviews and focus groups was achieved.

In all, interviews and focus groups were conducted with 102 HEAR students across twelve institutions and 26 DARE students across seven institutions (see Table A1 and A2 in the Appendix). The interviews and focus groups took place between February and May 2013 with students over the age of 18 in 1^{st}-4^{th} year across fields of study in higher education. Females were over-represented in both samples: 54% of HEAR participants and 59% of DARE participants were female. For the fieldwork, when possible separate interviews and focus groups were conducted with students who were offered an offer 'On or Above the Points' and those who received a 'Reduced Point' offer. We initially hoped to conduct interviews and focus groups with HEAR and DARE students in all HEAR and DARE institutions. However, difficulties arose in contacting students in some institutions as a result of lack of response among students, but there was also some attrition of students who initially agreed to participate in the study but then decided otherwise, often as a result of work and social pressures.

Access and Disability support staff working in each of the institutions were helpful gatekeepers in accessing students to inform them about the study. The research team was responsible for collecting and collating material from student and stakeholder interviews.

Interviews and Focus Groups with Students

The interviews followed a semi-structured format with a list of themes and key questions serving to guide the interviews. Each interview and focus group lasted 45-60 minutes, and the following were the main themes:

- Trajectories to third level: previous educational experiences, prior knowledge of the schemes, access to information about the schemes
- Experiences at third level: Procedures relating to admissions, curriculum and assessment at third level, transition planning, social aspects, academic aspects, interaction with students, interaction with staff, interaction with access office.

This qualitative component sets out to show how students who access the HEAR and DARE supplementary routes experience life at third level. The diversity of their views is reflected in the issues they raise: negotiating identities, dealing with transitions, encountering divergent and sometimes confusing teaching and assessment. Crucially, it foregrounds the views of students themselves, giving rise to a complex and contradictory picture of college life from students whose voices are not always heard.

Key Stakeholder Groups

In addition to the interviews and focus groups with students, interviews and focus groups were conducted with a number of key informants, including personnel working on the schemes (HEAR and DARE operators, HEAR/DARE co-ordinator, HEAR/DARE Admissions group) as well as with a number of external stakeholders: AHEAD (Association for Higher Education Access & Disability); Central Applications Office (CAO), National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), National Council for Special Educational Needs (NCSE), a representative from the Department of Education and Skills (DES), and Pavee Point). These interviews explored key stakeholder views of the schemes, particularly with regard to the sustainability and future direction of the schemes.

Chapter 3: Applications to and Eligibility for HEAR

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we consider issues relating to application to and eligibility for the HEAR scheme. We begin by providing an overview of applications to HEAR based on existing administrative data. We then consider if HEAR applicants who submit an incomplete application without full supporting documentation differ from those who submit complete applications. In Section 3.4 we seek to identify the type of student the eligibility criteria for HEAR are targeting. That is, we consider how HEAR applicants who are deemed eligible for the scheme differ from those who are ineligible. In Section 3.5 we explore each of the HEAR indicators in order to asses if the indicators used for the schemes are robust. In these analyses we consider the relationship between the indicators and a range of socio-economic variables. We also draw on EU-SILC data to assess the representatives of the indicators used among the wider population. Section 3.6 then draws on stakeholder perspectives of the scheme, and a summary is provided in Section 3.7.

3.2 Overview of Application to HEAR

We first consider data presented in the HEAR Annual Reports which has been provided by the Strategic Development Group (SDG). Table 3.1 identifies a significant growth in the number of applications to the HEAR scheme over time, with an increase from 3,008 applications in 2009 to 8,952 applications in 2012. Over this time, the share of applications which represent ‘complete applications’ has increased from 52 per cent to 60 per cent of applications (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Number of HEAR Applicants

Year	Total Applications	No Supporting Documentation	Total Complete Applications	% Complete Applications
2009	3,008			
2010	8,132	3,903	4,229	52%
2011	8,322	3,164[22]	5,158	62%
2012	8,952	3,600[23]	5,352	60%

Source: HEAR Annual Reports 2009-2012

Considerable change has occurred in the application process over time. In 2009, the process of applying to the schemes was by means of direct application to one of the participating institutions. At that time, all application data was recorded on a database developed by a service provider. Furthermore, the manner in which application data was recorded did not allow for the identification of applicants who did not provide supporting documentation relative to those who did. From 2010 onwards, the application process was integrated into the CAO application process. 2010 is notable in that letters and emails were not issued to students (as they were from 2011 onwards) to (i) acknowledge the receipt of their HEAR/ DARE application and remind them of the 1 March deadline, (ii) to remind them of the 1st April supporting documentation deadline, (iii) to communicate that their application would not be processed further where they had failed to provide any supporting documentation. In the 2010 application cycle, the first letter which issued to applicants detailed their eligibility/ ineligibility for the scheme(s) and resulted in a lot of queries for operators as applicants dealt with the implications of incomplete application detail and/or ineligibility for the first time. In 2010, a screening sheet system using Adobe Acrobat technologies was introduced.

Initially, comparisons were drawn between the data presented in the HEAR Annual Reports and the Form data provided by the CAO. The first thing to note is that the HEAR applications captured in the HEAR Form data for 2010-2012, presented in Table 3.2, do not represent all of the HEAR applications included in the Annual Reports. However, the total number of complete applications is very much in line with each other in the two tables. Thus, although it is difficult to comment on the increase in total applications, it is clear that the number of

[22] This figure includes online applicants with online detail without supporting documentation as well as online applications without online detail and without supporting documentation.
[23] This figure includes online applicants with online detail without supporting documentation as well as online applications without online detail and without supporting documentation.

complete HEAR applications increased steadily over the period 2010-2012, from 4,227 to 5,389.

Table 3.2: HEAR Form Data: Baseline Numbers

Year	Total Applications	No Supporting Documentation (NULL)	Total Complete Applications	% Complete Applications
2010	6,821	2,594	4,227	61.9
2011	7,304	2,167	5,137	70.3
2012	7,626	2,237	5,389	70.6

Source: HEAR 2010, 2011, 2012 Form Data

Profile of HEAR Applicants

The profile of HEAR applicants relative to all other CAO applicants is shown in Table 3.3a. If we consider the profile of applicants according to application type, we see a clear gender differentiation. While the majority of HEAR applicants are female, the majority of applicants who apply for DARE are male. There is no such gender differentiation evident among all remaining CAO applicants and HEAR and DARE applicants. In terms of country of origin, while the majority of all applicants were born in Ireland, almost one quarter of HEAR applicants were born in a country other than Ireland. It would appear that the HEAR scheme in particular is attracting more diverse applicants than the general CAO, with24% of the former born abroad, relative to 19% of the latter). These patterns are also replicated in terms of nationality[24].

Table 3.3a also provides information on the distribution of CAO applicants by the previous education institution attended. The majority of applicants (70%) have previously attended mainstream second level schools in the Republic of Ireland. Within this group, there is considerable variation. While over half of DARE applicants and non-scheme applicants had previously attended a secondary school, this was the case of 48% of HEAR applicants and HEAR & DARE applicants. Further, almost a third of HEAR applicants had previously attended vocational schools compared to 18% of non-scheme applicants. The number of

[24] The majority of CAO applicants who were born outside of Ireland or who have a nationality other than Irish have Leaving Certificate examination results (93% and 94% respectively). The majority of these young people previously attended secondary schools.

applications from VTOS and adult education centres represent 1.4% of all CAO applications, and are highest among HEAR applicants (1%).

Table 3.3 also highlights significant differences in average levels of Leaving Certificate performance among applicants with Leaving Certificate data. On average, non-scheme applicants achieve higher levels of attainment relative to other groups. HEAR applicants on average have similar but marginally higher levels of attainment than DARE applicants, while those who have applied to both HEAR and DARE have significantly lower average levels of attainment.

Table 3.3a Profile of all CAO applicants aged under 23, 2011

	HEAR Applicants	**DARE Applicants**	**HEAR & DARE Applicants**	**All Remaining CAO Applicants ('Non Scheme')**
Gender				
Female	58.6	44.3	49.8	50.8
Male	41.4	55.7	50.2	49.2
Country of Birth				
Ireland	75.7	88.1	84.9	81.1
Britain and UK	8.9	7.0	8.4	9.1
EU other	6.1	1.1	1.9	3.8
Rest of World	9.3	3.8	4.8	6.0
Nationality				
Irish	85.7	96.2	94.7	88.9
Nationality other than Irish	14.3	3.8	5.3	11.1
School Type				
Secondary	48.2	57.2	48.0	54.4
Comm/Comp	18.9	15.9	18.5	14.1
Vocational	30.8	15.1	31.2	18.2
Entrant type				
Leaving Certificate	90.7	84.9	91.6	59.7
Average LC Points	328.63	323.42	297.73	361.18

Further multivariate analyses were undertaken to consider the profile of HEAR and DARE applicants relative to all other non-scheme CAO applicants. In doing so, we compare the applicants in terms of gender, age, nationality, Leaving Certificate performance, and the type of school that they attended. The results are presented in Table 3.3b[25].

Table 3.3b: Multinomial Regression Model of the Factors Associated with Application to Supplementary Admissions Route, 2011 Applicants

	HEAR Applicant verses all other CAO Applicants			DARE Applicant versus all other CAO applicants		
	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>|z|	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>|z|
Constant	-1.710	0.044	0.000	-3.133	0.072	0.000
Male	-0.527	0.030	0.000	0.079	0.046	0.086
Ref: Female						
Age 18	-0.146	0.031	0.000	0.513	0.052	0.000
Age 19	-0.079	0.059	0.183	1.078	0.077	0.000
Ref: Age 17 or younger						
Nationality other than Irish	0.675	0.048	0.000	-1.000	0.134	0.000
Ref: Irish national						
Up to 150 points	-0.411	0.076	0.000	0.055	0.116	0.633
155-200	-0.173	0.067	0.009	0.409	0.095	0.000
205-250	-0.001	0.058	0.982	0.336	0.087	0.000
255-300	0.063	0.053	0.236	0.420	0.078	0.000
305-350	0.121	0.050	0.016	0.219	0.076	0.004
405-450	-0.187	0.053	0.000	-0.407	0.086	0.000
455-500	-0.460	0.061	0.000	-0.793	0.104	0.000
505-600	-0.889	0.075	0.000	-1.430	0.135	0.000
Ref: 355-400						
Community/Comprehensive	0.251	0.040	0.000	0.085	0.062	0.170
Vocational	0.070	0.038	0.067	-0.126	0.064	0.049
Fee Grind School	-1.810	0.227	0.000	0.326	0.118	0.006
Ref: Secondary						
DEIS School	1.535	0.037	0.000	0.059	0.077	0.444
Ref: Non DEIS						
Sample is restricted to those who had completed at least 6 subjects in the Leaving Certificate, those who were not FETAC applicants, and those under the age of 23.						
N=42,335; χ^2=4167.04, R^2=.08						

[25] For the purpose of these analyses, applicants who applied to both HEAR and DARE are included in the 'DARE applicant' category.

The results indicate that there are clear differences in the characteristics of applicant across admission routes. HEAR applicants are significantly less likely to be male than female compared all other applicants. HEAR applicants are more likely to be of a nationality other than Irish than all other CAO applicants. In terms of performance in the Leaving Certificate, HEAR applicants are less likely to have achieved very low points (less than 200) than an average Leaving Certificate performance, but more likely to have achieved just under the average Leaving Certificate points than all CAO applicants (under 355). HEAR applicants are also less likely to achieve over 400 points relative to all CAO applicants. In terms of the types of schools that HEAR applicants are making the transition from; HEAR applicants are significantly more likely to have attended a community/comprehensive school than a secondary school. HEAR applicants are also more likely to be making the transition from a DEIS school than all other CAO applicants, and less likely to be coming from private fee-paying or 'grind' schools.

3.3 Complete versus Incomplete HEAR Applications

A distinction can be made between applications to the HEAR scheme for which complete information is received relative to applications for which incomplete information is received. Typically, in the first instance, an application is recorded as incomplete if the correct financial documentation is not submitted.

Analyses were undertaken to examine the characteristics of applicants who submit incomplete applications. In the interviews with stakeholders, at times there were concerns that the application process may deter some young people from applying, due to the volume of paperwork required. The analyses presented here do not tell us anything about the body of second level students who are encouraged to apply to higher education as a direct result of the scheme. However, among the pool of applicants that have applied, we can consider if the application process generates a bias in favour of particular applicants through its documentation requirements.

The models presented here draw on the administrative HEAR Form and CAO data provided by the Central Applications Office (CAO). The models include a range of individual characteristics (gender, age, country of birth, exemptions); a broad range of family

characteristics (socio-economic group[26], family structure, household economic status), a measurement of the socio-economic profile of the area (based on the deprivation index), and finally a number of school characteristics (school sector, DEIS status). Table 3.4 presents the results of two logistic regression models of the factors associated with incomplete HEAR applications in 2010 and 2012[27]. Both years were examined due to changes in the application process over time. The analyses are restricted to applicants who are aged 23 or younger on the 1st January in the year of college entry, as well as those who have data for each of the variables in use.

A number of patterns are evident for both years. Younger applicants are less likely to submit an incomplete application than older applicants. For both years, applicants who have received an NUI exemption for Irish[28] are also less likely to have submitted incomplete applications than those who have not. While country of birth does not distinguish those who had submitted complete versus incomplete applications in 2010, by 2012, applicants who were born in EU countries are significantly more likely to submit an incomplete HEAR application.

While family structure is not a determinant of submitting an incomplete application in 2010, it clearly is in 2012. That is, the children of lone parents are more likely to submit an incomplete application than two-parent families. Further, in both years, families with a smaller number of dependents are significantly more likely to submit an incomplete application than families with three to five dependents. When the dominant economic situation of the family is considered, applicants from economically inactive households, and applicants from unemployed households are significantly *less* likely to submit incomplete applications than applicants from employed households[29]. All else being equal, the socio-economic profile of the area did not distinguish those who submitted an incomplete application in 2010 from those who submitted a complete application, with all supporting

[26] Detailed information on household SEG is available only for the 2012 data.

[27] Analyses were undertaken in a stepwise manner, entering groups of variables at separate stages. Final models only are presented here.

[28] A CAO applicant may receive an NUI Irish language exemption if the candidate was born outside the Republic of Ireland; or if the candidate was born in the Republic of Ireland and spent a considerable amount of time outside the Irish education system (i.e. primary education up to the age of 11 outside the Republic of Ireland; or had at least three years of their post-primary education elsewhere). Candidates may also receive an exemption from Irish and/or a third language if they have been exempted in school from the study of Irish, because of a Specific Learning Disability affecting basic language skills in the mother tongue; or if they have been diagnosed with a Specific Learning Disability.

[29] These households are defined as households where at least one parent present is in employment, either paid employment or self-employment.

documentation. However, greater variation was evident in 2012, whereby applicants living in areas that are deemed to be marginally above the average deprivation rate are more likely to submit an incomplete application than those living in more disadvantaged areas. Finally, the characteristics of the schools that applicants attend were also considered. There were no significant differences across school sectors, but by 2012, applicants who had previously attended a DEIS school were significantly less likely to submit an incomplete application than those attending non-DEIS schools.

The final model of Table 3.4 includes socio-economic group information for each applicant in 2012. All else being equal, applicants from the targeted SEG groups are significantly less likely to submit an incomplete application than other groups, while those for whom SEG information was not provided at application were significantly more likely to submit an incomplete application to HEAR in 2012. We should however keep in mind that those from unclassified SEG groups are likely to be a heterogeneous group.

Table 3.4: Logistic models of factors associated with incomplete HEAR applications in 2010 and 2012

	(1) **2010 Applicants**	(2) **2012 Applicants**	(3) **2012 Applicants**
Female	-0.11*	-0.01	-0.01
Ref: male	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Age 15/16	-0.25*	-0.34**	-0.32**
	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Age 17	-0.39***	-0.52***	-0.51***
	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Age 18	-0.34**	-0.53***	-0.52***
Ref: 19 or older	(0.11)	(0.09)	(0.10)
UK	0.13	0.10	0.11
	(0.16)	(0.19)	(0.19)
All other EU	-0.03	0.25*	0.25*
	(0.16)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Outside EU	-0.06	0.12	0.05
Ref: Ireland	(0.14)	(0.12)	(0.12)
NUI Irish Exemption	-0.42*	-0.81***	-0.82***
Ref: no exemption	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)
Other Language exemption	0.21	-0.17	-0.14
Ref: no exemption	(0.32)	(0.38)	(0.38)
HH SEG Target Group			-0.22**
			(0.07)
SEG HH information unknown			0.30***
Ref: SEG non-targeted groups			(0.09)
Lone Parent Family	-0.01	0.38***	0.25***
Ref: Two parent family	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
3-5 family dependents	-0.19**	-0.17*	-0.16*
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.07)
6+ family dependents	-0.21	-0.35	-0.35
Ref: 2 or less dependents	(0.17)	(0.26)	(0.26)
Economically inactive household	-0.38***	-0.37***	-0.43***
	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Unemployed household	-0.38***	-0.27***	-0.30***
Ref: Employed household	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Affluent area	-0.07	0.08	0.09
	(0.09)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Marginally above area	0.12	0.16*	0.16*
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Marginally below area	0.05	0.09	0.09
Ref: Disadvantaged area	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Community/Comprehensive	-0.13	-0.08	-0.09
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Vocational	-0.05	0.07	0.06
Ref: Secondary	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
DEIS	-0.03	-0.25***	-0.24***
Ref: Non DEIS	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Constant	0.05	-0.55***	-0.43***
	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.12)
N	6460	7532	7532

Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Among the pool of applicants to the HEAR scheme, there is little evidence to suggest that those in more disadvantaged circumstances (attending DEIS schools, in economically inactive or unemployed households, living in disadvantaged communities) are more likely to submit an incomplete application. In fact, they are less likely to do so. One interpretation of this finding is that applicants who begin the application process but who come to believe that their probability of success is low, fail to complete their applications; the disadvantaged groups referred to here do not fall into this category. Another possibility is that the most disadvantaged are accustomed to form-filling and collating documents and so do not find the process off-putting, or that accessing such information is more straight-forward to obtain. A third possibility is that applicants draw on the support provided by schools and the HEAR scheme when submitting their application.

However, the analyses reveal two particular groups that may warrant greater attention: those born in EU countries and the children of lone parents, both of whom are more likely to submit incomplete applications. It may be that these groups experience difficulty in accessing the required documentation due to parental separation or language difficulties.

3.4 Eligibility for HEAR

Eligibility for the HEAR scheme is dependent on completion of the online application as well as provision of supporting documentation. Eligibility is also dependent on the applicant reaching the criteria for the scheme. Over the period 2010-2012, eligibility for HEAR has increased from 29 percent of all applications with at least some supporting documentation in 2010, to 46 percent of all applications in 2012 (see Table 3.5). Among completed applications, eligibility has increased from 46 per cent in 2010 to 61 per cent in 2012.

Table 3.5: HEAR Applications and Eligibility 2010-2012

Year	Total Applications	Eligible (all)	% Eligible of all applications	Total Complete Applications	Number Eligible Complete Applications	% of all Complete applications
2010	6,821	1,954	28.6	4,227	1,949	46.1
2011	7,304	2,781	38.1	5,137	2,776	54.0
2012	7,626	3,479	45.5	5,389	3,302	61.3

As before, logit analyses were undertaken to examine the characteristics of those who reach eligibility, conditional on submission of a complete application (Table 3.6). For both 2010 and 2012, we find that applicants from disadvantaged areas are more likely to be eligible than applicants from other areas, and that applicants from vocational schools are more likely to be eligible that applicants from secondary schools. It is worth noting that while having been born in an EU country (other than the UK) does not affect the probability of success in this model in 2010. In 2012, applicants born in non-UK EU countries are *more* likely to be eligible for HEAR, while those born in any country outside of the EU are significantly *less* likely to achieve eligibility for HEAR than applicants born in Ireland. Again, these results are sensitive to the inclusion of local area indicators, which suggests that the local area deprivation indicator is strongly correlated with the country of birth of applicants.

While in 2010 applicants with an exemption for Irish were more likely to achieve eligibility for HEAR, eligibility did not vary by exemption in Irish in 2012. Further, in 2012, applicants from lone parent families are significantly more likely to be deemed eligible for the scheme than those in two parent families. By 2012 we also find that females are significantly less likely to be eligible for scheme, all else being equal, than males.

Table 3.6: Logistic regression model of factors associated with eligibility for HEAR in 2010 and in 2012 (conditional on submission of complete application)

	(1) **2010 Applications**	(2) **2012 Applications**
Female	0.05	-0.12*
Ref: Male	(0.06)	(0.06)
Age 15/16	0.01	0.01
	(0.15)	(0.13)
Age 17	0.10	0.05
	(0.13)	(0.11)
Age 18	0.01	-0.02
Ref: 19 or older	(0.14)	(0.12)
UK	-0.27	-0.38
	(0.20)	(0.20)
Non-UK EU	-0.24	0.25*
	(0.15)	(0.13)
Outside EU	-0.07	-0.24*
Ref: Ireland	(0.16)	(0.12)
Irish Exemption	0.32*	-0.06
Ref: no exemption	(0.15)	(0.12)
Language exemption	-0.14	0.06
Ref: no exemption	(0.37)	(0.30)
Lone Parent Family	0.33***	0.44***
Ref: Two parent family	(0.06)	(0.07)
Community/Comprehensive	-0.05	-0.02
	(0.08)	(0.07)
Vocational	0.35***	0.23***
Ref: Secondary	(0.07)	(0.07)
Fee-Paying School	-0.30	-0.53
Ref: Non fee-paying	(0.32)	(0.37)
Affluent area	-0.90***	-1.38***
	(0.08)	(0.13)
Marginally above average	-0.90***	-1.39***
	(0.08)	(0.09)
Marginally below average	-0.86***	-1.24***
Ref: Disadvantaged	(0.08)	(0.08)
Constant	0.23*	1.42***
	(0.14)	(0.13)
N	4224	5546

Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

A number of stakeholders had expressed concerns about the application process and eligibility. Typically there was a concern that the application process may deter some young people from applying, or from submitting complete applications due to the volume of paperwork required. While we cannot address the first issue, it is evident from the two sets of analyses presented here that a range of factors (individual characteristics, language exemptions and school characteristics, local area characteristics) exert an influence on the submission of complete application for the scheme. Further, there is evidence to suggest that conditional on submission of a complete application, applicants from lone parent households, those who attended a vocational school and those living in the most disadvantaged areas are more likely to become eligible for the scheme, relative to their counterparts. Attention should be placed on understanding why all else being equal, we find that females and applications from young people born outside of the EU are less likely to be eligible in 2012.

3.5 Criteria for Eligibility: HEAR Indicators

Analyses of the combination of HEAR indicators contributing to eligibility

HEAR applicants are required to meet a range of financial and social/cultural indicators in order to reach eligibility. A summary of the HEAR indicators and changes in their terms is presented in Table 3.7.

Descriptive analyses were undertaken to examine the combination of indicators that were met among those who were deemed eligible, and are shown in Figure 3.1 below. The guidelines indicate that in order for applicants to become eligible, they must meet the income indicator (the HEAR income limit) *plus a combination of 2 other indicators* to be eligible for HEAR. The combinations are:

- Income and medical as well as either the SEG, DEIS or area indicator.
- Income and welfare as well as either the SEG, DEIS or area indicator.
- Income and SEG as well as the DEIS or area indicator.
- Income and DEIS and area indicator.

Table 3.7: Summary of Indicators

Indicator	**Description**	**Changes between 2010-2012**
Income	Your family income falls on or below the HEAR income limit in 2010. This is calculated by how many children there are in the family, the number of people in the family in full-time education, and the amount parents earned in income during the year ending December 2010.	In 2010 the income cut-off in that year was the same as for the student grant; this was €51,380 for families with up to three dependent children, €56,460 for families with between four and seven dependent children and €61,295 for families with eight or more dependent children. In the following year, 2011, the income cut-offs were cut by 5% (to €48,811, €53,637 and €58,230 respectively for the three family sizes), and they have remained at this reduced level ever since. The income cut-offs are different to reckonable income limits for the student grant[30].
Medical/GP Visit Card	Your family has a Medical Card/GP Visit Card that was in date on 31 December 2011	
Means Tested Social Welfare	Your family received a means-tested payment from the Department of Social Protection for at least 26 weeks in 2010	
Socio-Economic Group	You belong to a group that is under-represented in higher education based on the occupation and employment status of your parent(s) or guardian(s). Under-represented socio-economic groups are non-manual workers, semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers and agricultural workers.	For the 2013 cycle, in the case of applicants from dual parent households, both parents must belong to an under-represented group.
DEIS School Attendance	You completed five years in a second level school that takes part in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) scheme run by the Department of Education and Skills	The HEAR scheme was opened up to all students (not just those attending DEIS schools) in 2010.
Area Profile	You live in an area in which there is concentrated disadvantage – in other words, an area where for example, there is high unemployment and poverty and very few facilities for the community (For 2010 this was those falling into the categories 'very disadvantaged', 'extremely disadvantaged' and 'disadvantaged').	Up until 2012 Electoral Divisions were used to define areas, from 2012 onwards 'small areas' were used. Small areas have a minimum of 50 households and a mean of just under 100.

[30] http://www.studentfinance.ie/downloads/1369145623/2013_14_reckonable_income_limits.pdf

Figure 3.1 Proportion of all HEAR Eligible Applicants that met each of the combination of HEAR indicators

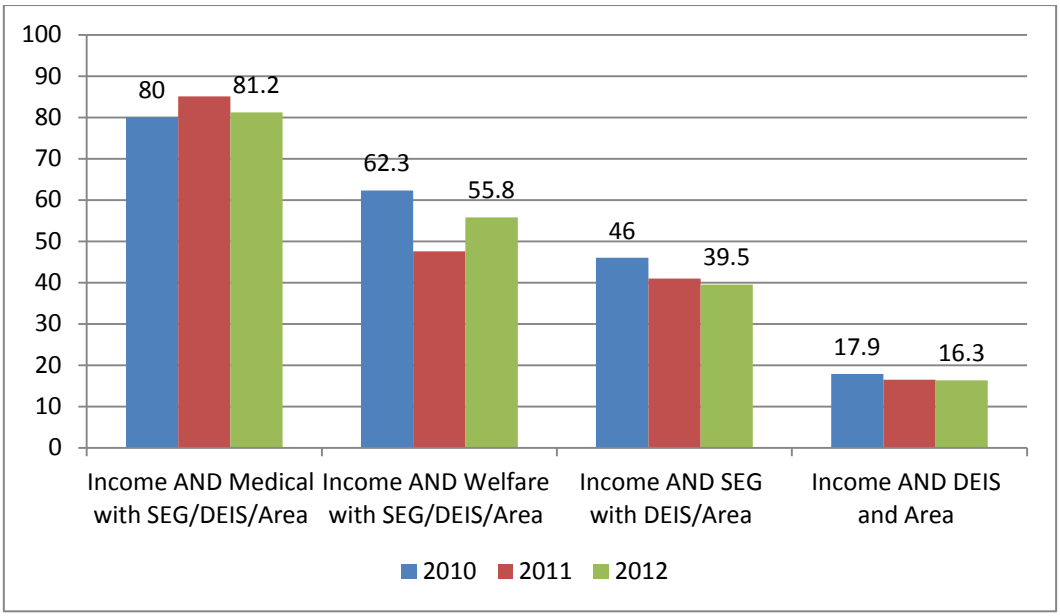
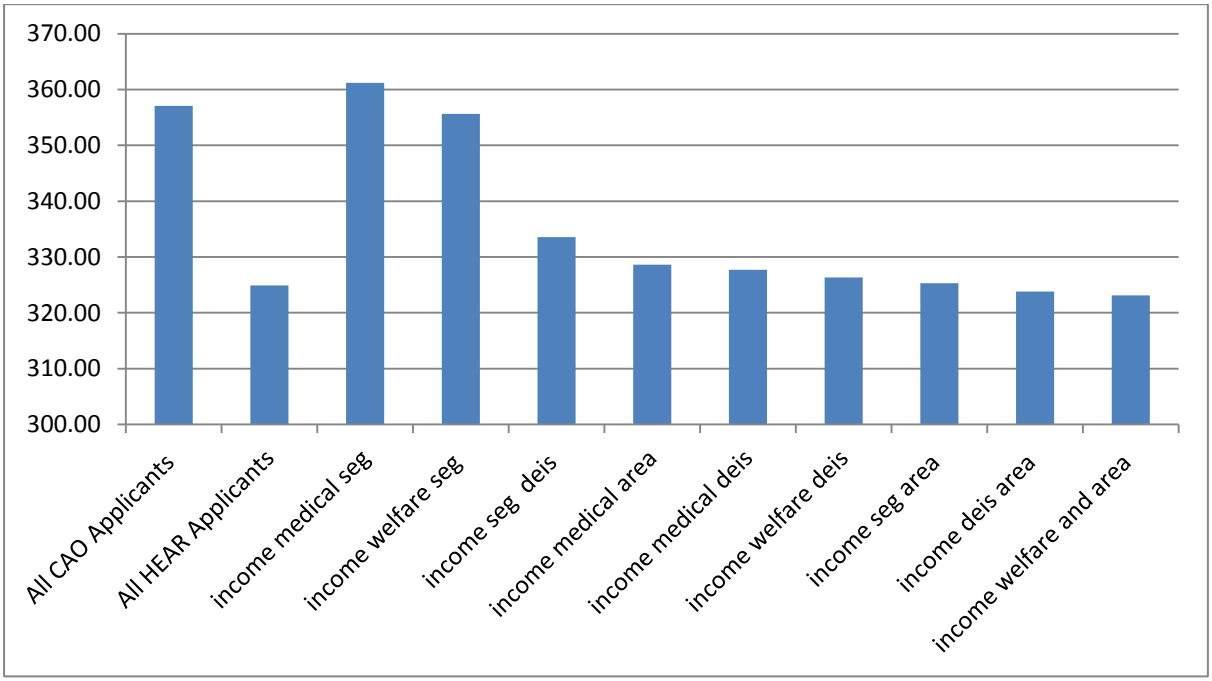


Figure 3.1 illustrates that the vast majority – about 80% - of those who reach eligibility for HEAR do so on the combination of income and medical indicators, with either SEG/DEIS or the Area indicator. In 2012, approximately 56% of HEAR eligible applicants were deemed eligible on the grounds of income and welfare indicators, with either SEG/DEIS or the Area indicator. Perhaps surprisingly, the share of applicants reaching eligibility on these combinations has declined somewhat over time. Also in decline are those who reach eligibility with the combination of income and SEG indicators with either the DEIS or area indicator. Finally, just 16% of applicants who were deemed eligible did so on the grounds of meeting the income, DEIS and area indicators.

Figure 3.2 illustrates the average Leaving Certificate points that are achieved by all CAO applicants and all HEAR applicants, but also HEAR applicants according to the combination of indicators that were met. On average, those who apply to the schemes and achieve eligibility on the income, medical card/GP card and SEG combination, as well as those who achieve eligibility on the income, social welfare and SEG combination of indicators have higher average levels of LC performance than other eligible applicants. Applicants for whom eligibility is achieved through DEIS and/or the disadvantaged area indicator typically have lower levels of LC performance.

Figure 3.2: Average Levels of LC Performance by the combination of HEAR indicators that eligible applicants have met



The average LC attainment of all CAO applicants and HEAR applicants was also examined according to the number of HEAR indicators that applicants reached eligibility for (not shown here). The findings suggest that those who reach eligibility on all six indicators have substantially lower levels of attainment in the Leaving Certificate (an average of 314 points), compared to other applicants.

Robustness of the HEAR indicators: Administrative data

Administrative data gathered by the scheme allows us to test the indicators against other socio-economic variables in the data. For 2010, we have detailed information on the degree of deprivation in the neighbourhood of all HEAR *applicants.* Binary cross tabulations were run to consider the pattern across each of the HEAR indicators by neighbourhood deprivation and the results are presented in Table 3.8 below.

The analyses suggest that the variation across the indicators is not as strong as one may anticipate. For example, 50% of those living in extremely disadvantaged areas – in which just 2.6% of applicants live – are deemed eligible under the income criterion, while a similar

proportion (47.9%) of those from very affluent areas, in which 1.3% of applicants live, qualify under the income criterion. Patterns for the other indicators are similar, with the exception of attendance at a DEIS school, under which indicator only 8.5% of applicants living in very affluent areas live, compared to 42.6% of those living in very disadvantaged areas. To the extent that students draw their educational expectations from peers in their neighbourhood, this analysis suggests that many successful HEAR applicants are not those in most need of encouragement to attend higher education.

Table 3.8: Proportion of HEAR applicants in each neighbourhood deprivation category who were deemed eligible on each indicator

Income Indicator	**Not Eligible**	**Eligible**	**Not Screened for Financial**	**All applicants**
Extremely Disadvantaged	19.4	50.0	30.6	2.61
Very disadvantaged	15.4	56.0	28.6	7.19
Disadvantaged	16.6	56.0	27.4	13.27
Marginally below average	17.7	53.7	28.6	30.74
Marginally above average	17.9	52.7	29.4	32.46
Affluent	16.9	54.3	28.8	11.71
Very Affluent	25.5	47.9	26.6	1.29
Medical Card Indicator				
Extremely Disadvantaged	13.7	55.8	30.5	
Very disadvantaged	17.0	54.3	28.7	
Disadvantaged	19.9	53.1	26.9	
Marginally below average	20.1	51.3	28.6	
Marginally above average	19.3	51.3	29.4	
Affluent	19.3	52.0	28.7	
Very Affluent	24.5	48.9	26.6	
Means-Tested Benefit Indicator				
Extremely Disadvantaged	31.6	37.9	30.5	
Very disadvantaged	34.2	37.1	28.7	
Disadvantaged	40.3	32.8	26.9	
Marginally below average	41.8	29.6	28.6	
Marginally above average	42.9	27.7	29.4	
Affluent	43.1	28.5	28.4	
Very Affluent	36.1	37.2	26.7	
Socio-Economic Group Indicator				
Extremely Disadvantaged	27.9	41.6	30.5	
Very disadvantaged	23.7	47.6	28.7	
Disadvantaged	24.5	48.6	26.9	
Marginally below average	27.5	43.9	28.6	
Marginally above average	26.7	43.8	29.5	
Affluent	25.7	45.5	28.8	
Very Affluent	27.7	45.7	26.6	
DEIS School Indicator				
Extremely Disadvantaged	26.8	42.6	30.6	
Very disadvantaged	32.3	39.1	28.6	
Disadvantaged	41.3	31.8	26.9	
Marginally below average	48.2	23.1	28.7	
Marginally above average	52.6	17.9	29.5	
Affluent	55.1	16.0	28.9	
Very Affluent	64.8	8.5	26.6	
Disadvantaged Area Eligibility Indicator				
Extremely Disadvantaged	0	69.5	30.5	
Very disadvantaged	0	71.3	28.6	
Disadvantaged	0	73.0	26.9	
Marginally below average	71.3	0	28.6	
Marginally above average	70.5	0	29.4	
Affluent	73.4	0	26.6	
Very Affluent	71.3	0	28.6	

Administrative data gathered by the scheme also allowed an examination of the indicators at individual level among HEAR applicants. Table 3.9 presents information on the correlation between each measure of disadvantage based on those who were screened for financial information. The combination of HEAR indicators can be examined according to their strength of the correlation with each other, starting with a correlation close to zero for the income and area indicators in 2010 and 2012, and increasing to a correlation of .323 for the combination of medical and welfare indicators.

The strongest correlations are between income and welfare; and medical and welfare. That is, applicants who are eligible on one are likely to become eligible on the other. However, in general, the association between indicators tends to be relatively weak, which is to be expected given that these are correlations within a relatively homogenous population. Furthermore, over time, the strength of the correlation between indicators on which applicants were deemed eligible has changed. This is particularly the case of the Income and DEIS indicators; but also the Socio-Economic and DEIS indicators; and SEG and Area indicators each in 2012 are no longer significantly correlated. It is unclear why such change is evident across both years.

Table 3.9: Relationship between the HEAR Indicators in 2010 and 2012

		INCOME	MEDICAL	WELFARE	SEG	DEIS	AREA
INCOME	2010	1	.067**	.206**	.048**	.196**	.006
	2012	1	.071**	.174**	.064**	.013	.010
MEDICAL	2010		1	.293**	.032*	-.052*	.040**
	2012		1	.323**	.018	-.089**	.007
WELFARE	2010			1	.048**	-.019	.056**
	2012			1	.031*	-.028*	.059**
SEG	2010				1	.057**	.061**
	2012				1	.016	.026
DEIS	2010					1	.183**
	2012					1	.187**
Overall Eligibility	2010	.671**	.247**	.283**	.282**	.245**	.145**
	2012	.574**	.241**	.232**	.474**	.262**	.244**
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).							
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).							

The last two lines of Table 3.9 then present the correlations between the HEAR measure of disadvantage (overall eligibility for HEAR) and each HEAR indicator attached to them or their neighbourhood. We find a consistent pattern between 2010 and 2012, as each of the indicators are significantly correlated with overall eligibility. The ‘strongest’ correlation has remained relatively consistent over time, but has diminished somewhat – that of overall eligibility and income. There are two explanations; by 2012 the correlation between overall eligibility and socio-economic group has increased to .474. In the same year, the correlation between overall eligibility and area has increased to .244.

Robustness of the HEAR indicators: Use of EU-SILC Data

To complement the previous analysis of the HEAR Form data, the Irish component of the EU-SILC[31] data can also be used to examine the incidence of some of the indicators used to establish eligibility for the HEAR scheme. This dataset contains information on household income, receipt of a medical card and/or many means-tested benefits, occupations and education levels of individuals in each household as well as various indicators of household financial deprivation. Using this information, we can investigate the robustness of the HEAR indicators. The most recent year for which EU-SILC data are available is 2011; this is the income year that was relevant for the most recent group of HEAR entrants, those who applied to enter third level institutions in 2012. For some purposes, we also use data from 2009, which was the income year relevant to entrants in the first year that HEAR was opened up to students attending all schools, 2010. In all cases, we restrict our analyses to households containing individuals aged16-22, since this is the age group that is eligible to apply for HEAR. For each analysis, we report the weighted results, using the weights included with the dataset[32].

The household incomes used in calculating HEAR entitlement differ from the household income in the EU-SILC data in several important respects. Several categories of income are excluded from the HEAR calculation, including Child Benefit, education grants and some child-related social welfare payments. Not all of these income sources are identifiable in the data. Child benefit entitlements can be calculated using the number of children and, if aged 16 or 17 (or 18 for 2009)[33], whether still in full-time education. Grant payments, Family Income Supplement and Carer's Allowance are recorded and so can be excluded. However, a few of the less common child-related social welfare payments cannot be identified. A more accurate household income variable would place more households below the threshold in each year, but the difference should be small.

[31] The EU-SILC is a household survey conducted by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) which collects a large number of variables on a reasonably large sample of households every year.

[32] However, it is important to note that these weights are designed to gross up to population representativeness in terms of sex, four age categories, region and six household composition types. The age categories and household types used do not coincide with those required for our analysis, which are households containing 1-3, 4-7 and 8+ dependent children and so it is not clear that the weights provided are appropriate. Because weights designed specifically for our purposes are not available, the analysis should be taken as indicative rather than strictly accurate.

[33] In 2009, payments of Child Benefit in respect of children aged 18 were being phased out, and were paid at half the normal rate.

The following table summarizes the proportion of 16-22 year olds living in households with income below the HEAR threshold relevant to their household size in each year.

Table 3.10: Percentage of 16-22 year olds Living in Households with Low Income, for 2010 and 2012 entrants

	% Below Threshold	
	2009 (2010 entrants)	2011 (2012 entrants)
Weighted	46.8	53.4
Unweighted	*44.3*	*54.3*

From Table 3.10 we see that over half of all Irish households containing 16-22 year olds had incomes below the relevant thresholds in 2011. We also see that the income threshold had less 'bite' in 2011 than in 2009, with a higher proportion of households lying below the threshold in that year. This suggests that in the first instance, those who can consider applying to the scheme represent about half of the relevant national age cohort[34].

Since eligibility for a medical card largely depends on household income, it is useful to compare the bite of the medical card indicator with the household income indicator. At first glance, the medical card income thresholds are much lower than the HEAR income thresholds, but in fact it is difficult to compare them directly, as allowance is made under the medical card eligibility rules for rent and mortgage interest paid, childcare costs and reasonable travel-to-work costs, most of which cannot be directly observed in the EU-SILC. Moreover, it is a rule of medical card eligibility that anyone who has been unemployed or in receipt of a One Parent Family Payment for 12 months or more may retain the card for 3 years after taking up employment. Hence, it is not clear *a priori* that the medical card income threshold will substantially restrict the number of eligible HEAR applicants and only empirical analysis can establish this.

In 2009, 36.7% of 16-22 year olds had a medical card; by 2011 this had risen to 42.0%. Looking just at those households whose incomes were below the HEAR income thresholds, in 2009, 61.3% of 16-22 year olds in households with income below the relevant HEAR threshold held a medical card. In 2011, the corresponding figure was 66.1%. In other words, in that year, only 34% of 16-22 year olds living in households with incomes that would have

[34] In order to be eligible for HEAR, applicants must reach the income threshold in the first instance, and then adhere to at least one of the combination of eligibility indicators.

qualified them for HEAR under the income criterion would *not* have met the medical card eligibility criterion.

Using EU-SILC, we can also examine the proportion of 16-22 year olds in the general population who qualify under some of the other indicators. The proportion of the general population that would qualify under the Socio Economic Group (SEG) indicator (Indicator 4) can be calculated using information contained in the dataset on individuals' occupations.[35] Here, we used the current definition of the Socio-Economic Group indicator recommended by the HEAR SEG Advisory Board, under which either parent having a high occupational group disqualifies the applicant under the SEG indicator.

Several different categories of benefits are recorded separately in the EU-SILC data, including Job Seekers Allowance, Family Income Supplement, Social Welfare Allowance, Carers Allowance, Lone Parent Allowance and Disability Allowance. These are all means-tested benefits, and so a variable was constructed indicating receipt of mean-tested benefits by anyone aged over 35 in the household.[36] This will allow us to examine the proportion of the population that qualifies under Indicator 3. Unfortunately, there are no variables available in the EU-SILC data that would allow us to examine Indicators 5 (attendance at a DEIS school) or 6 (living in a disadvantaged area).

Table 3.11 shows the proportion of the general population of 16-22 year olds who qualify under each of the eligibility criteria that can be identified in the data, both individually and in various combinations. Singly, household receipt of a means-tested benefit is the most restrictive indicator; this is also true when added to income. The final two rows of the table show combinations of indicators that would qualify a young person for HEAR; in 2011, just 11.1% of 16-22 year olds would meet the 'Income plus Means Tested Benefit (MBT) plus SEG' combination of eligibility criteria, down from 14.4% in 2009. The proportion qualifying under the 'Income plus Medical Card plus SEG' combination rose slightly between the two years in the general population, and far more young people (19.1% in 2011) are eligible under this combination.

[35] The occupational group provided in the dataset was translated into the SEG using the list of constituent occupations in each of the socio-economic groups given in Appendix 6 of Volume 8 of Census of Population 2006.

[36] Establishing family relationships between individuals within a household is not always straightforward in the EU-SILC, and so the 35 year old cut off was used as a proxy for parents.

Table 3.11: Percentage of 16-22 year olds Living in Households that Qualify Under Various Indicators and Combinations of Indicators

	% Qualifying	
	2009 (2010 entrants)	2011 (2012 entrants)
Income	46.8	53.4
Medical Card	36.7	42.0
Socio-Economic Group (SEG)	42.4	40.1
Means-Tested Benefit (MTB)	28.6	31.7
Income + Medical Card	28.6	35.3
Income + SEG	27.2	27.9
Income + MTB	24.8	24.1
Income +Medical Card +SEG	17.4	19.1
Income + MTB + SEG	14.4	11.1

Of course, just because a low proportion of the general population would be eligible for the scheme, this does not guarantee that the eligible group coincides with the targeted group – the indicators are not targets in themselves, but proxies for educational and financial disadvantage. It is therefore interesting to assess the correlation between the eligibility criteria that can be identified in the data and more direct indicators of disadvantage.

One interpretation of the aim of the HEAR scheme is that it should encourage students from families that have lower levels of education or lower educational expectations to apply for third level. A second interpretation is that it can address credit constraints facing the most financially deprived households. The maintenance grant aims to address the direct cost of attendance at third level, but the additional funding available through the HEAR scheme could partly address the opportunity cost of third level attendance for students from poor families who might have been expected to contribute financially to the household once they left school. We address the extent to which the HEAR indicators target these two groups – those with low educational expectations and those who are financially deprived – in turn.

Educational Disadvantage

To capture the incidence of low education households, we constructed a dummy variable indicating a household in which no-one either had a degree level qualification (or higher) or was studying for such a qualification. Within households, having either a parent or sibling in the household who has this high level of education is expected to raise educational

expectations. The following table summarizes the proportion of 16-22 year olds living in households that contain no such degree-holders.

Table 3.12: Percentage of 16-22 year olds Living in 'Low Education' Households By Income Level, Medical Card Holding, Socio-Economic Group, Receipt of Means-Tested Benefits, 2011

	Below Income Threshold	Above Income Threshold	All
Medical Card	64.9	63.3	63.9
No Medical Card	41.4	26.2	31.1
Low SEG Household	61.7	50.7	58.1
Not Low SEG Household	52.5	24.4	36.4
MTB[37] Household	61.2	58.9	59.6
Non-MTB Household	54.9	26.3	38.4
All	57.3	30.9	45.1

The first two rows of Table 3.12 show that in 2011, for 16-22 year olds living in households whose income was below the HEAR threshold and who held medical cards, 64.9% lived in a household where no-one either had a degree or was studying for one, compared to 26.2% of 16-22 year olds living in households who were above the income threshold and held no medical card, a more than two-fold difference. Having a medical card alone increases the probability of living in a low education household by a factor of two (31.1% compared to 63.9%).

Turning to the proportion of 16-22 year olds living in households with income below the HEAR threshold and where no-one has an occupation that places them in a high-socio-economic group, we see that 61.7% live in low education households, compared to 24.4% of those whose household income is above the threshold and who have a member with a high SEG – a 2.5-fold difference. Living in a low SEG household alone increases the probability of living in a low-education household by a factor of about 1.6 (58.1% compared to 36.4%).

Finally, the means-tested benefit receipt indicator suggests that 61.2% of 16-22 year olds with household income below the HEAR threshold and in receipt of a means-tested benefit live in low-education households, compared to 26.3% of those whose household income is above the threshold and whose household does not receive a means-tested benefit, so meeting these two criteria increases the probability of living in a low-education household by a factor of about 1.5 (59.6% compared to 38.4%).

[37] MTB: Means-Tested Benefit

In summary, this analysis of those indicators that may be examined using the EU-SILC data suggests that the medical card, low SEG and means-tested benefit receipt indicators are all useful in adding to income as a predictor of low-education households, with medical card receipt slightly more effective in reducing the risk of targeting resources at high education households than the other two indicators.

Table 3.13: Percentage of 16-22 year olds Living in 'Low Education' Households By Combinations of Income Level, Medical Card Holding, Socio-Economic Group, Receipt of Means-Tested Benefits.

	Qualifiers	Non-Qualifiers
Low Income, MTB, Low SEG	64.2	42.5
Low Income, Medical Card, SEG	69.4	39.2

Table 3.12 examines the impact of two of the combinations of indicators that allow applicants to qualify for HEAR on the probability of living in a high education household (based on the previous analyses). The table shows that both combinations – (i) low income, receipt of a means-tested benefit and low socio-economic group; and (ii) low income, medical card holding and low socio-economic group – reduce the probability of a young person coming from a household where educational expectations are likely to be high. As in Table 3.11, it seems that medical card holding is more strongly indicative of a low-education household than receipt of a means-tested benefit. Nevertheless, even in households qualifying under the low income, medical card holding and low SEG indicators, 30.6% contain parents or siblings educated to degree level or studying for a degree. If most HEAR eligible applicants were drawn from this relatively well-educated pool, it would suggest that HEAR was targeting resources at those for whom educational expectations were already quite high.

It is also worth noting that the incidence of low education households among 16-22 year olds who would *not* qualify under these combinations of HEAR indicators is also relatively high, at around 40%.

Low Parental Education

We now turn to young people living in households where there is a low level of *parental* education. Although the above analysis of low education households – including all degree-educated individuals in the household, whether parents or not – is arguably the best way of capturing unobservable factors that feed into a household's educational expectations, 16-22 year olds whose parents do not have a third level degree are those who can be classified as 'first generation' higher education attenders, a group in which policy interest has always been strong.

Table 3.14: Percentage of 16-22 year olds Living in 'Low Parental Education' Households By Income Level, Medical Card Holding, Socio-Economic Group, Receipt of Means-Tested Benefits, 2011

	Below Income Threshold	Above Income Threshold	All
Medical Card	89.2	89.4	89.4
No Medical Card	77.5	54.1	61.4
Low SEG Household	95.7	83.5	92.4
Not Low SEG Household	74.3	50.4	60.7
MTB Household	84.1	71.9	82.1
Non-MTB Household	86.9	56.4	69.4
All	85.6	58.6	73.4

We see from Table 3.14 that for 16-22 year olds living in households whose income was below the HEAR threshold and who held medical cards, 89% lived in a household with low parental education levels compared to 54% of 16-22 year olds living in households who were above the income thresholds and did not hold a medical card. Those who meet the HEAR income threshold and hold a medical card are 1.6 times more likely to be living in a low parental education household than those who have no medical card and live in higher income households.

Turning to the proportion of 16-22 year olds living in households with income below the HEAR threshold and where no-one has an occupation that places them in a high socio-economic group, we see that 95.7% live in low parental education households, compared to 50.4% of those whose household income is above the threshold and who have a member with a high SEG – a 1.9 fold difference. Living in a low SEG household alone increase the

probability of living in a low parental education household by a factor of about 1.5 (92.4% compared to 60.7%).

Moving now to the means-tested benefit receipt indicator, we find that 84.1% of 16-22 year olds with household income below the HEAR threshold and in receipt of a means-tested benefit live in low parental education households, compared to 56.4% of those whose household income above the threshold and whose household does not receive a means-tested benefit – a 1.4 fold difference.

The patterns presented here and in Table 3.12 are very similar in that they each contribute to predicting low parental education households along with income, with targeted SEG slightly more effective in reducing the risk of targeting resources at high education households than the other two indicators.

Table 3.15: Percentage of 16-22 year olds Living in 'Low Parental Education' Households By Combinations of Income Level, Medical Card Holding, Socio-Economic Group, Receipt of Means-Tested Benefits.

	Qualifiers	Non-Qualifiers
Low Income, MTB, Low SEG	91.4	70.8
Low Income, Medical Card, SEG	94.7	67.8

Table 3.15 then examines the impact of two of the necessary combination of indicators that allow applicants to qualify for HEAR on the probability of living in a low parental education household. Both combinations reduce the probability of a young person coming from a household where parental education levels are high. Again, it seems that the combination of reaching the HEAR income threshold, having a medical card and coming from a targeted SEG group is more strongly indicative of living in a household with low parental education levels. Further the potential of bias is reduced among households who qualify under these indicators to between 8.6% and 5.3%.

Financial Deprivation

To assess the suitability of the income and medical card indicators with respect to financial deprivation, similar tabulations to those used to assess educational attainment. For this

analysis, we use the EU-SILC indicator that counts a household as deprived if they cannot afford two or more of 11 named items[38]. The following table summarizes the proportion of 16-22 year olds living in households that are categorized as 'deprived'.

Table 3.16: Percentage of 16-22 year olds Living in 'Deprived' Households By Income Level, Medical Card Holding, Socio-Economic Group, Receipt of Means-Tested Benefits, 2011

	Below Income Threshold	Above Income Threshold	All
Medical Card	43.6	20.3	40.5
No Medical Card	30.5	8.4	14.9
Low SEG Household	40.9	6.7	31.2
Not Low SEG Household	37.5	10.9	22.1
MTB Household	51.7	14.3	44.0
Non-MTB Household	28.9	9.2	17.2
All	39.3	9.9	25.8

In the case of deprivation, it is clear that income is the variable driving its extent. Those living in households with incomes below the HEAR threshold are four times more likely to suffer deprivation than those with incomes above the threshold (39.3% rather than 9.9%). The other indicators do not individually affect the probability of living in a deprived household to the same extent. Those with a medical card are 2.7 times more likely to suffer deprivation than those without (40.5% compared to 14.9%). Those living in a low socio-economic group household are 1.4 times more likely to suffer deprivation than those living with at least one high-SEG person. Those in a household in receipt of a means-tested benefit are 2.6 times more likely to be financially deprived than those not in receipt of such a benefit. On this basis, income is the most effective variable in identifying deprivation.

[38] Watson et al., (2012) report that there is a higher rate of at-risk poverty for older children (12-17) than younger children. Further, they identify a higher deprivation rate evident for children than adults.

Table 3.17: Percentage of 16-22 year olds Living in 'Deprived' Households by Combinations of Income Level, Medical Card Holding, Socio-Economic Group, Receipt of Means-Tested Benefits

	Eligible	Not Eligible
Low Income, MTB, Low SEG	50.3	22.4
Low Income, Medical Card, Low SEG	47.8	20.3

Table 3.15 shows that, for the two combinations of indicators that imply eligibility for HEAR that can be captured using the EU-SILC data, those who qualify under these combinations of indicators are significantly more likely to live in financially deprived households than those who do not qualify – for both the low income plus means-tested benefit plus low SEG combination and the low income plus medical card plus low SEG combination, the incidence of deprivation amongst those who are eligible is about 2.4 times the incidence of deprivation amongst those who are not eligible. Nevertheless, among the 16-22 year olds living in households that would qualify them for HEAR, around half are not living in financially deprived households.

Educational Disadvantage or Financial Deprivation

In order to check the extent to which the above combinations of indicators are useful in picking up young people who are *either* from a household with low educational attainment *or* from one that suffers financial deprivation, a combination variable was constructed which takes the value 1 if the household has low education levels or is deprived and zero if the household has either high education levels or is not deprived. Table 3.16 shows the analysis of this variable.

Table 3.18: Percentage of 16-22 year olds Living in either 'Low Education' or 'Deprived' Households by Combinations of Income Level, Medical Card Holding, Socio-Economic Group, Receipt of Means-Tested Benefits

	Eligible	**Not Eligible**
Low Income, MTB, Low SEG	75.6	51.2
Low Income, Medical Card, Low SEG	74.4	49.1

Table 3.16 shows that about 75% of those who would be deemed HEAR eligible by the two combinations of indicators shown are either from households where no-one has a degree (nor studying for one) or from households that suffer financial deprivation – or both. Of those not eligible, about half are from such households. Notably, however, this implies that about a quarter of 16-22 year olds who would qualify for HEAR are neither from low education households nor from financially deprived ones.

It seems likely that HEAR-eligible applicants are disproportionately drawn from the more highly educated and less financially deprived group of households within the HEAR-eligible group. It would have been useful to have detailed data on household income[39] in order to examine the extent to which HEAR-eligible applicants are drawn from those who are just below the income threshold – and hence also more likely to be at the upper end of the distribution in terms of household education and lack of deprivation. However, it was not possible to provide us with these data in the timescale required. If at some future date, these data can be provided, it will be possible to draw more detailed conclusions regarding the likely level of educational and financial disadvantage of those eligible for the scheme.

3.6 Stakeholder Perspectives of HEAR

We now provide an overview of stakeholder perspectives of HEAR, according to themes that arose. These include perceptions of the development of HEAR before and since 2009; the

[39] Household income is provided by applicant, but only an indicator of whether the applicant was above or below the relevant income threshold was provided to us.

success of the schemes in reaching national targets; perceptions of the HEAR indicators and allocation of places; and finally issues around workload and sustainability.

3.6.1 Development of HEAR

The 'nationalisation' of the scheme (as it is commonly referred to) was perceived to be a key strength of the HEAR scheme. However, a number of internal and external stakeholders questioned the extent to which the scheme(s) could be termed 'national'

> *I suppose another fundamental related point of course is the number of institutions, because again we've moved to the CAO, again there was a rationale beforehand, there was a number of likeminded institutions came to an agreement, they worked with each other, that makes sense, but once you move in to the CAO space again all of a sudden the limited of institutions involved in both schemes begins to make less sense, and less of a rationale... I suppose it surprises me even more that there are a whole range of institutions who are not in the DARE scheme.*

HEAR operators spoke about the move from local access programmes to the national scheme as '*a big leap of faith*' at the time. In general, there was agreement that the expansion of the scheme is working well. It was articulated from the HEAR stakeholders that initially, there were fears that the process would be too complex and too difficult to access for students. Internal stakeholders spoke about the schemes being '*more accessible than it was before when it was linked to colleges*', and the schemes being in general '*more accessible*' and having created a '*big mind shift around access*' and having '*mainstreamed access'*.

> '*previously we worked on a system where we'd take applications into our own office and we'd have a certain time of year where we'd have three or four hundred applications in our office stacked up and putting them into the database and all that. And I suppose there's an acknowledgment in the office that there's a huge amount of work whereas now they go through CAO and there's a different type of role for operators. I don't think it's less busy or less intense it's just not as visible locally.*

> '*I think now that the schemes are, the students apply through the CAO, that is huge, has been a huge of huge benefit to the schemes for applications to make their application to higher education and be able to you know tick additional boxes that bring up other forms. So I think that's kind of created a big mind shift around access because it's now literally been mainstreamed, which has been very, very positive*'.

Another strength of the re-launch of the HEAR scheme was the improvement in information available to potential applicants about the schemes, and the volume of information on the

CAO and Access College websites, as well as the promotion of the schemes to schools and pre-entry support, as carried out by the HEAR operators. Typical comments from internal and external stakeholders were as follows:

> '*there is a wealth of information out there about the schemes [for applicants and their families] that wasn't there before*'.
>
> *'I was doing filing the other day and came across a really old application we had from 2006 and there was family profiles and there was oh my god you'd have to read everything twice to understand what we are asking.*
> *Statement of net worth.*
> *Yeah, there's been huge progress in terms of all the students that we are now able to reach and weren't able to reach in the past, I think that's incredibly positive.*
>
> *I think maybe in terms of accessibility a huge amount of work took place two years ago in terms of looking at our communications and how we communicate with our students. I think it was very, very effective and very successful; our college isn't as accessible as what it can be in terms of speaking plain English. In the past I think we didn't do as well there as what we could have.*
>
> *'I think they use, it's been very effectively, I think, integrated with the career guidance piece in schools and career guidance, because my experience again of career guidance counsellors is that they're actually more aware of HEAR and DARE than they are for example of, you know, student grants' (External Stakeholder)*
>
> *'in terms of just general involvement in work at post primary level I suppose I'd recognize them as important schemes, ones that are reasonably well known within the system I think, that are very well set out and well communicated' (External Stakeholder).*

The agreement around eligibility checks and processes in general was also perceived to be a positive development; and transparency was an issue that external stakeholders also focused on. Just one group raised concern about inconsistency in assessment principles when assessing applications.

> '*Because we all have agreed to the same process for the eligibility checks'.*
>
> *'that's the one thing about the scheme you could say it's a big positive in the fact it's so transparent and the rules are there for everybody you know and it's this black and white you meet it you meet it and that's it'.*
>
> *'that's a very positive thing [about the expansion of the schemes] that it is open and fair in the sense that every leaving cert student in the country can apply for this scheme if they want to'.*

Others spoke at length about the development of the HEAR scheme since it moved to a national project in 2009 and the volume of work that goes into it '*it's the small things that make it'*; '*there's a lot that we do to get it from application to student entry*'. Others commented on the development of the schemes, and the work involved in getting the HEAR scheme to where it is currently. The degree of goodwill among colleagues and stakeholders across institutions promoted the scheme. As one HEAR operator indicated:

> '*I think like I don't think the vast majority of people would never have seen the amount of development work that went on to take it from where it was to where it is now and even the development work that's ongoing like there was huge amount of man-hours put into getting every piece of this done and you are talking about coordination between institutions and I suppose it's a working relationship between people*'.

> '*I think there's lots of goodwill in that we are always hoping it becomes more efficient, that its better from the applicants point of view, that it's all within the CAO*'.

> *I think the networks we have is great as well. We can pick up the phone to other colleagues and institutions and talk to them.*

A number of stakeholders spoke about the HEAR scheme in more nuanced terms, indicating positive and negative aspects to moving to a national scheme from a local scheme. In particular, access staff spoke about how moving to a national scheme required a more 'balanced' view of what could be achieved. For some, this meant less contact with individual students regarding entry to higher education.

> *So I suppose I know there was a big fear of moving to the national scheme that it was going to be very complicated and more difficult for students to access and we are not able to chase up the students, we are not able to give them twenty phone calls to say you sent in the wrong document. And I know we've got feedback from some of our guidance counsellors saying that's really unfair to the real, genuine access student on the ground but there's a balancing act in trying to accommodate a scheme for thousands of students and being able to give that level of support.*

> *It's a national scheme so it's open to every single leaving cert student in the country so it comes down to resources as well. We can't physically go to every single school in the country but I think that's where the communications helps.*

when we were working on the local scheme yes we knew all our students, we knew the background, we knew the circumstances that led to the difficult maths paper or whatever it was, but we could take that into consideration.

[A] disadvantage of national scheme, [is that it] cannot support those who were initially targeted for entry to higher education, but who did not make the points. With the national scheme, they're not re-directed to other pre-entry schemes or further information about educational progression. 'You just could not do it on the scale. It's like, phone calls to students...'

'We would be aware that travellers are not accessing them, do not find them accessible and that there's a number of reasons kind of for that that maybe steps would need to be put in place to make them more accessible for travellers as a route. Feedback we've got as well in terms of the HEAR program going national would be that from local traveller organisations we'd have heard that they don't feel that say for example access officers from local colleges may have come out previously and helped individual students with filling in their applications. And now that it's gone national and it's through the CAO that system no longer happens in some areas and as a result a lot of travellers themselves would struggle with the application process' (External stakeholder)

External stakeholders were largely supportive of both the HEAR and DARE schemes, particularly in their role of 're-balancing' or 'compensating' the opportunities of young people.

Yes, there should be recognition, strong recognition I think, that actually here is a cohort of people who applied because they thought they would need this extra assistance and have been able to get in to their college course of choice without that by dint of the fact that they overcame all of the obstacles that they have, but also acknowledging that there is a range of students who, because of the extent of the challenges, either socio-economic or from a disability point of view, were not able to, able to make the points that they, you know, needed, but were, but could succeed by, by our policy terms rebalancing...

'From an equality perspective, you know, in relation to post primary education that it's probably necessary I would think, that the levels of inequality in terms of access to Third Level education within Ireland had been so seriously askew that you needed positive interventions in terms of applying quotas and, you know, putting special arrangements in place. ...given the structural inequalities in Second Level education and they're structural now, I mean we know that they got worse over the boom time, the more, the greater polarization in the school system increased clustering of very

disadvantaged groups of students in particular schools, so you've got those really challenging schools.

You would hope that in the longer term a different approach might be possible with increased levels of participation. However if you're talking about how ideally an education system should set out its stall in relation to equality, it shouldn't really be dealing with in compensation, it should try to address, whatever inequalities are intrinsic to education itself, it should try to address them at the outset

3.6.2 Success of HEAR in reaching National Targets

Stakeholders were also probed about the success of the HEAR scheme in reaching national targets. At times, internal stakeholders made statements such as '*the numbers are increasing*' or '*the National Access Office would set targets around access and HEAR and DARE are contributing very significantly to those targets for the cohorts that we are talking about*'. Others made more direct statements such as '*HEAR has shown to be a beneficial route for students and it is meeting national targets'.* However other internal stakeholders presented a more unsure view stating '*it wouldn't be easy to comment overall on that thing, but I suppose in general numbers have been increasing*'. Ultimately, there was a general understanding and acknowledgement that the process is actually quite individualised at institutional level. As one member of a focus group put it:

'*In terms of realisation of targets, I think that is really an individual college matter really because each institution would have their own targets and their own quotas you know'.*

In this context, one HEAR operator spoke about the difficulty in deciphering whether and how targets are being met and what areas require further attention due to a lack of regular co-ordinated data around the success of different types of access initiatives at higher education.

The access and the ease of access to data about our students and who we are getting from an institutional point of view is really limited. And it's a very manual process, and it's really on goodwill from your admissions officers, from the CAO to give that data or from UL to give that data. ... You know we get like general okay these are the total amount of eligible applicants or the total amount of students from Dublin or the total amount, but when you are looking at but where did they go and how many met five indicators went to [HEI] over [HEI]. And how many went into a course like Law over a course like you know, general Arts. You know you are not seeing that.

Many of the HEAR institutions work with targeted linked schools through pre-entry supports. There was a concern particularly in some institutions that the HEAR programme was not successful in improving higher education participation rates among those attending the most disadvantaged local schools. There was a strong concern within some of these institutions that the scheme was not '*pushing through'* the work that is currently being undertaken at the pre-entry stage. One access officer stated:

> '*within [our institutional'] cohort of x local schools we would say that there are [a number of]extremely at-need schools within that that we focus a huge amount of our outreach budget and activity on...it's (HEAR) not translating into a scheme that these students are actually able to access. They may not be accessing it for reasons of matriculation and those barriers that we don't have as much influence on, but there is definitely a case that those students now are not getting the supports to apply because we don't have the time to do it [due to the national scheme]'.*
>
> *'I suppose really on the pre-entry side of things it can be very disheartening if you are working with a group of pupils from first year, in secondary school with links schools and you work with them through first, second year they obviously do their junior cert and then when they come into senior cycle you are working and they do pre-entry activities with them. Bring them into the university, doing different things. And then they apply to the HEAR scheme and are deemed eligible which is fantastic but they don't get the minimum entry. They are not even considered because academically they don't perform.*

A number of institutions also have access programmes in addition to the HEAR scheme. HEAR operators spoke about the necessity of a range of access initiatives in order to allow greater flexibility around access. In these institutions, internal stakeholders often identified how HEAR students typically differ from other access students.

> *I would find that the students that come in under the HEAR scheme would not be the type of student we get in under the access course ... So you find that the students come in under HEAR they are ... the ones are going to get the points anyway to come into college where this our access course will give students who've not been able to meet the requirements of HEAR or the points but they have that opportunity there but our fear would be that they might see the students coming in under HEAR and disband the access courses.*
>
> *[For our access scheme] They [applicants] are assessed exactly the same so you could have a person who applied to the HEAR scheme was deemed eligible but points wise was too low but had the minimum entry for the university. So they can apply in the spring time to do our longer course. And because they had already been assessed through the HEAR scheme we know they are eligible, so the eligibility criteria is still*

the same. They may get into college through a longer access program and get that way but I suppose one of the things about it is the process itself is so long.

These institutions typically supported the operation of a range of access initiatives. At times, the HEAR scheme was typologised as '*bringing in the numbers'* or '*looking good on paper'*.

There's room for both and I think we shouldn't neglect our access courses just because HEAR is bringing in the numbers and there's less work.
And there's more quantitative results from HEAR - it looks very valuable for the university, plus maybe one person dealing with it, whereas a course is very intensive seven month process with 30 or 40 students with varying abilities. So it's not cheap for the university to run these courses but it's very targeted. You are getting people without leaving certs, without even junior certs and they are making the transition. So definitely HEAR is the star...when it comes to numbers.

In the focus groups, stakeholders were conscious about the impact and outcomes of HEAR eligible applicants that do not make it to higher education through HEAR. It was argued that supplementary access routes were often used in institutions to help these young people gain access to higher education: '*If you had your own access scheme, you'd pick up people'* or *'it's a good approach for those who do not get the points to matriculate'.* There was a genuine concern for HEAR eligible applicants that did not get the points to matriculate, and it was argued that HEAR is not enough to reach all target groups. Some internal stakeholders proposed that the scheme provide more support for those in such situations:

'maybe rather than just leaving them to the winds maybe there is another stage that we can go for those students that were deemed eligible and say listen unfortunately you are not getting an offer of a place this year can we direct you to other pre-entry'.

However, many others argued that minimum points entry mechanisms are in place for a reason. In such cases, stakeholders spoke about a fear of '*setting people up for failure*'.

It's very easy to get caught up in oh my god they didn't get a place. But what you have to think is from the university or college, not their point of view but say for example if you are letting the student in on a sixty points reduced basis, they are sixty points behind the least academic person in their class. The average could be one hundred points ahead of them. So as much and all as we would like the HEAR scheme to be able to offer as many places as we can we've got to be realistic in terms of it doesn't matter how many indictors are student meets we can't set them up for failure.

Typically, internal and external stakeholders argued for greater transparency, co-ordination and flexibility in the use of alternative entry routes to higher education, including incorporating FETAC routes into HEAR in some way, thus allowing FETAC students to access post-entry supports typically available to HEAR students.

> *So in all essence of the word it (FETAC) is an access route but it's not always, it's seen as very separate to HEAR. I would like to see that explored a bit in terms of if you have a student that is HEAR eligible does the leaving cert, doesn't get the points but decides to go off and do their whatever, FETAC course and comes to college through that they should be entitled to all of the post entry supports that they need. And that's how we would work in [my institution] when the student has come in through FETAC and they were eligible we will pick them up post-entry. So that can be a backup plan or Plan B for students who can't get in but we need to be realistic in terms of you know nobody wants to set students up for failure.*

> *I think, I mean what we talk about in European terms tends to be the more generic idea of alternative pathways in to higher education, and that might mean the more general piece around, you know, further education for example, our, you know, recognition of higher learning, but also it means I think programmes like HEAR and DARE that recognise that ... I think it's really important that, you know, the flexible, flexible provision in higher education, a multiplicity of pathways*
> *I suppose the whole question is how does HEAR or DARE interact with that, but, and what it does do and what it does do in conjunction with those other alternative streams is it does fulfil one of our national objectives, and that's important, in terms of providing alternative pathways in to higher education. (External Stakeholder)*

> *What about the situation of students who do the Leaving Certificate Applied, are they included and encompassed by the scheme or not? (External Stakeholder)*

> *We are running a series of parent programs that are outreach at the moment and I could safely say there is little to no awareness of the HEAR program among traveller parents (External Stakeholder)*

Other spoke about how divergent the goals of access can be in relation to institutional goals in reaching targets. It was articulated how the goals of access and a wider social justice agenda may not always be closely aligned to institutional goals which seek to promote the HEI on a range of activities. In this sense, access officers were keen to highlight that pre-entry supports may not always secure a '*win*' for the institution:

> *Coming to [my institution] doing a FETAC course, ... if you've a student and they've no strong history of progression in third level in the family or progression beyond junior cert, they go on and goes to further education college, you know, in a way that is a result for us and institutionally it's not a result. Or maybe they have gone to the*

IT down the road that's a positive outcome for that student in that family. You can't claim it as a win for your institution and maybe not, but going back to access work... It can't be all statistically recorded either, a lot of the work, so HEAR is very convenient in that it can...

3.6.3 HEAR Indicators and the Allocation of Places

Issues around the indicators and the definition of educational disadvantage also arose in the stakeholder interviews. In general, the HEAR operators were confident that using a broad range rather than a narrow range of indicators is a good idea in targeting students most at risk of educational disadvantage. This view was held by both internal and external stakeholders.

'well I mean we, we always get a lot of interest from our European partners on these because it's a kind of, it's looked on as a kind of more comprehensive approach to the issue than, you know, would have been attempted in a lot of other areas. I suppose the real question for us is whether, you know, whether it's, whether it's indicating, you know, what it should indicate'.

Typically, stakeholders were very concerned about the robustness of the approach in capturing educational disadvantage. Typically they seek to get to a (perhaps impossible) point at which the indicators as proxies for educational disadvantage are robust and verifiable:

I think what we have to do is get to a point where we are able to say that these indicators are capturing educational disadvantage, they are verified and robust and that we sign off on those indicators and say right what we are going to use from 2013 until 2016.

I don't think any of us can say quite where to, you know, draw the line, and whether it's all of the other things which would be going on in their lives as well, it's not necessarily they had a bad experience in school... it is a complex area but is it meeting the needs of the students that it's meant to be there for ...in so far as there's a range of students who, who, with the extra help that those points provide, and not only the points, because of course a really, really important part is the post-entry support (External Stakeholder)

There was a strong concern in the interviews about the nature and definition of educational disadvantage, and the success of the HEAR scheme in capturing this educational disadvantage. While HEAR operators were sure that the schemes are meeting at least some of the target groups, often access officers spoke of their concern about the adequacy of the indicators to capture long-term educational disadvantage rather than economic disadvantage. In effect, it was reported that the scheme could possibly be displacing those who are long-

term educationally disadvantaged, given that entry into the scheme is aligned to the points system. There was a concern that the quota system, which is typically aligned to the points system via a 'mini-CAO' may disadvantage those who are most disadvantaged, should they have lower average educational attainment.

> *'...Once you are eligible and then it operates like a mini-CAO, it would go if the points were 375 and the students meet the requirements it would go to the first who are eligible and then 370, 365 until we've used our full quota of places. We don't look and say oh well here's an applicant who meets six of the indicators and has a disability has applied to DARE they move off our list to be considered...We haven't got the time'*
> *'Because my gut feeling tells me that that group of students who are probably meeting the three indicators are actually getting those places. It's not, the high point prestigious courses are not going to what we call the real target groups, they are not going to five or six indicator people'.*

Others warned that the process has to be systematic in the interests of equality

> *'I mean when you bring subjective judgement into it that's when you'll get court cases, that's when you'll get parents saying, well hold on we qualified for your scheme. Why did so and so down the road get ahead?*

> *I think that where, one of the places where it has to move if it is to be seen to be per a system is that in line with, I suppose, the operating principle of the CAO, everyone was treated equally.*

HEAR operators also warned that competitiveness across institutions relating to point thresholds for courses had implications for the reduction in points for both HEAR and DARE applicants. While the policy pertaining to reduction in points varied considerably across institutions, a small number of HEAR operators felt that since the scheme went national, the reduction in points was lower, partly because of the larger number of students in the HEAR list on similar points, but also due to the necessary institutional policy on protecting the minimum entry points of a course.

> *In our case I'd have two relatively high points schemes like 470 last year for our [Level 8 course] so the lowest we went was 445 but I would have had a lot of the students, some of the students in previous years when we did our own scheme I would have been taking in students with maybe 40 or 50 points below what they were set but now we've gone 35, 25 you know.*

> *Yeah, and that would, we would have the same experience on our high pointed courses. We are actually only going 20 or 25 points below...*

In some institutions, there was a concern that the displacement issue was being disregarded by institutions who saw HEAR as a box that they could tick, '*numbers in the door, tick.*

> '*What we are seeing for [HE institution] I can say is that more and more students who really aren't educationally disadvantaged, there's no long term educational disadvantage in the background, they are financially disadvantaged. And they've been affected more recently with economic disadvantage and it's not really [those] who are [the] outreach target and it's not for an access office who we necessarily want but it may be for an institution. So that's an institution saying numbers in the door, tick. That's where I think the problem is but I think that affects morale as well for me*.
>
> *I mean when you meet the students finally at orientation ...these are essentially middleclass kids who haven't experienced educational disadvantage but because of a drop in income as a result of the recession they are getting in, and the other indictors like the medical card one. I know I keep banging on about the medical card but that is not a reliable indicator of disadvantage.*

The HEAR operators spoke about their ongoing and persistent discussions that they have at meetings about the verifiability and the 'self-report' nature of the indicators. It was acknowledged by internal and external stakeholders that the income is verifiable (to a point) from the supporting documentation, as is the social welfare payment indicator. Typical comments included the following:

> *Well one of the concerns we have a lot ...it's the verification of our indicators such as socioeconomic group, DEIS school, but with socioeconomic group I mean it's completely unverified. A student can enter any job title they want into it and if they have a medical card and meet the income and meet the socioeconomic group they are eligible to be considered for a HEAR place...I don't think we should be using an indicator that's completely up to manipulation by the applicant*.
>
> *In fact it can be, that there's nothing stopping a person [putting down] that they went to a DEIS school for five years. There's nothing to say they weren't. Now often people could be genuine but there's nothing to stop me saying I went to a DEIS school if I was a school leaver not in a DEIS school saying I went to a DEIS school in [area] for five years and meeting that indicator.*
>
> *Sometimes I have a concern maybe about the medical card as an indicator because I feel it could be a double count because if your income is of a certain level you are going to get a medical card anyway, automatically.*

Other stakeholders indicated that the concerns surrounding verifiability of indicators are being addressed and greater efforts are currently underway with the relevant agencies, private companies and Government departments in verifying such information. There was also the

view that the onus on the individual applying to such schemes could be reduced by linking up existing administrative tasks such as assessing HEAR and grant applications.

> *One of the pieces in terms of the meeting the criteria, particularly under HEAR of course is that the means testing piece, which seems to be particularly heavy on, you know, resources, ...because it's a socio-economic piece, so, and of course at the same time it makes no sense in practical terms to carry out a means test for a grant and carry out an entirely different means test for the same person for HEAR, if you say to your HEAR cohort you need to apply within, within your current timeframe for HEAR, but actually the way you apply is if you're saying to us that you qualify for HEAR you will also qualify for a grant, so what you do is you put in an early application for your grant before a certain date and what they will do, because that's your low processing time of the year, they will process your application first because it's an application for HEAR as well, and they will tell us what the outcome of your means test is.*

As well as the concerns outlined above about the possibility of manipulation of the indicators, particularly those which are not verifiable, HEAR operators also had concerns about a potential bias in the application process.

> *We are assuming a huge level of computer literacy here on young people and their families. But it's the parents, our real target group, their parents are not computer literate and may not have a computer in the household. They may not have access to broadband and that came up for me particularly when we were in the [one particular area] clinic. In that you were almost having to go back and explain quite basic terms to parents and what is CAO. How does the points work? And I think the scheme assumes a level of knowledge, and if you think about how we really are targeting is the most disadvantaged they are the less likely to have computer access and computer literate.*

> *It's kind of evolved into a scheme that's great if you do have all that social and cultural capital, you know how to fill in a form, you know how to identify yourself as somebody who would be the target group but I know from talking to some of the current students who came in through HEAR say they have younger brothers and sisters and are applying this year and three of them we were chatting to last week, they would say oh yeah I'm doing the application, sure my mother wouldn't have a clue or you know. So its siblings that are doing it, that's definitely an issue I've always had with you know an online application system for the groups that we target.*

> *At the end of the day a lot of our targeted students aren't the type of students that are going to be proactive in terms of chasing things up or following things up or being clued into oh what's this about. Or their parents may not be in a position to be that proactive as well, you know we all get those phone calls from the parents who aren't our target who have heard about the scheme and are sussing it out. They are doing their bit of research. So I suppose from our point of view as school visits are a huge part of our program with feedback we get from our schools is that it's critical. In a*

way it doesn't matter what a guidance counsellor has said about a program somebody from an institution coming in saying this is here, that's very significant.

they're school mediated so you need to be a kid who's getting on in school, recognized by your teachers, you know, and teachers will champion this scheme for you and they'll champion you through the scheme and they'll really motivate you... whereas a kid who's got the attendance problems and all the other things that come with disengaging from school, is never going to find out that this opportunity is there' ... it's quite a dose of realism for you in terms of categorizing where you stand in society and where you are as a student in terms of poverty. (External Stakeholder)

if you're talking about working class communities, you know, there are certain families that have that an outward looking disposition but there are equally families that are exactly the opposite and if you're a student from one of those families who would actually have to fight a battle at home in terms of making the case for accessing a higher level of education, I think I'm not sure that the scheme does an awful lot for you in that context. I think you are very dependent then on the social services and the quality of the support from the school. (External Stakeholder)

Finally, stakeholders also spoke of two particular groups that are not specifically targeted by the schemes: members of the travelling community and people in care of the State. HEAR operators spoke about the very low numbers of these applicants entering the schemes:

'but they are not coming through the HEAR scheme for us... We are not even identifying or asking for that information so I don't think we can say that definitively but you know we [the HEAR scheme] don't ask for that information. And you know given that they are a group who are not going to third level, I mean the percentage stats are just minute. Nothing is being done to address that and this scheme is part of that.

One of the things we would kind of say is that if there were a number of places on the HEAR program that were ring fenced or identified as being specifically for traveller students whether it was you know I suppose travellers are one percent of the population so if it was one percent of places. ..[even if they were not initially filled] it would mean that you would be able to go out to young travellers and say you know there's a program specifically for you guys to get into college and start in first and second year and start to change that kind of expectation and start to see, make it a tangible future. So that would be you know one of the things that young travellers as early as first year because you've to look at the reality that fifty-five percent of travellers are leaving school before the age of fifteen. So you do need to put incentives in place and you know in order to change that and maybe that kind of idea to ring fence a number of places would be something. Now obviously if those places

weren't filled by travellers they would be filled by anybody else. (External Stakeholder)

3.6.4 Workload issues and sustainability

Each of the HEAR operator groups spoke about the workload involved in the administration of the HEAR scheme:

> '*Yeah I'd say, one of things that surprised me being quite new on it is the amount of paperwork behind it...but there's a huge amount of work that goes in the background in making sure it all runs smoothly and has got it to the point it is, that's been a learning curve for me'.*

Others indicated that they and their senior colleagues were '*shocked*' and '*unaware*' of the work that is involved in the administration of the HEAR and DARE schemes. Workload issues also arose in a context of sustainability. Some felt that because of the volume of work required in the administration of the scheme, serious issues should be raised around the sustainability of the scheme:

> '*Depending on the time of the year, depending on the problem emerges, depending on the urgency of it, there's often times it becomes the only thing that you do in your day because of the amount of work... I suppose that's something from a sustainability issue I don't think any of us has HEAR as the only part of our job'.*

> *'I think there is a massive amount of work that's taken on by people because they have faith maybe in the scheme but definitely faith in the students we are all looking to recruit and retain. People will go the extra mile but as we all keep saying that's not sustainable and if somebody is out sick you have to look around and try and find somebody else to do that work.*

There was an overall acknowledgement that the work involved in the administration of the HEAR scheme led to a considerable increase in workload for individual access officers. One access officer spoke about a considerable increase in the application stage.

> '*In my case its actually much more time for HEAR because prior to HEAR we would have had about two hundred applications[and] I would have processed them in house but I would have had like a six week window between opening applications, assessing them, phone calls back and forth and then closing off the applications. Whereas HEAR tends to run because the development work requires it, it runs throughout the whole year. There are peaks and troughs, there are particular busy times but essentially it's a year round thing. It's always there. So in my experience*

my work load in terms of an application process for Access students would have grown massively. I mean at least tripled'.

Importantly, HEAR operators also spoke about how the administration of the HEAR scheme displaced their traditional activities, particularly around outreach and post-entry support activities.

'*...outreach activities...but certainly support yeah it definitely had a huge impact, the amount of support I was able to provide at the really vulnerable time, the first few weeks of the semester'.*

'I think it also [impacts on] as well the time that we have to commit to... HEAR leaves no time for development of outreach because outreach has changed because of changes to budget and resources and those kinds of things ... you actually have no time to think about like what do they really need, and how can I use my resources of staff and budget to change outreach and it's just from year to year you are saying I need to sit down and do that but HEAR takes up months of the year. We are not talking about weeks, its months of the year that you don't get the time to really develop your own work which is, well for me is my primary thing. I'm an outreach officer, I'm not a HEAR operator.

It's definitely a juggling act for me at the moment and I suppose there's lots of things I should be doing but it's just getting around to doing certain things particularly on the post-entry side of things.

I suppose for me HEAR has become an additional piece of extra work that I've gotten [in the] last two years, my other job hasn't decreased or reduced. So even if somebody waved a magic wand in the morning and took HEAR away it doesn't mean I have all this extra space time on my hands.

there's little enough recognition of the post entry support, which is, I think, the really critical bit (External Stakeholder)

Others spoke about how an institutional commitment to HEAR rested uniquely on the shoulders of access officers, irrespective of the number of access officers working in an institution.

But it's meant to be an institutional commitment it's not meant to be an individual commitment, that's the point. When you say one and a half days it's not meant to be [specific access officer] who spends one and a half days.
But who else in the institution is going to do it except the access office?

There was a strong consensus from the HEAR operators for the operation of HEAR to move out of the HEIs and to be merged either into another body such as the CAO or a co-ordinated unit, because of the impact of the workload of the scheme on current access initiatives. However there was a tension among HEAR operators as to whether the process was ready for

that step based on the issues raised above. However, a number of external stakeholders indicated that the schemes should not be developed further until all institutions agree on processes.

> *I think administratively they wanted to move it to the CAO because that made sense and it made it a national programme and it made it less onerous in terms of administration and that was, all of those pieces were important. But as I say the quid pro quo or the other side of that coin has to be that it that also has to equalise, you know, what the points' requirements and what the availability of percentage places in courses is as well (External stakeholder).*

> *Having a person in there who can coordinate it is very good, because it can't work without that ...while it's been established in a particular way that it's not, that it's not really stable as it is. And yes, it's been mainstreamed through the CAO to an extent, you know, we can go back to what we said earlier on about it, but even having been, you know, mainstreamed there is still a significant amount of administrative work involved in it.*

> *I was surprised at the variability of the quotas across the colleges when I looked at them. It seems strange that colleges wouldn't be in a position to adopt a fairly kind of, I mean they're radically different.*

3.7 Summary

In general there was considerable support for the HEAR scheme and the recent developments associated with the scheme since 2009. However, it was also evident that there are a number of tensions associated with the scheme. On the one hand, discussions from the focus groups point to a situation whereby the schemes may be large-scale or 'national' in attracting applications from young people countrywide with set eligibility criteria. On the other, there is a sense that the development of the schemes led to a greater onus on individual students to navigate the entry route to higher education by themselves, particularly those with less resources and teacher and parental support. It was generally argued that the most disadvantaged students were most likely at a disadvantage in accessing the schemes.

The administrative data indicate an increase in the share of complete applications that were received for HEAR over the period 2010-2012 (from 62% in 2010 to 71% in 2012). The share of HEAR applications as a percentage of all CAO applications has also increased over

time from 9.5% in 2010 to 10.6% in 2012. Data released by the CAO indicate that the HEAR share of CAO applications continues to grow. Over this period, the percentage of HEAR applications that reach eligibility has also increased. In 2010, 29% of all HEAR applications achieved eligibility and this increased to 46% in 2012. However, a more robust definition would include only those who have submitted *complete applications*, and among this group there has been a substantial increase in eligibility from 46% in 2010 to 61% in 2012.

A limitation of the data used in this evaluation is that the data begins at the point of application to higher education. That is, we cannot examine the extent to which the schemes encourage the wider pool of young people under 23 to apply to higher education. On the other hand, a strength of the administrative is that it allows us to compare the profile of HEAR applicants and identify if they differ in any way from all CAO applicants under 23. We find that HEAR applicants are quite a distinct cohort in terms of gender, country of birth, nationality but also in terms of the schools that they attend and educational attainment levels. That is, the majority of HEAR applicants are female (59% compared to 51% of all CAO applicants under 23), and represent a more diverse applicant in terms of country of birth: (26% were born in a country other than Ireland compared to 19% of all CAO applicants) and nationality (14% were of a nationality other than Irish compared to 11% of all CAO applicants under 23). Almost one-third of HEAR applicants had previously attended vocational schools which typically tend to have higher concentrations of students from working class and unemployed households (31% compared to 18% of all CAO applicants). HEAR applicants are significantly more likely to have attended a community/comprehensive or vocational school than a secondary school compared to all other CAO applicants. They are also more likely to have attended a DEIS school. HEAR applicants also have on average lower levels of attainment in the Leaving Certificate than CAO applicants that do not apply to higher education through the HEAR and DARE schemes. While the HEAR applicant group are not more likely to have achieved lower levels of LC performance than all other applicants (less than 200 points), there are more likely to have achieved 205-350 than the average of 355-400; and less likely to have achieved higher levels of attainment.

A number of stakeholders had expressed concerns about the process surrounding application and eligibility. Typically there was a concern that the application process may deter some young people from applying to, or from submitting complete applications due to the volume of paperwork required. Based on the use of administrative data, it was not possible to examine if the application process may deter applications to the schemes among the wider

pool of school leavers. However, the data did allow an examination of the pool of applicants, and how applicants who submit incomplete applications differ from those who submit complete applications. Among the pool of applicants to the HEAR scheme, there was little evidence to suggest that those in more disadvantaged circumstances (using proxies such as attending DEIS schools, in economically inactive or unemployed households, living in disadvantaged communities) have a greater probability of submitting an incomplete application. However, based on our analyses, those administering the schemes should consider two particular groups: those born in EU countries and the children of lone parents who are more likely to submit incomplete applications, two groups which warrant greater attention. It may be that these groups experience difficulty in accessing the required documentation due to parental separation or language difficulties. We should keep in mind that our analyses are restricted to previously defined variables in administrative data, and so our statistical findings are limited in this regard. However, the interviews and focus groups also indicate that children from the travelling community, those in the care of the State, and typically more marginalised young people and their parents are likely to have limited access to the schemes. Greater engagement with and communication of the scheme to local community support groups and advocacy groups (traveller, migrant, lone parent groups) may help alleviate this potential issue.

On a positive note, there is evidence to suggest that conditional on submission of a complete application, those born in the EU, lone parents, applicants who attended a vocational school and those living in the most disadvantaged areas are more likely to become eligible for the scheme, relative to their (less disadvantaged) counterparts. While the results presented here are generally positive and indicate less of bias (than anticipated by some stakeholders) among applicants, attention should be placed on understanding why all else being equal, we find that females and applications from young people born outside of the EU are less likely to be eligible in 2012.

The interviews with stakeholders are replete with issues relating to the robustness of the indicators. Administrative data gathered by the scheme allows the examination of the indicators against other socio-economic variables in the data. Our analyses suggest that the variation across the indicators is not as strong as one may anticipate (such as in the case of reaching the income criteria across different local area contexts) among applicants. In terms of Leaving Certificate performance, HEAR applicants who achieved eligibility on DEIS and

local area deprivation indicators had on average lower levels of attainment, compared to all CAO applicants, but also all other HEAR applicants.

Further analyses were undertaken using EU-SILC data to test the robustness of the indicators in the population. The analyses revealed that over half of all 16-22 year olds were living in families with incomes below the relevant income thresholds[40]. Given the high rates of eligibility based on income and medical card holding, and income and means-tested benefits, further analyses were undertaken with the combination of these two indicators using EU-SILC. The analyses reveal that the combination of either (income, medical card and low SEG; or income, means-tested benefit and low SEG) is rather effective in predicting which young people are potentially first generation students. Over two-thirds of the group who could qualify under this combination of indicators are living in households without where no-one had a degree, and over 90% are living in households without where we estimate that no parent has a degree. Having a medical card alone increases the probability of living in a low parental education household by a factor of about 1.6. These indicators are effective in reducing the risk of targeting resources at highly education households.

The combination of indicators (low income, means-tested benefit/medical card, and low SEG) is predictive of living in a household with lower levels of education. Nevertheless, even in households qualifying under these combinations, between 30% and 35% contain a family member who is educated to degree level or studying for a degree, or between 8.6% and 5.3% contain a parent who is educated to degree level or studying for a degree. While those administering the scheme are concerned about 'gaming' to a certain extent, it is likely that depending on the combination of indicators, some young people will have greater resources (cultural, social) at their disposal than others and legitimately access the scheme. If most HEAR eligible applicants were drawn from this relatively well-educated pool it would suggest that HEAR may be targeting resources at those for whom educational expectations were already quite high. Targeting disadvantage is a complex business, and it is also worth noting that the incidence of low education households among 16-22 year olds who would not qualify under the combinations of eligibility indicators that were examined is also relatively high, at around 32-40%.

[40] Previous exploratory analyses not presented in the report also found that over half of households in the EU-SILC with dependent children had incomes below the relevant thresholds.

In the Irish context, research in the mid 1990s indicates that children are more likely to experience poverty than adults, with single parent families and those with three or more children being particularly susceptible to a relatively high risk of poverty (Callan et al., 1996). More recently, Watson et al., (2012) found that basic deprivation fell between 2004-2007 and rose over the period 2007-2010, with a higher deprivation rate evident for children than adults. In 2010, 30% of children were in households experiencing basic deprivation; an analysis of deprivation by age group in 2009 and 2010 showed a significant increase in the deprivation rate for children (0-17) which was 30.2% in 2010 compared to 23.5% in 2009 (CSO, 2011). Furthermore, data from Growing up in Ireland (GUI) (2011) show that almost two-thirds of all families with 3-year-old children reported that the recession has had a 'very significant' or 'significant' effect on them. More recently, research has found that a quarter of children live in jobless households, which raises the prospect of the intergenerational transmission of unemployment and poverty (Watson et al., 2012b). Analysis of the EU-SILC data shows that the combination of indicators used by the HEAR scheme (low income, means-tested benefit/medical card, and low SEG) is also predictive of living in a deprived household among 16-22 year olds. Among the 16-22 year olds living in households that would qualify them for HEAR (using the combinations stated above), around half are living in deprived households, and 75% are from either deprived or/and low educated households. Again, if most HEAR eligible applicants were drawn from the remaining 25% of households that do not experience deprivation and/or low levels of education, it would suggest that HEAR may be targeting resources at those for whom educational expectations were already quite high. The EU-SILC analyses presented here raise the question of which pools are school leavers who apply to the schemes most likely to come from? Given that advantage confers advantage, it is possible that a considerable proportion of HEAR eligible applicants are drawn from more advantaged families within the indicator thresholds and that HEAR eligible applicants are disproportionately drawn from more advantaged families within the indicator thresholds. Furthermore, the indicators are susceptible to wider economic conditions which may limit their effectiveness. The administrative data used in this study does not include information on parental education, and more detailed information on the income of applicants may help us draw more detailed conclusions in this regard. We recommend that the scheme consider collecting data on parental education levels not as an indicator, but for future research purposes.

Interviews with stakeholders also highlight wider issues relating to the role of post-entry support workers in access offices, and a necessity for wider engagement with local community groups. Importantly, internal and external stakeholders highlight the need for greater flexibility in the transition to higher education, advocating the joined-up use of multiple pathways for young adults that fall within the remit of HEAR (and DARE).

In terms of sustainability and the future of the scheme, there was willingness for the schemes to be relocated outside of the HEIs due to work pressures and displacement of outreach and post-entry support work. However, external and internal stakeholders raised concerns that the indicators should be robust, and greater co-ordination across institutions in the quota-setting and allocation of places should be achieved before such relocation could take place.

Chapter 4: Applications to and Eligibility for DARE

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of issues relating to application to and eligibility for the DARE scheme. Section 4.2 draws on administrative data collected by the DARE scheme to consider changes in application and eligibility between 2010 and 2012. We also consider the determinants of complete versus incomplete DARE applications over time in section 4.3. In section 4.4 we provide an overview of eligibility rates for DARE and consider the factors associated with eligibility and criteria. Section 4.5 then provides stakeholder perspectives, and a summary is provided at the end of the chapter in Section 4.6.

4.2 Overview of Application to DARE

We now consider data presented in the DARE Annual Reports which has been obtained from the Strategic Development Group. Table 4.1 identifies a reduction in the number of applications to the DARE scheme since 2009, with a decrease from 3,346 applications in 2009 to 2,942 applications in 2012[41]. Between 2009 and 2012 the share of applications which represent 'complete applications' has decreased from 87% to 81%.

Table 4.1: Number and Eligibility Outcome of DARE Applicants

Year	Total Applications	No Supporting Documentation	Total Complete Applications	% Complete Applications
2009	3,346	439	2,907	86.8%
2010	2,203	367	1,836	83.3%
2011	2,551	391	2,160	84.6%
2012	2,942	545	2,397	81.4%

Source: DARE Annual Reports 2009-2012

[41] However, the report highlights an anomaly in the 2009 data 'There were anomalies within the database, in that decisions were recorded for 2907 applicants but records of supporting documents for 1636 applicants'. In 2012, the DARE Report indicates that there were 2,942 online applications for DARE through the CAO, of which 2,397 provided supporting documentation and were screened.

Comparisons were drawn with the data presented in the DARE Annual Reports, and the data the research team received from the Central Applications Office (CAO) as shown in Table 4.2. The first thing to note is that DARE applications captured in the DARE Form data for 2010-2012 do not represent all DARE applications as presented in Table 4.2 for each of the years. However, total complete applications are very much in line with (but do not exactly match) the total number of complete applications over the period. Thus, from the data we received, we cannot comment on the increase in total applications. However, over the period 2010-2012, the share of complete DARE applications increased steadily from 1,836 to 2,432, representing an increase from 79% of applications in 2010 to 82% in 2012.

Table 4.2: DARE Form Data: Baseline Numbers

Year	Total Applications	No Supporting Documentation (NULL)	Total Complete Applications	% Complete Applications
2010	2,322	486	1,836	79.0
2011	2,585	432	2,153	83.2
2012	2,980	548	2,432	81.6

Source: HEAR 2010, 2011, 2012 Form Data

4.3 Profile of DARE Applicants

The profile of DARE applicants relative to all other CAO applicants is shown in Table 4.3. If we consider the profile of applicants according to application type, we see a clear gender differentiation. The majority of applicants who apply for DARE are male. There is not such gender differentiation evident among all remaining CAO applicants and HEAR and DARE applicants. Relative to other CAO applicants, in terms of country of origin, the DARE scheme at application is capturing a less diverse student than the typical CAO applicant. There are also considerable differences according to the previous education institution attended. Over half of DARE applicants had previously attended a secondary school, and just 15% had previously attended vocational schools and community/comprehensive schools respectively. On average, than DARE applicants have significantly lower average levels of attainment.

Table 4.3a: Profile of DARE Applicants relative to all CAO applicants aged under 23, 2011

	HEAR Applicants	DARE Applicants	HEAR & DARE Applicants	All Remaining CAO Applicants
Gender				
Female	58.6	44.3	49.8	50.8
Male	41.4	55.7	50.2	49.2
Country of Birth				
Ireland	75.7	88.1	84.9	81.1
Britain and UK	8.9	7.0	8.4	9.1
EU other	6.1	1.1	1.9	3.8
Rest of World	9.3	3.8	4.8	6.0
Nationality				
Irish	85.7	96.2	94.7	88.9
Nationality other than Irish	14.3	3.8	5.3	11.1
School Type				
Secondary	48.2	57.2	48.0	54.4
Comm/Comp	18.9	15.9	18.5	14.1
Vocational	30.8	15.1	31.2	18.2
Entrant type				
Leaving Certificate	90.7	84.9	91.6	59.7
Average LC Points	328.63	323.42	297.73	361.18

The multivariate analyses that were undertaken to consider the profile of HEAR and DARE applicants relative to all other non-scheme CAO applicants as shown in Chapter 3 is now reproduced in Table 4.3b below. In doing so, we compare the profile of DARE applicants relative to all other CAO applicants in terms of gender, age, nationality, Leaving Certificate performance, and the type of school that they attended. The results are presented in Table 4.3b[42].

[42] For the purpose of these analyses, applicants who applied to both HEAR and DARE are included in the 'DARE applicant' category.

Table 4.3b: Multinomial Regression Model of the Factors Associated with Application to Supplementary Admissions Route, 2011 Applicants

	HEAR Applicant verses all other CAO Applicants			DARE Applicant versus all other CAO applicants		
	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>|z|	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>|z|
Constant	-1.710	0.044	0.000	-3.133	0.072	0.000
Male	-0.527	0.030	0.000	0.079	0.046	0.086
Ref: Female						
Age 18	-0.146	0.031	0.000	0.513	0.052	0.000
Age 19	-0.079	0.059	0.183	1.078	0.077	0.000
Ref: Age 17 or younger						
Nationality other than Irish	0.675	0.048	0.000	-1.000	0.134	0.000
Ref: Irish national						
Up to 150 points	-0.411	0.076	0.000	0.055	0.116	0.633
155-200	-0.173	0.067	0.009	0.409	0.095	0.000
205-250	-0.001	0.058	0.982	0.336	0.087	0.000
255-300	0.063	0.053	0.236	0.420	0.078	0.000
305-350	0.121	0.050	0.016	0.219	0.076	0.004
405-450	-0.187	0.053	0.000	-0.407	0.086	0.000
455-500	-0.460	0.061	0.000	-0.793	0.104	0.000
505-600	-0.889	0.075	0.000	-1.430	0.135	0.000
Ref: 355-400						
Community/Comprehensive	0.251	0.040	0.000	0.085	0.062	0.170
Vocational	0.070	0.038	0.067	-0.126	0.064	0.049
Fee Grind School	-1.810	0.227	0.000	0.326	0.118	0.006
Ref: Secondary						
DEIS School	1.535	0.037	0.000	0.059	0.077	0.444
Ref: Non DEIS						

Sample is restricted to those who had completed at least 6 subjects in the Leaving Certificate, those who were not FETAC applicants, and those under the age of 23.
N=42,335; χ^2=4167.04, R^2=.08

While the majority of DARE applicants are male (56 per cent), there are no significant differences in the gender of DARE applicants relative to all other CAO applicants, once we take into account age, LC performance and school type attended. DARE applicants are however, more likely to be older than all other CAO applicants, perhaps reflecting the 'biographical disruptions' (Williams 2001) as a result of their disability that students with disabilities are likely to encounter over the life course. In terms of performance in the LC examination, DARE applicants are also less likely to have achieved lower (rather than

average levels of attainment) in the LC examination compared to all other CAO applicants. As with HEAR applicants, DARE applicants are also less likely to achieve over 400 points (rather than the average level of LC performance) relative to all CAO applicants. In terms of the schools that DARE applicants are transitioning from, DARE applicants are significantly less likely to have attended a vocational school than a secondary school which typically has a higher socio-economic student intake. Furthermore, DARE applicants are significantly more likely to have attended private fee-paying or 'grind' schools.

4.4 Complete versus Incomplete DARE Applications

The vast majority of applications to the DARE scheme represent complete applications. Before applications can considered for eligibility to the scheme, applicants must provide supporting documentation of a diagnosis of the nature of the disability that the applicant is disclosing. As part of the online application form, the Evidence of Disability Form must be completed by the accepted Medical Consultant/Specialist. This form provides verification of the disability that the applicant wishes to disclose, and is used to determine appropriate supports at third level. While all applicants must provide evidence of disability, some applicants do not have to complete the form should they already be in possession of existing medical documentation.

Using the DARE Form data, analyses were undertaken to examine the characteristics of applicants who submit *incomplete* applications: 21% in 2010 and 18% in 2012. In doing so, we can determine if there is consistency in the characteristics of applicants that are more likely to submit incomplete applications over time; or if the process of submitting an incomplete application is random. Furthermore, in the interviews with stakeholders, there were strong concerns that the application process may be biased in favour of those with greater financial resources at their disposal to access medical or psychological reports.

A logistic regression model was run to consider the characteristics of applicants who applied of the scheme but who did not submit the required documentation in 2010 and in 2012. The models include a range of individual characteristics (gender, age, country of birth) school experience including language exemptions and the number of supports received at school; a number of school characteristics (school sector, DEIS status, fee-paying status), and finally a

measurement of the socio-economic profile of the area for 2010[43] (based on the deprivation index). Table 4.4 presents the results. Both years were examined due to changes in the application process over time. The analyses are restricted to applicants who are aged 23 or younger on the 1st January in the year of college entry, as well as those who have no missing data on each of these key variables[44].

Columns 1 and 2 of Table 4.4 relate to 2010 applications and column 3 relates to applications in 2012. We find that a gender effect persists in 2010 but not in 2012, all else being equal. Females are significantly less likely to submit incomplete applications than males. In both years, older applicants (those aged 19-22) are more likely to submit incomplete applications relative to younger applicants. Interestingly, the Irish exemption exerts an influence despite controlling for country of birth. Applicants who have secured exemptions from Irish (i.e. those who born outside of Ireland or those who were born in Ireland and spent a considerable amount of time outside the Irish education system, or those with a Specific Learning Disability) were less likely to submit incomplete applications to DARE than those without an Irish exemption. Further, in both years those with a third language exemption (those exempted from Irish and/or applicants with a Specific Learning Disability) are significantly less likely to submit incomplete applications than those without such exemptions.

[43] This area information was not available for 2012.
[44] This applied only to the 2010 cohort. After deletion of missing data 2,11 applicants remained in the 2010 dataset.

Table 4.4: Factors associated with incomplete DARE applications in 2010 and 2012 versus complete applications

	2010 Applications (1)	**2010 Applications (2)**	**2012 Applications (3)**
Female	-0.20	-0.25*	0.03
Ref: male	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.10)
Age 16	0.17	0.14	-0.05
	(0.24)	(0.25)	(0.23)
Age 17	-0.08	-0.15	-0.10
	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.12)
Age 19-22	0.60***	0.59**	0.89***
Ref: Age 18	(0.17)	(0.18)	(0.13)
Born in country other than Ireland	0.09	0.08	-0.05
Ref: Born Ireland	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.23)
Irish Exemption	-0.88***	-0.69*	-0.38*
Ref: no exemption	(0.25)	(0.27)	(0.19)
Language Exemption	-0.53	-0.72*	-0.66**
Ref: no exemption	(0.28)	(0.30)	(0.23)
Number of supports	-0.07	-0.09*	-0.11***
received at 2nd level	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)
Community/Comprehensive	0.00	-0.00	-0.11***
	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.03)
Vocational	-0.02	-0.00	0.37**
Ref: Secondary and other	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.14)
DEIS school	0.36*	0.31	0.02
Ref: Non DEIS	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.16)
Fee-paying school	-0.54*	-0.61**	-0.49**
Ref: non fee-paying	(0.20)	(0.22)	(0.16)
Marginally above average		0.39*	
		(0.15)	
Marginally below average		0.25	
		(0.18)	
Disadvantaged		0.45	
Ref: Affluent		(0.24)	
Physical, sensory disability	-1.09***	-0.94***	-0.13
Ref: all others	(0.27)	(0.24)	(0.18)
Constant	-1.13***	-1.27***	-1.35***
	(0.15)	(0.19)	(0.13)
N	2213	2111	2941
R^2	0.058	0.067	0.052

Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

In both years, applicants who have received a greater number of supports at second level are significantly less likely to have submitted incomplete applications. This may suggest that those who are receiving a wide range of supports are not disadvantaged in terms of submitting the documentation for DARE.

We also consider the school that applicants attend. In 2010, applicants attending DEIS schools are more likely to submit incomplete applications than those attending non-DEIS schools. However, when we consider local area deprivation (column 2), the effects of attending a DEIS school are not longer supported. That is, the local area deprivation measure aborbs the effect of attending a DEIS school. By 2012, there is no significant difference in incomplete applications by those attending DEIS schools and those not. This may indicate an improvement in communication around DARE between 2010 and 2012. However in both years applicants from fee-paying schools are significantly less likely to submit incomplete applications than those from non-fee-paying schools. In 2012, applicants attending vocational were significantly more likely to submit an incomplete application, relative to secondary school students in particular. Local area deprivation is clearly a determinant of incomplete applications, and the 2010 data indicate that applicants from areas that are 'marginally above average' are more likely to have submitted an incomplete application relative to those from more affluent neighbourhoods.

Finally, the nature of the disability that has been disclosed was considered. In both years, students who declare a physical or sensory disability are significantly less likely to submit incomplete applications relative to those who disclose other types of disabilities. It should be noted that because applicants must submit documentation on their *primary disability* it is not possible to capture those who have multiple disabilities.

4.5 Eligibility for DARE

We now consider eligibility for the DARE scheme between 2010 and 2012. Table 4.5 provides an overview of eligibility for DARE applications. Over the period 2010-2012, eligibility for DARE has increased from 41 p of all applications with at least some supporting documentation in 2010 to 55% of all applications in 2012. However, eligibility is dependent on the submission of a complete application, and we find that eligibility has increased among all applications with complete documentation, from 51% in 2010 to 63 % in 2012. As a result

37% of DARE applicants with supporting documentation did not reach eligibility in 2012, down from 49% in 2010.

Table 4.5: Number and Percentage of Eligible DARE Applications

Year	Number of Eligible (all)	% Eligible (all)	Number of Complete Eligible	% Complete applications
2010	952	41.0	949	51.7
2011	1,278	49.4	1,275	59.2
2012	1,646	55.2	1,536	63.2

Source: HEAR 2010, 2011, 2012 Form Data

Multivariate analyses were undertaken to examine the characteristics of applicants who achieve eligibility versus those who do not, conditional on submission of a complete application. In the interviews with stakeholders, there were concerns that the application process is biased in favour of applicants with greater resources at their disposal (i.e. costs of medical tests). Stakeholders were also concerned that the scheme may automatically 'screen out' students with a disability who apply to higher education, given that the application process requires evidence of a disability. That is, while some students disclose their disability, the application process places considerable emphasis on the nature and extent of the disability based on diagnosis, rather that the presence of a disability per se.

Table 4.6 presents the results of a logistic regression model of the factors associated with eligibility for DARE in 2010 and 2012. The multivariate models include a range of individual characteristics (gender, age, country of birth) school experience including language exemptions and the number of supports received at school; a number of school characteristics (school sector, DEIS status, fee-paying status), and finally a measurement of the socio-economic profile of the area (based on the deprivation index). As before, the analyses are restricted to applicants who are aged 23 or younger on the 1st January in the year of college entry, as well as those who have data on the variables used in the models.

From Table 4.6 we find that few of the measured educational and social background characteristics are significant determinants of eligibility versus non-eligibility for DARE. This is in line with our expectations, given that eligibility for the scheme is based on the nature of disability.

Table 4.6: Logistic regression model of factors associated with eligibility for DARE in 2010 and 2012 (conditional on submission of a complete application)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	2010 Applications	**2010 Applications**	**2012 Applications**
Female	-0.17	-0.15	0.03
Ref: male	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.09)
Age 16	-0.22	-0.19	
	(0.22)	(0.22)	
Age 17	-0.22*	-0.19	-0.26
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.13)
Age 19-22	-0.13	-0.07	-0.11
Ref: Age 18	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.13)
Born country other than Ireland	-0.04	-0.06	0.07
Ref: Born Ireland	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.13)
Irish Exemption	0.05	0.04	-0.20
Ref: No exemption	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.14)
Language Exemption	-0.32	-0.34*	-0.01
Ref: No exemption	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.15)
Number of supports	0.04	0.05	0.02
at second level	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Secondary	0.17	0.19	0.09
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.11)
Comm/comp	0.29	0.30	0.05
Ref: Vocational	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.13)
Fee-paying school	-0.10	-0.17	0.31*
Ref: Non fee-paying	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.12)
DEIS	-0.05	0.00	0.02
Ref: Non DEIS	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.14)
Marginally above average		-0.13	
		(0.12)	
Marginally below average		-0.19	
		(0.14)	
Disadvantaged		-0.12	
Ref: Affluent		(0.20)	
Physical or sensory disability	0.86***	1.45***	0.49**
Ref: All other disabilities	(0.18)	(0.32)	(0.16)
Constant	0.01	0.09	0.60***
	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.16)
N	1839	1839	2527
			0.009

Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

However, among 2012 applicants, those attending fee-paying schools are significantly more likely to achieve eligibility for DARE than those attending non fee-paying schools. This suggests that students with a disability who attend fee-paying schools are almost 1.4 times more likely to become eligible for DARE. Further, applicants who have declared a physical or sensory disability are significantly more likely be deemed eligible for DARE relative to those who disclose other types of disabilities.

The analyses presented here do not tell us anything about the body of second level students who are encouraged to apply to higher education because of the existence of DARE. Within this evaluation it is not possible to answer that question, given that the evaluation is focused on application to higher education as the starting point. The analyses presented here considered the pool of DARE applicants in 2010 and 2012. Using the administrative collected from the schemes, we have identified the factors that are likely to influence the submission of incomplete applications for DARE. A number of clear patterns emerge from the analyses. Older students, those who have an Irish or third language exemption and those who receive a greater number of supports at second level and students attending fee-paying schools or community/comprehensive school are groups that are less likely to submit incomplete DARE applications. However, applicants attending vocational schools (which typically have a higher proportion of children from lower socio-economic households) are more likely to submit incomplete applications. This may suggest that the application process is biased against students with lower levels of resources or information necessary to access the documentation necessary for application. In the administrative data, we do not have a measure of household financial situation. However, in 2010, those living in households in areas that are categorized as marginally above average levels of deprivation, are more likely to submit an incomplete application to DARE compared to those living in affluent areas. Using the number of supports received at second level as a proxy for extent of disability, those who have received a greater number of supports at second level are less likely to submit an incomplete DARE application. This may suggest that there is a *positive bias* in the application process toward those receiving a wide range of supports and those living in more financially secure households. All else being equal, while there was no evidence to suggest that the application process is biased against students with physical or sensory disabilities in 2010, no such effect was evident in the 2012 data.

When we considered the factors that are associated with eligibility for DARE among those who submit complete applications, we expected that few factors would determine eligibility

given that eligibility is dependent on provision of evidence (and extent) of disability. However, we find 2012 applicants who attend fee-paying schools are almost 1.4 times more likely to become eligible for DARE. While in 2010 those with a physical or sensory disability were 2.4 times more likely to be deemed eligible for DARE, their probability had reduced to 1.6, all else being equal, by 2012.

4.6 Criteria for Eligibility: Disclosure of Disability

This section now considers the criteria for eligibility and considers the nature of disability in more depth. It has been argued by some internal stakeholders that it is more difficult to access the scheme for some depending on the nature of disability that is being disclosed. Applicants must provide evidence of their disability in order to be considered eligible for the scheme. As part of the online application form, the Evidence of Disability Form must be completed by the accepted Medical Consultant/Specialist. This form provides verification of the disability and is used to by disability staff across institutions to determine appropriate supports at third level. While all applicants must provide evidence of disability (see Table 4.7), others do not have to complete the form should they already be in possession of the following documentation:

- Applicants who have an existing report completed within the appropriate timeframe by the accepted Medical Consultant/Specialist. The report must contain the same detail as the Evidence of Disability Form.
- Applicants with specific learning difficulties (Dyslexia or Dyscalculia), who must provide a full psycho-educational assessment completed by an appropriately qualified psychologist. The report must be less than 3 years old (i.e. must be dated after 1st February 2010 for entry in 2013).
- Applicants with DCD - Dyspraxia/Dysgraphia must provide a full psycho-educational assessment completed by an appropriately qualified psychologist and verification from an Occupational Therapist or Neurologist. The report must be less than 3 years old i.e. must be dated after 1st February 2010 (for 2013 new entrants).

Table 4.7: The Medical Consultants/Specialists and the age limit of reports, 2013 Entrants

Type of Disability	Accepted Medical Consultant/Specialist	Age of Report
Asperger's Syndrome	Appropriately qualified Psychiatrist OR Psychologist OR Neurologist OR Paediatrician who is a member of his or her professional or regulatory body	No age limit
Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	Appropriately qualified Psychiatrist OR Psychologist OR Neurologist OR Paediatrician who is a member of his or her professional or regulatory body	Must be less than three years old i.e. must be dated after 1st February 2010
Blind/Vision Impaired	Ophthalmologist OR Ophthalmic Surgeon	No age limit
Deaf/Hard of Hearing Students may apply under ONE of the following categories **1. Applicants who have an Audiogram** **2. Applicants who attend a School for the Deaf** **3. Applicants with a Cochlear Implant**	(A) Applicants who have an audiogram: Professionally Qualified Audiologist (B) Applicants who attend a School for the Deaf: Principal of School for the Deaf (C) Applicants with a Cochlear Implant: Ear, Nose & Throat (ENT) Consultant OR Cochlear Implant Programme Coordinator	No age limit
DCD – Dyspraxia/Dysgraphia	Applicants with DCD - Dyspraxia/Dysgraphia Must provide a full psycho-educational assessment completed by an appropriately qualified psychologist AND a report from an Occupational Therapist OR Neurologist who is a member of their respective professional or regulatory body.	Report from Psychologist must be less than three years old i.e. must be dated after 1st February 2010. There is no age limit on the report from the Occupational Therapist/Neurologist
Mental Health Condition	Psychiatrist	Must be less than three years old i.e. must be dated after 1st February 2010
Neurological Conditions (incl. Epilepsy, Brain Injury, Speech & Language Disabilities)	**Neurological Conditions:** Neurologist OR other relevant Consultant. **Speech & Language Disabilities:** Speech and Language Therapist	No age limit
Physical Disability	Orthopaedic Consultant OR other relevant Consultant appropriate to the disability/condition.	No age limit
Significant Ongoing Illness	**Diabetes Type 1:** Endocrinologist or Paediatrician **Cystic Fibrosis (CF):** Consultant Respiratory Physician or Paediatrician **Gastroenterology Conditions:** Gastroenterologist **Others:** Relevant Consultant in area of condition or Consultant Registrar/Registrar	Must be less than three years old i.e. must be dated after 1st February 2010
Specific Learning Difficulty (incl. Dyslexia and Dyscalculia)	Appropriately qualified Psychologist.	Must be less than three years old i.e. must be dated after 1st February 2010

While the nature of the disability that is disclosed typically influences both the application process and eligibility for the DARE, Table 4.8 highlights considerable variation in the numbers applying to DARE across categories of disability.

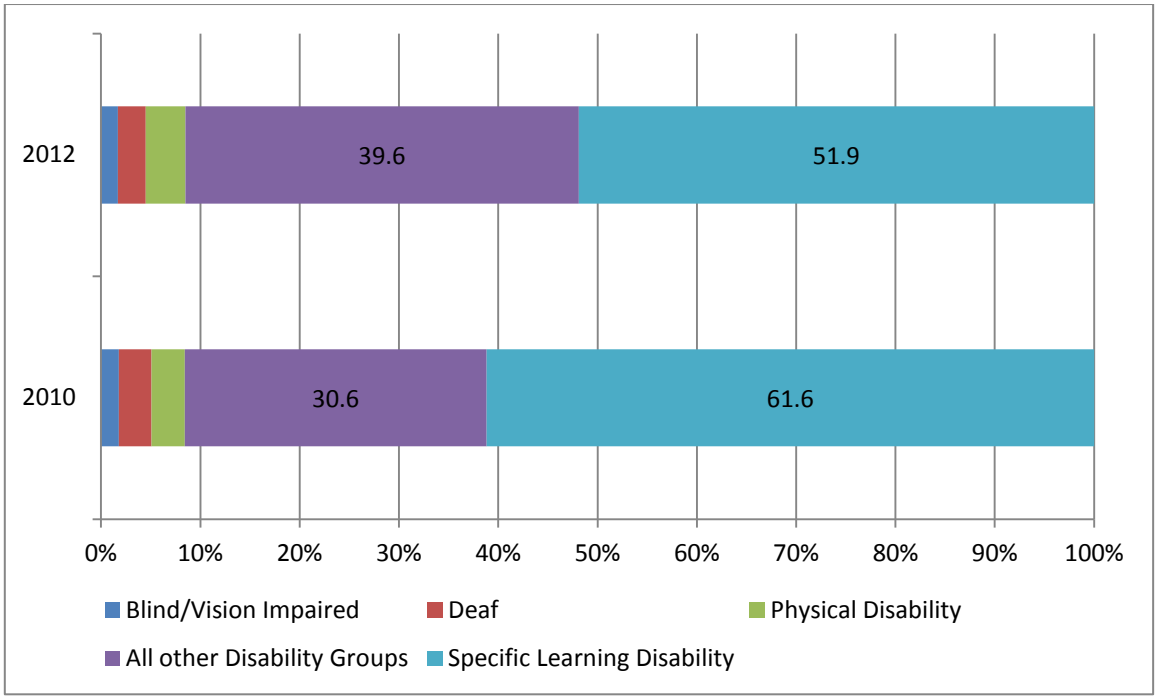
Table 4.8: Distribution of the number of DARE Applicants by category of disability 2010-2012

2010 Applicants					
	Number of Applications	Number of Complete Applications	% Complete Applications	Number of Eligible Applications	% Eligible Applications
Other	77	54	70	27	50
ADD/ADHD	83	68	82	62	91
Autism	79	68	86	62	91
Blind/Vision Impaired	39	35	90	20	57
Deaf	72	68	94	45	66
Physical Disability	76	69	91	57	83
Specific Learning Difficulty	1364	1124	82	385	34
Dyspraxia	110	84	76	64	76
Mental Health	92	79	86	70	89
Neurological	51	45	88	37	82
Significant Ongoing Illness	170	145	85	123	85
All	2213	1839	83	952	51.8
2012 Applicants					
	Number of Applications	Number of Complete Applications	% Complete Applications	Number of Eligible Applications	% Eligible Applications
ADD/ADHD	179	160	89	144	90
Autism	149	139	93	120	86
Blind/Vision Impaired	49	43	88	25	58
Deaf	81	73	90	51	70
Physical Disability	118	102	86	87	85
Specific Learning Difficulty	1527	1269	83	603	48
Dyspraxia	183	161	88	120	75
Mental Health	254	219	86	194	89
Neurological	92	85	92	74	87
Significant Ongoing Illness	301	272	90	225	83
Total	2941	2527	86	1646	65

Note: the number of those disclosing ‘Other’ or ‘Unspecified’ disabilities is not shown here due to small numbers, but do appear in the overall total

The majority of applications in both years come from DARE applicants who disclose a specific learning difficulty: representing 1.364 applications in 2010 and 1,527 applications in 2012. Figure 4.1 illustrates in summarised format, the considerable variation application by category of disability. That is, the majority of total applications (by young people under 23) to the scheme come from those who disclose a Specific Learning Disability in both years: 62% in 2010 and 52% in 2012. Less than 10% of all applications in both years are received from young people with a physical or sensory disability. Equal Access Data collection for 2011/12 reported in the HEA (2013a) indicates that 46% of respondents who indicated one or more disabilities disclosed having a learning difficulty.

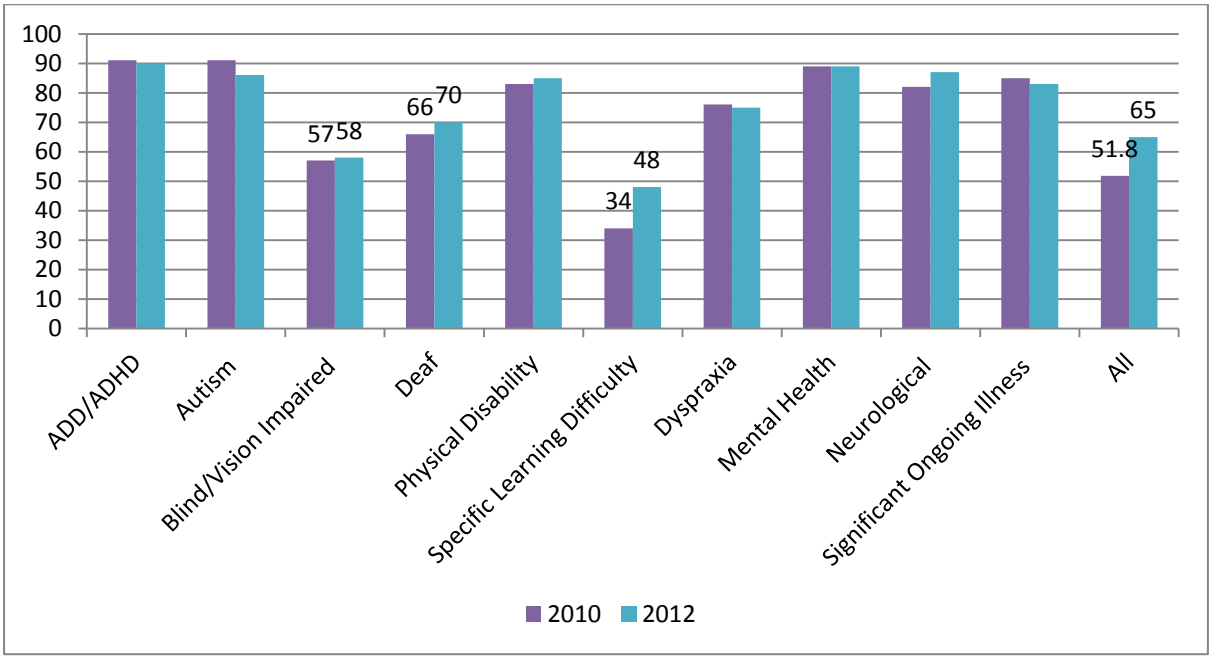
Figure 4.1: Distribution of all DARE Applicants aged under 23 by Category of Disability Disclosed, 2010 and 2012



The percentage of complete applications also varies somewhat according to category of disability. Those with physical or sensory disabilities have higher rates of submission of complete applications than any other group of students that disclose a disability in 2010. However, in 2012, while the percentage of complete applications received by this group continues to be high, other students according to disability have also increased their probability of submitting a complete application.

Table 4.8 also considers eligibility rates for DARE according to the category of disability that students declare, and eligibility rates for DARE are illustrated by type of disability that is disclosed by applicants for 2010 and 2012 in Figure 4.2. There is a high degree of consistency in eligibility rates within categories of disability between 2010 and 2012. Clearly, applicants who disclose ADD/ADHD, ASD, Physical Disability, Mental Health, Neurological Conditions or a Significant Ongoing Illness have high eligibility rates in both years. Despite the high number of applications from young people with Specific Learning Disabilities, their eligibility rates are lowest, with just over a third achieving eligibility for DARE in 2010 and almost a half in 2012. Eligibility rates are also relatively low among applicants who disclose a visual impairment or who are deaf.

Figure 4.2: Percentage of all DARE Applicants Who Achieved Eligibility for DARE by Category of Disability Disclosed, 2010 and 2012



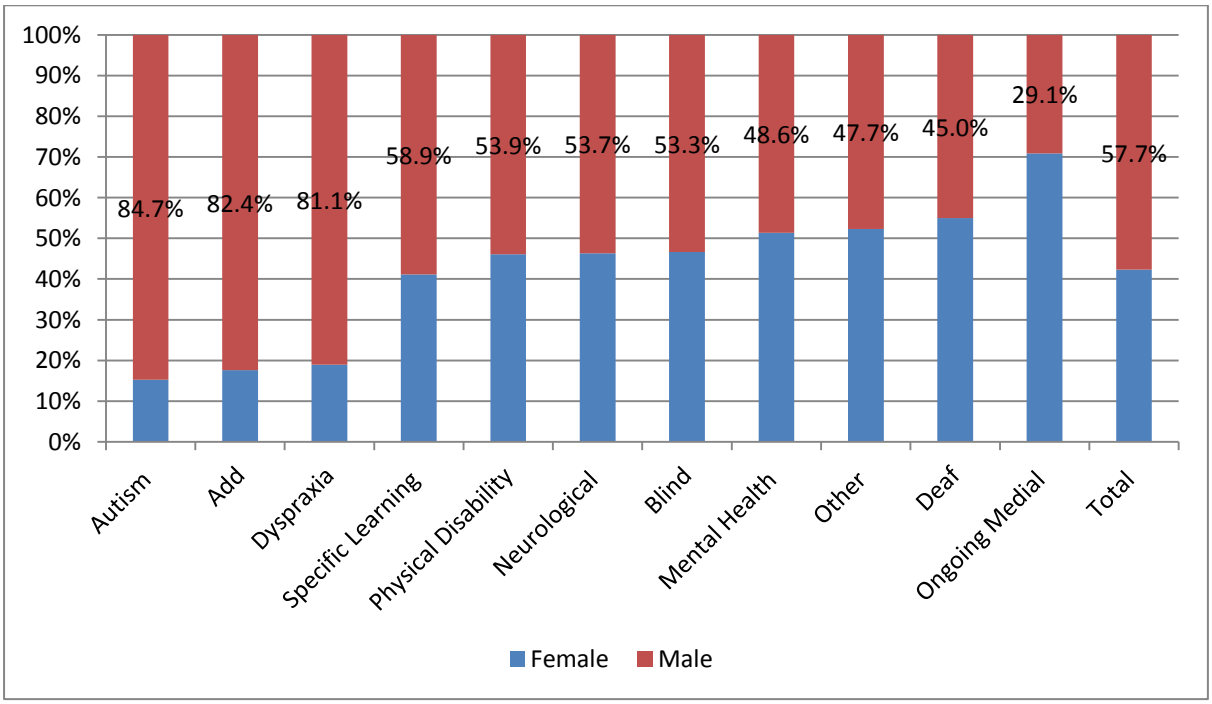
The profile of DARE applicants according to the nature of disability disclosed is examined in Table 4.9. There are some clear significant differences across applicants. Applicant groups that are under-represented at higher education: students with physical or sensory disabilities – are significantly less likely to be attending fee-paying schools and more likely to be attending vocational schools relative to other DARE applicants. Students with physical or sensory disabilities that apply to the scheme are also more likely to have a nationality other than Irish but less likely to have secured Irish or language exemptions.

Table 4.9: Profile of DARE Applicants by Type of Disability Disclosed, 2012

	Specific Learning Disability	Physical or Sensory Disability	Other Categories of Disability	Total DARE Applicants
	%	%	%	%
Irish Nationality	96.8	92.5	95.9	95.0
Irish exemption	29.8	10.7	12.4	22.1
Third language exemption	24.9	3.7	7.4	16.4
DEIS (not significant)	11.4	12.3	9.8	11.7
Fee-paying (approached)	17.3	10.7	16.2	17.3
Secondary	58.4	50.3	60.0	56.6
Vocational	17.4	20.9	15.9	18.1
Comm/Comp and other	24.2	28.2	24.1	25.3

Figure 4.3 highlights significant gender disparities across DARE applications according to the type of disability that they declare.

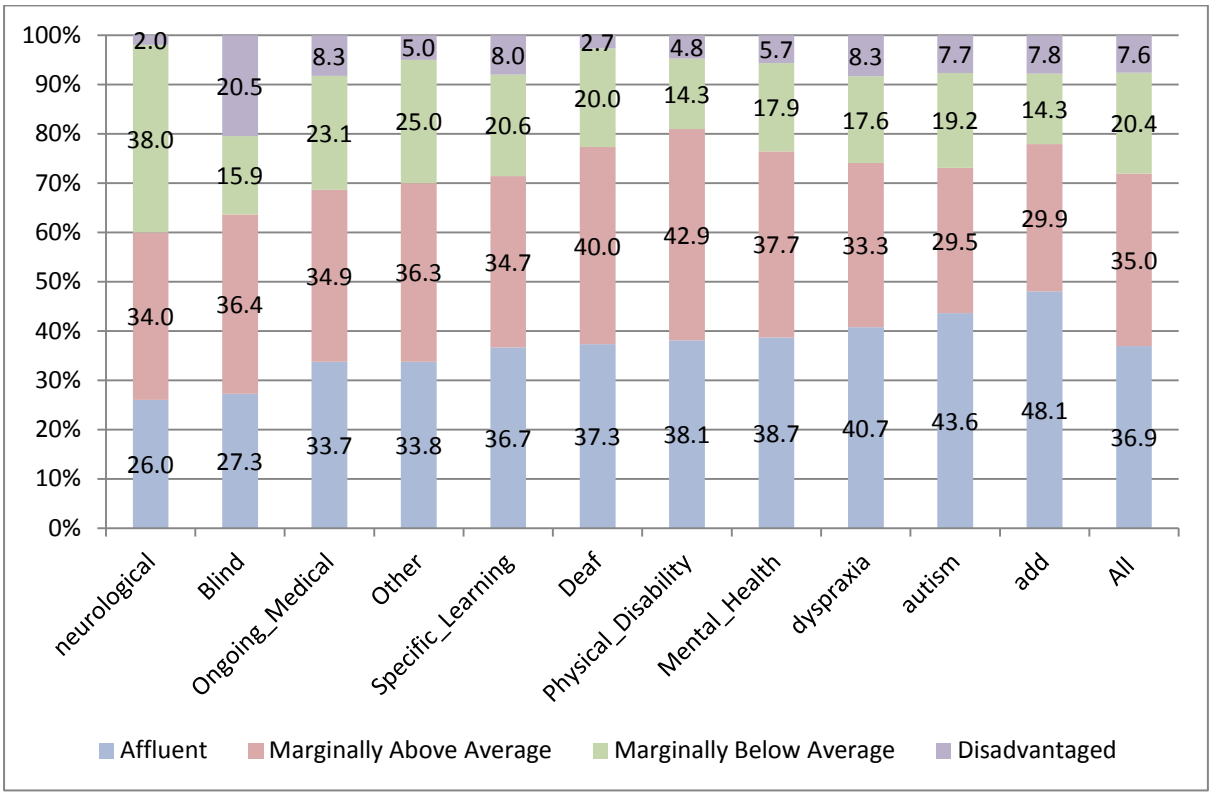
Figure 4.3: Gender Profile of all Applicants to DARE by Category of Disability Disclosed, 2012



The OECD (2007) has reported that in all countries, boys constitute more than 50 per cent of children identified as having a special educational need, and receiving additional resources in compulsory education. The OECD reports offers a possible explanation for such gender imbalance by way of boys' greater vulnerability to risks associated with germs, genes and trauma, so that they are more likely than girls to experience childhood illness or inherited conditions, but also they may be more likely to be involved in accidents in the home (NESSE 2012; Riddell 1996). In the Irish context, at primary level, boys are more likely to be identified as having an emotional or behavioural difficulty (Banks, Shevlin and McCoy 2012). Using data from the nine-year-old cohort of the *Growing Up in Ireland study*, (McCoy, Banks and Shevlin 2012) report that children attending highly disadvantaged school contexts are far more likely to be identified with behavioural problems and less likely to be identified with learning disabilities than children with similar characteristics attending other schools. They argue that 'behavioural' issues take precedence over learning difficulties in these schools pointing to a culture of care/containment rather than academic progress. This gender disproportionality has also been highlighted in Scottish research, but the discrepancy is most evident in non-normative categories such as learning difficulty and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, particularly where there is a strong association with social deprivation (Riddell 1996).

Figure 4.4 then provides an illustration of the distribution of DARE applicants within each category of the Local Area Deprivation measure according to the type of disability that is disclosed. In all, 37 per cent of applications live in affluent areas while just 8 per cent of applicants are living in areas of disadvantage. Contrary to the views expressed at times among stakeholders, DARE applicants who disclose are specific learning difficulty are not more likely to come from affluent areas relative to all other DARE applicants. 40 per cent of DARE applicants who disclose a neurological condition are from the most disadvantaged contexts (living in areas of disadvantage or areas that are marginally below average levels of deprivation), and this is case of 37 per cent of DARE applicants who disclose blindness, 31% of applicants with a significant ongoing illness, and 28% of applicants with a specific learning difficulty.

Figure 4.4: Local Area Deprivation Profile of all DARE Applicants by Category of Disability Disclosed, 2012

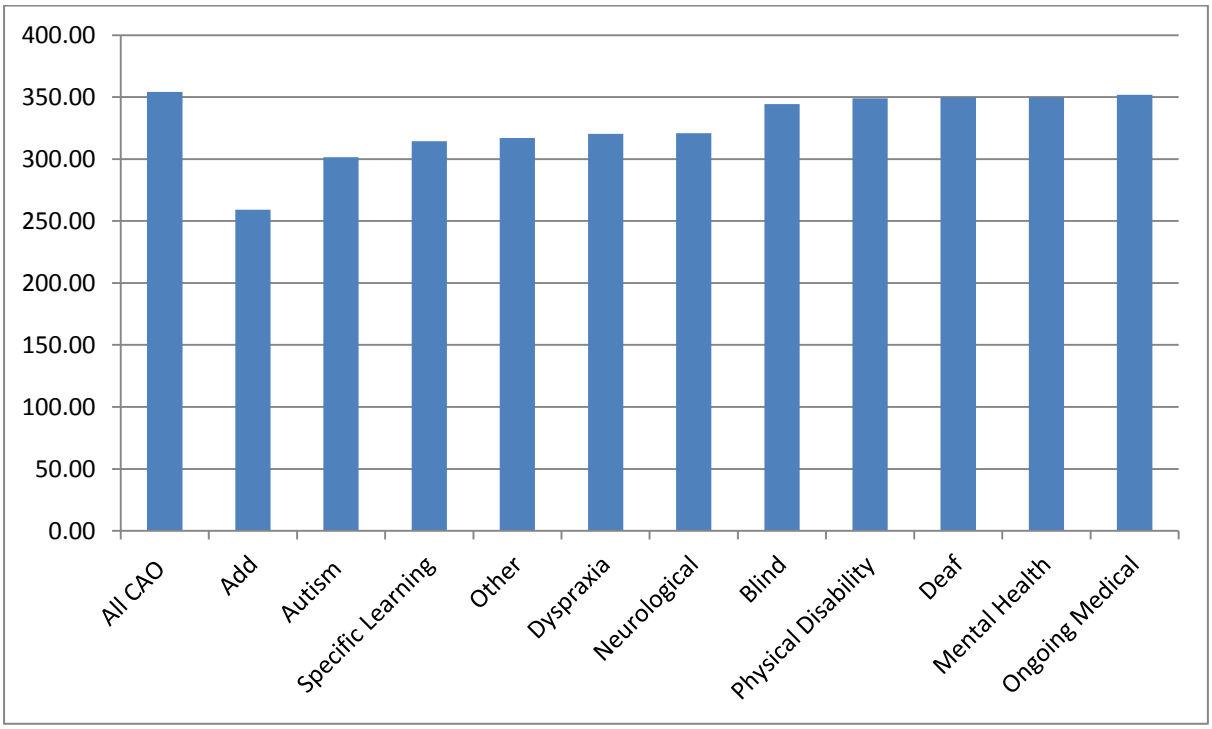


Clearly, DARE applicants who apply to higher education through the scheme represent students with disabilities who are more advantaged in terms of the areas. There is currently no analysis that we are currently aware of which maps the identification of additional support needs in Ireland to measures of living in an area of social deprivation. However, Banks and McCoy (year) report the disproportionate identification of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties among students in disadvantaged school contexts. That is, children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those attending schools designated as socio-economically disadvantaged are significantly more likely than their peers to be identified as having a special educational need of a non-normative type such as emotional behavioural difficulty (EBD).

Figure 4.5 highlights disparities in average Leaving Certificate performance levels among all DARE applicants by category of disability that applicants disclosed. Clearly, applicants who disclose blindness/visual impairment; those with a physical disability, deaf applicants, applicants with mental health concerns and applicants with a significant ongoing illness have on average similar levels of attainment relative to all CAO applicants. On the other hand,

applicants who disclose ADD, ASD, SLD, Dyspraxia or a Neurological condition have lower average attainment levels.

Figure 4.5: Average Leaving Certificate Performance of all DARE Applicants by Category of Disability Disclosed, 2012



We do not have individual level information on the wider pool of applicants to higher education with a disability to inform this evaluation. Should such data arise in the future, it would be possible to examine issues relating to disproportionality in application to higher education. In the absence of such data, it is possible to draw on the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) resource allocation at post primary schools. The NCSE differentiates between 'high incidence' and 'low incidence' disabilities. The definition of high incidence and low incidence can be found in the 2012 annual report[45]. In summary, high incidence disabilities tend to be those with a Borderline Mild[46]/Mild[47] General Learning

[45] http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/Annual-Report_20_06_13AccFINAL-ENGLISH.pdf

[46] Based on the pupil being assessed by a psychologist as having a borderline mild general learning disability (the pupil's full scale IQ will have been assessed in the range of 70 to 79)

[47] Based on the pupil being assessed by a psychologist as having a mild general learning disability, (the pupil's full scale IQ will have been assessed in the range 50 – 69).

Disability and those with a Specific Learning Disability[48]. Low incidence disabilities constitute all other categories of disability (Autism/Autism Spectrum Disorder; Emotional disturbance and/or behaviour problems; Hearing impairment; Moderate general learning disability; multiple disabilities; Pupils with special educational needs arising from a syndrome, Physical disability, severe and profound general learning disability, severe emotional disturbance and/or behaviour problems; Specific speech and language disorder; Visual impairment).

Typically, students at second level with Borderline mild/Mild General Learning Difficulty, Specific Learning Disability, or Emotional or Behavioural Difficulties on average receive the largest numbers of resource hours[49]. Those with a physical disability or Autism Spectrum Disorder receive a lower number of resource hours, followed by students with other types of disabilities including sensory and multiple disabilities. Likewise, students with an emotional or behavioural difficulty, and those diagnosed with ASD followed by students with Physical Disabilities receive larger SNA Support than those with multiple disabilities, Specific Learning Disabilities or sensory impairments] In 2010, 52% of applications granted for additional teaching support at second level related to children with a high incidence disability. These issues are considered later in Chapter 6 relating to school level application.

4.7 Stakeholder Perspectives

The stakeholder interviews provided in-depth insights into the workings of the DARE scheme and the impression of the schemes by internal and external stakeholders. Many spoke about the significant gains that have been made in the administration of the scheme since its inception (in terms of streamlining the screening process, nailing down the criteria, and general awareness of the schemes). There was a generally held view that the DARE scheme was now much more accessible to students with disabilities, with regard to application to the scheme via the CAO system. There was also a dominant view that institutions had learned a lot from the DARE process about the complex and heterogenous nature of disability which was driven by the 'national' scheme. Further, compared to the application process in the past,

[48] Such children have been assessed by a psychologist as being of average intelligence or higher and having a degree of learning disability specific to basic skills in reading, writing or mathematics which places them at or below the 2nd percentile on suitable, standardized, norm-referenced tests.

[49] See Appendix 3 http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/AnnualReport2010.pdf; http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/Annual_Report_accessible_version.pdf ; http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/Annual-Report_20_06_13AccFINAL-ENGLISH.pdf

stakeholders were convinced that the application was of great benefit to students. Previously, students could apply to higher education but had to submit an application to each individual institution they were hoping to attend.

However, views relating to the effectiveness of the DARE scheme varied considerably. At times internal stakeholders were polarised in their views relating to the effectiveness of the scheme, particularly in targeting students with physical, sensory and multiple disabilities. Continuing low levels of uptake among students with HEA targeted groups (those with physical, sensory and multiple disabilities) was a key issue for many disability officers and those working with students with disabilities in higher education institutions.

> *I suppose my concern, speaking from [my institutions] point of view is who's accessing it and who's availing of it and certainly from our targets it tends to be students with specific learning difficulties, mental health and those kinds of disabilities. Whereas we've set quite ambitious targets around students with physical disabilities and sensory disabilities and multiple disabilities.*

A number of reasons were attributed to a limit in the effectiveness of the DARE scheme with regard to improving the participation rates of young people with physical, sensory and multiple disabilities. The dominant explanation offered tended to focus around previous attainment levels at second level.

> *What we're seeing in our research is that there are certain counties in Ireland where there's no application from a student with a sensory or a physical disability... their achievement is so poor that they're not even in the run for consideration for a place on reduced points.*

> *A lot of them just never meet the matriculation requirements, they shouldn't be coming to third level and the, this unrealistic expectation...it's amazing the amount of guidance counsellors that cannot understand why somebody with maybe even a hundred and twenty points can't get into a three hundred point course'.*

Stakeholders and those working in access and disability offices often expressed a concern of bias in the scheme, whereby those from more advantaged households are more likely to access the information, knowledge and accompanying documentation necessary for eligibility for the scheme. At times, those with a Specific Learning Difficulty were identified as having more access to educational resources and supports, thus displacing those with Physical, Sensory or Multiple disabilities.

I'd be the first to say that the, the process is overrun by applicants with a specific learning difficulty and I think again, there's a huge concern across Ireland that you know, again there's evidence there from the applicants and where they're coming from that many are coming from more privileged backgrounds, that are applying through DARE because they can afford the educational psychologists report

there is data there as well to, to show the evidence that the applicants with an SLD from DEIS schools or disadvantaged areas are not applying through DARE, because a). the ed. psychologist that is working in the second level school in that environment would, would not have the time to do an ed-psych report for the purposes of DARE, but and of course the applicant can't, doesn't have the funding or the means to go externally, like the more privileged students would, maybe from other backgrounds.

'...schools that have additional funding, you know, they're drawing on it. Schools that don't, can't and I mean it is, I think principals are coming out very strongly now and saying it is the most vulnerable, those with special needs and the most disadvantaged who are actually feeling this the most (External Stakeholder)

I do think that there are issues there because, and again it does come down to resourcing because the level of resources and capacity that post primary schools have, and primary schools have, in terms of adopting the technologies and using the technologies and applying them and so on is limited and we have, you know, quite a different for example accommodations scheme at Junior Cycle and at Senior Cycle than at Third Level and so on...curriculum discontinuity is also a significant factor (External Stakeholder)

In this context the issues of access to accommodations at second level was also raised:

[there are those who can access] private psychological assessments or who have, who game this in some ways and I'm sure there is informational data on it but certainly go on the boards and look at the Mumsnet and the suggestions that are made about how you can get your kid a private centre, get your kid a scribe, you know, all the things that will advantage your child and I think that's one of the, I think that's part of the reason why it's [the accommodations at second level] more tightly policed. I don't think it's successfully policed but it's part of the reason.

There was an evident willingness for greater outreach activities to accompany the DARE scheme. Such outreach would target pupils and students in primary and second level schools, particularly in terms of raising aspirations, introducing assistive technologies and getting young people 'on the right track' to go to higher education. Typically internal stakeholders perceived greater outreach activities as one way to successful counter any long-term barriers

to making it to higher education. Examples of existing outreach programmes included the Southwest Regional Alliance on Access[50].

> *DARE is just an admissions route, but the pre-entry activities, you have to get at those students before they're advised by the guidance counsellors to do foundation maths which leaves practically no course open to them and this is what's happening. They don't, they're not even eligible for DARE because the, they're making the incorrect decision at the junior cert level and that's what we need to be targeting in the second level*

> *We should have linked schools, like the Access programmes do and we should be working with those children in your twenty satellite link schools and those are the students that you recommend on to be considered for the DARE route, not this points nonsense.*

> *If more money was put in to supporting the students with high end need physical and sensory disabilities in second level, supporting their access to education, supporting them in the learning process in, in the use of assistive technologies... if a programme like that was, was like given more funding and, and more HEI's did similar outreach for those categories, maybe they wouldn't need DARE at all. They wouldn't need a reduced points system, because they, it's not like these kids have a lack of ability, they have ability but they're not currently getting access to the curriculum because of you know, inadequacies there in the second level system.*

Others identified that such long-term outreach programmes would require a certain level of co-ordination between schools, higher education institutions, parents, students and disability organisations and support groups.

> *if say we focused on those groups, those disabilities, the physical, sensory and the multiples and even then, it becomes a collaborative project between institutions and second level and parents and those support groups that are there as well...you have then you know, targeted students at a very young age to, and working the whole way up and that they then come.*

DARE operators also had concerns about how students with disabilities choose institutions. They spoke of the benefits of co-ordinated approaches such as UniLink and were unsure of the extent to which a student could decide the best institutional match, given their needs.

> *'students should be making those informed decisions about major disability and the supports they can receive in the institution, it shouldn't be up to the institution to cherry pick the best students, but students have to make an informed decision as well'.*

[50] UL and UCC

DARE as a supplementary admissions route

DARE operators also spoke about the considerable amount of work involved in screening the large number of applications, with limited success as some perceived it in terms of incoming DARE students. In such instances, they questioned the current model of admission in terms of increasing overall numbers of students with disabilities in higher education. Typical comments from DARE operators working in some of the larger institutions with a larger number of DARE acceptances coming through were as follows:

> *'the DARE eligible students are probably less than 15 percent of the students that register in a year cycle and yet you give them hundreds of hours for the process for those students as against other students...so my question is, what is the point? I could have spent those hours on handpicking the [number] [that came to my institution]'.*

> *'We had over sixteen hundred students put [this institution] somewhere on their CAO list and apply through DARE and we had eighty-one acceptances of places, so that's what, five percent?*

Among some DARE operators that had substantial functions in the screening and admission process for DARE, there was often a feeling that the screening function left little time for reflection on key issues around students with disabilities. However, this could be symptomatic of the relative infancy of disability work in Ireland.

> *'the reality is that AHEAD published a report quite recently which is saying that still participation rates of students with physical disabilities and sensory disabilities are lower...But what are we doing about that? You know, how, you know how are we targeting those individuals, what are we doing to retain those individuals...That's what we should be doing'.*

> *I mean I think we're, we're significantly further behind on the disability [in European terms] (External Stakeholder)*

A number of internal and external stakeholders also expressed concern that the DARE scheme, while seeking to raise the educational attainment of young people with disabilities, has had the unintended consequence of being aligned to a 'medical model' rather than a 'social model'. In such instances, stakeholders spoke about the DARE system as a system of 'gate-keeping'; 'looking at documentation rather than people', and identifying whether a candidate was 'disabled enough'; rather than focusing on providing assistance and resources.

> *'Well we sit there as services and promote a social model and inclusion and what have you and we operate a medical model, you have to fit this, you have to be disabled enough to do it and what, it's absolutely wrong. And I've always believed its wrong because no, this, I think that this is the reason why this is not operated anywhere else in the world, because it's impossible to do fairly. It's impossible, it's about excluding people if they're not disabled enough and I think that's the reason why, there must be a better way of doing.*
>
> *I would agree basically is that we're looking at documentation rather than people, we're deciding on how dyslexic are you compared to the person beside you, we're not taking in the social and economic factors of their life, the parental, school that they've gone to and we're basically deciding well no, you, you're bad enough to get in, you're unfortunate enough to have a bad thing but you're eligible now.*
>
> *just because a person has a diagnosis of a condition it doesn't necessarily mean that it has affected their education so that they might get through on DARE because they have their diagnosis, but, they mightn't really need DARE (DARE Operator)*
>
> *This process was never, this process was set up to, to make an opportunity for people with disability to get into college and what's happened is because of the numbers in the uptake*

Others provided a counter-discourse to this by highlighting the (uncomfortable) necessity of pragmatic system in order to create a fair national system, that provides that students with disabilities with information on how to access college.

> *I do see this as an, as an inclusive scheme, it is, you know, it is opening up college as an option for individuals who are significantly impacted by, by their disability and like I do have you know, a discomfort I suppose in terms of, it is very diagnosis driven, it is a desk exercise, we're just looking at documentation but I think the reality is being very pragmatic about it, you know, for this to be a national scheme you know that's going to be hopefully at some stage more centralised and more embedded through the CAO, I don't see how, like I'm open to being convinced on this but I don't see how you can make it a different model, you know*

Administration of DARE and Growing Numbers of Applicants

Those working as DARE operators spoke about the wider context within which the expansion of the numbers applying operates. They also spoke about the unintended consequences of the expansion of applicants over time on the primary roles of disability officers within institutions. In doing so, they highlighted how the administrative nature of the DARE admissions process has had an impact on how they work within their own institutions; and the resources they can offer students with disabilities who are currently in higher education.

Even if you look at your numbers they're over a thousand now in terms of the number of students with disabilities, like resources aren't increasing within the sector and we are getting busier in terms of participation rates.

'I see the huge amount of hours that my colleague gives to DARE on a weekly basis, I mean, I'm managing a caseload of students, but I'm managing all the students while [my colleague] is doing DARE administration [ ] meetings and up to her eyes in it and doing good work, but you know that's distracting from the actual students we've got in through the DARE process, because one disability officer is busy two and a half days a week on the process'.

A key theme that arose in the evaluation was the changing nature of the role of disability officers and people within institutions working with students with disabilities. There was a strong view held that the administrative nature of the work of DARE on the admissions side displaced the traditional activities of staff working on the ground, both pre and post entry.

'That's what we should be doing, in actual fact, that's what we should be doing with our time. Because as the number of students increases and we have to come up with solutions like that, on increasingly less money because the ESF budget has been cut and cut and cut, that is what we should be doing, not this stuff. We're wasting, we're expending so much time on DARE that we don't have time to be looking at you know, developing our support systems within our colleges to support the students that are entering through DARE.

'The reality is the work that we do predominately is around post entry support or very targeted outreach activities whereas for me DARE now is really an administrative piece'

'You know, why are we doing that, we're professionals that work in the area of support provision to students with disabilities'

'but in terms of the screening and managing the administration around communications and around rechecks and all the rest, I wouldn't see our expertise in the area of disability and disability support and policy making being utilised as effectively as it can'.

However when prompted, and perhaps as a result of the administrative nature of the DARE screening process, some of the disability officers had a limited grasp on the range of literature relating to disability and educational disadvantage, little contact with external stakeholders or other Government departments and agencies relating to students with disabilities.

Uptake of Disability supports among entrants

The limited uptake of supports provided by the Disability office was often a source of tension for those who work on the schemes. This was evident across HE institutions. In two institutions there was a concern about DARE eligible students accessing high points courses such as Medicine, Dentistry or Pharmacy through the DARE scheme, but not accessing supports once entry had been negotiated.

> *there were a number of students that said no, we don't need to register, and if they're registered they said they didn't need any support. And that's, that's a real concern, you know.*

Sometimes DARE operators attributed this to parents applying for the scheme rather than the students themselves, and so as a result, the student has little input. When they then make it to higher education, they feel that they can manage by themselves.

> *all the information and the student has no input in it whatsoever and then it gets to college like and they're like, I'm grand, I don't need the support because that's the way a lot of students are anyway, they don't want to partake in any supports, they're, you know, it's, they're eighteen now and they're an adult and they don't have to sign up to these things and they don't want to be*

Other institutions talked about how at times students would have quite severe disabilities and not make contact with the disability office. It was acknowledged in this context that interaction with the disability office may reinforce an individuals' 'otherness' or stigmatisation despite the fact that the disability office is there as a source of support. In this particular context, it was estimated that just 40% of new entrants with a disability had accessed supports provided by the disability office, despite efforts that were made to inform students who were admitted through the DARE scheme of the supports available to them. However, typically when students begin to struggle, they then had more contact with the disability office.

> *I mean we respect that if they don't want the support I'm not going to push it but at the same time if when, because last year we would have indicated in the letter that, to the student, you know, it came in last year that if they were offered a DARE place it was part of the, part and parcel of that allocation that they were to register with the disability service, you know.*

It was also recognised that third level offers greater flexibility in how students learn and as a result, the need for a DARE student to register for accommodations because of their disability may not be so great.

> *there are some students who maybe second level just doesn't suit them and they can't succeed at second level so their disability at second level has an impact on them. But when they get to third level, they may actually excel because it's a different, it's a different way of learning because I think at second level there's so many students who second level just doesn't, they just can't succeed at second level and they need something like DARE in order for them to get into third level*

4.8: Summary

This chapter sought to provide an overview of issues relating to application to and eligibility for the DARE scheme. The share of applications to the DARE scheme has increased substantially over the period 2010-2012. As total applications have increased, so too have complete applications, from 79% in 2010 to almost 82% in 2012. The share of DARE applications as a proportion of all CAO applications has also grown from 3.2% of all applications in 2010 to 4.2% in 2012. By 2012, application for both schemes accounted for 15% of all CAO applications. DARE eligible applications have also increased over this period from 41% of all applications in 2010 to 55% in 2012. The increasing eligibility rate is also evident when we consider only complete applications: an increase is evident from 52% of complete applications in 2010 to 63% of applications by 2012.

Using the DARE Form data and DARE CAO data, analyses were undertaken to examine the characteristics of applicants who submit incomplete applications. We should point out that the data used in this chapter do not capture the body of second level students who are encouraged to apply to higher education because of the DARE scheme. DARE applicants are significantly more likely to be older than younger, perhaps reflecting the health/well-being difficulties of the body of students with disabilities across the life-course. Compared to all other CAO applicants, DARE applicants are more likely to have achieved lower levels than average levels of attainment in the LC, compared to all other CAO applicants. In addition, DARE applicants are less likely to have achieved higher levels than average levels of attainment in the LC, compared to all other CAO applicants. There are also clear disparities in terms of the schools that DARE applicants have attended; that is, the DARE cohorts are more likely to have previously attended a fee-paying or 'grind' school relative to all other CAO applicants, and less likely to have attended a vocational school.

In the interviews with stakeholders, there were concerns that the application process may be biased in favour of applicants with certain types of disabilities, or applicants with greater resources at their disposal. Both 2010 and 2012 were examined due to changes in the application process over time. In both years, older applicants (those aged 19 and over) are more likely to submit incomplete applications relative to younger applicants. In both years those with a third language exemption (incorporating applicants with a Specific Learning Disability) are significantly less likely to submit an incomplete application than those without such exemptions. Much of the paper work involved in securing a language exemption overlaps with the paperwork required by the DARE programme. Thus, it may be that these students are automatically best placed to apply for the DARE scheme. In both years, applicants who have received a greater number of supports at second level are significantly less likely to have submitted incomplete applications. This may suggest that those who are receiving a wide range of supports are not disadvantaged in terms of submitting the documentation for DARE. Applicants who previously attended fee-paying schools are significantly less likely to submit incomplete applications than those from non-fee-paying schools in both years, suggesting that these applicants are perhaps better placed in terms of resources and information to apply to the DARE scheme. Further social differentiation is evident in 2012 as applicants attending vocational schools were significantly more likely to submit an incomplete application, relative to secondary school students. These findings may suggest that the application process is biased against students with lower levels of resources or information necessary to access the documentation for application. There is however a *positive bias* in the application process toward those receiving a wide range of supports. All else being equal, there is no evidence to suggest that the application process is biased against students with physical or sensory disabilities, given that they are less likely to submit incomplete applications than students who disclose other disabilities.

When we consider the factors that are associated with eligibility for DARE among those who submit complete applications, we expect (and find) that few of the measured educational and social background characteristics are significant determinants of eligibility given that eligibility is dependent on the evidence (and ultimately extent) of the disability. However, we find that the type of school attended (fee-paying), the number of supports received at second level and the nature of the disability influence both the application process and eligibility for the scheme.

The final section summarized some of the key themes arising from the stakeholder interviews. Stakeholder perspectives of the schemes tended to be positive in general, particularly about the advances that have been made for students with disabilities in applying to higher education alongside applying for the DARE scheme. Stakeholders typically tended to have concerns about a potential bias in the application process for DARE alongside disability and social class lines. That is, there was a concern that the scheme is not capturing greater numbers of students with a disability from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. There was a concern that the scheme is not capturing greater numbers of students with physical, sensory and multiple disabilities over time. (The quantitative data would suggest this also). A further concern articulated by stakeholders relates to the intersection of disability and disadvantage, and about a potential bias in the application process which may deter low income or disadvantaged students with disabilities from applying to higher education through the DARE scheme.

Reasons for the low uptake of the target HEA groups typically were attributed to lower levels of prior academic attainment and lack of outreach around the DARE scheme by internal stakeholders. Internal stakeholders also expressed concern about the potential lack of agency that students with disabilities have in choosing the best college to support their needs. There was also a tension between DARE eligibility and the uptake of disability supports once entry had been negotiated. Internal stakeholders also spoke about the impact that the DARE scheme has on their working lives, indicating that the screening of applications largely displaced the traditional activities of staff working on the ground, both pre and post entry.

Chapter 5: School Level Application to the HEAR and DARE schemes

5.1 Introduction

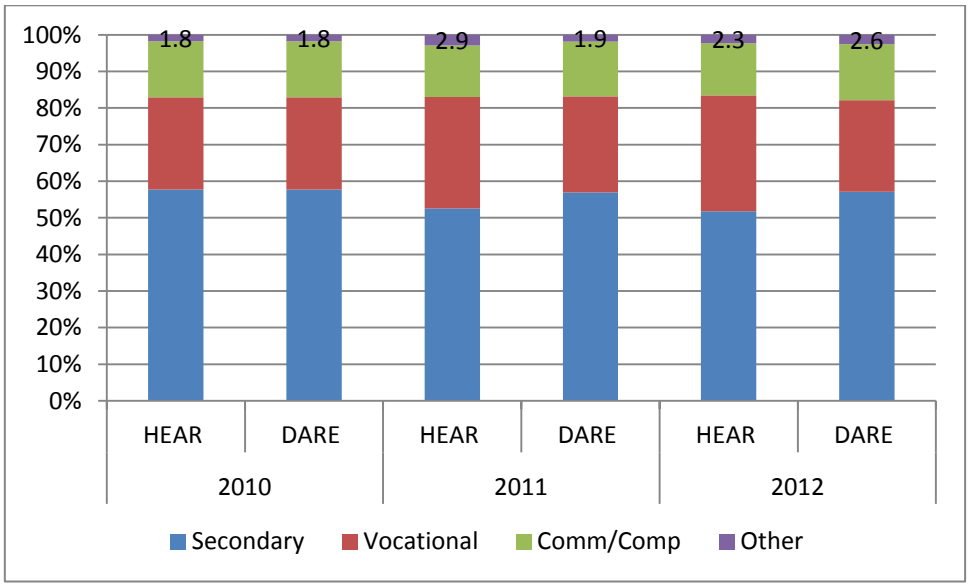
We now consider the schools from which HEAR and DARE applications are submitted between 2010 and 2012. In doing so, we consider the extent to which access to the schemes through application varies across different types of schools. Combining the administrative HEAR and DARE Form data with data already published on the Department of Education and Skills website allows us to compare uptake across various different school settings. This allows a consideration of the following aspects or dimensions of mainstream schools: Sector (Vocational, Secondary, Comm/Comp, Other); Gender-mix; Fee-Paying status; DEIS status, School size; Curriculum on offer in junior and senior cycle; and supports granted to schools by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

The reminder of the chapter is set out as follows. Section 5.2 provides overall trends in application to HEAR and DARE across a range of diverse school settings. Section 5.3 then models the school level factors associated with the submission of applications to HEAR. Section 5.4 presents the results of the models which consider the school level factors associated with the submission of applications to DARE. A summary is then provided in Section 5.5.

5.2 Overall Trends in Application to HEAR and DARE

We now examine the schools, and their characteristics, from which HEAR and DARE applications come from; as well as trends over time in numbers of school leavers applying to the schemes. We first consider the profile of all educational institutions from which applications are received. Figure 5.1 illustrates the distribution of applications by institutional type.

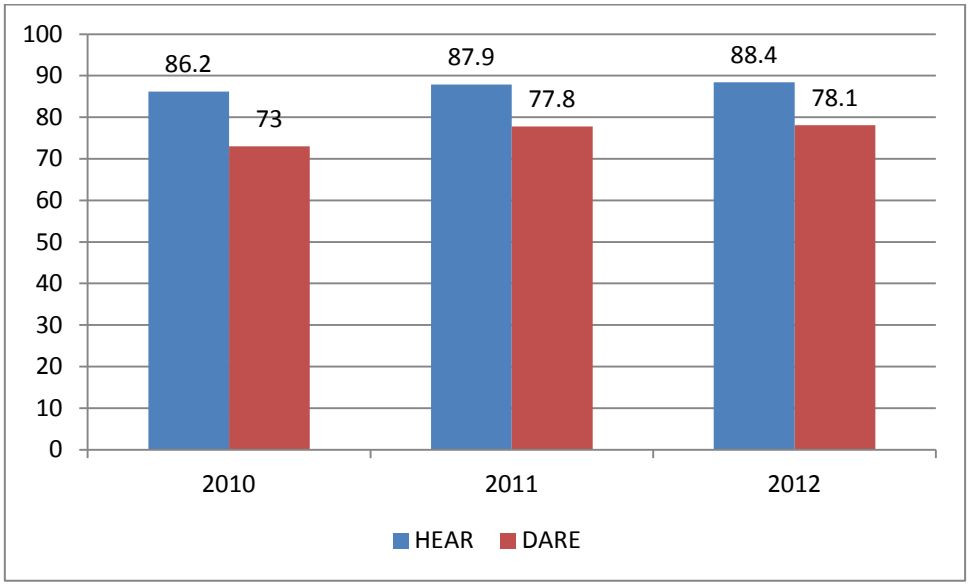
Figure 5.1: Distribution of applications for HEAR and DARE by school sector 2010-2012



While the schemes are targeted at school leavers under the age of 23, applications can also be potentially received from VTOS Centres and Adult Education centres, Further Education Centres, Adult Literacy Services, as well as Fee-paying and 'Grind' schools. The share of applications for each of the schemes from outside mainstream second level schools are typically very low, but have increased from 1.8% in 2010 to 2.6% of applications. Typically, this accounts for applications from less than twenty such schools.

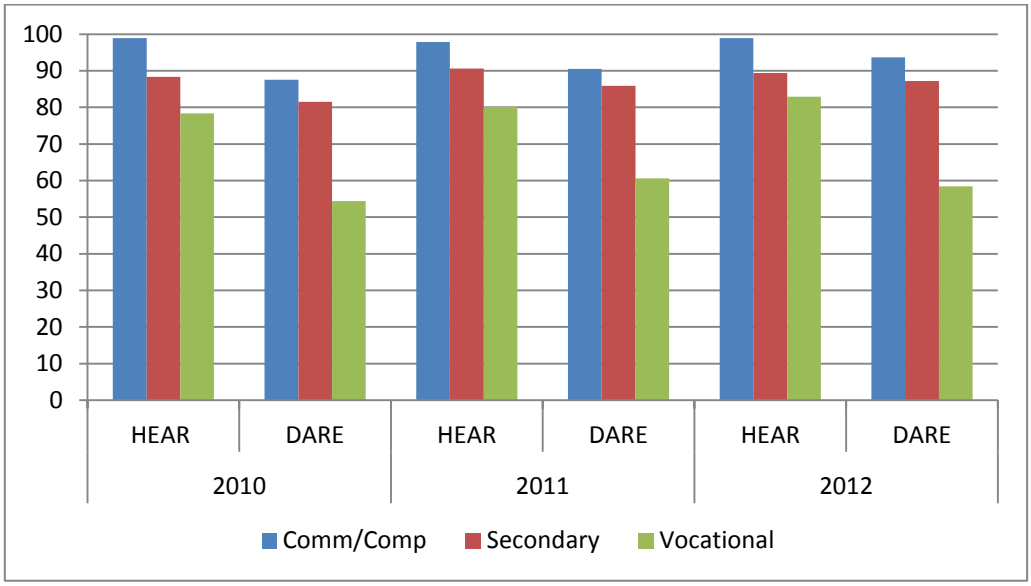
Figure 5.2 illustrates the share of mainstream second level schools from which at least one application was received, for each of the schemes. We find that that applications have increased significantly over the period 2010-2012 for both HEAR and DARE. For example, at least one application was received from 86% of second level schools in 2010, and this grew to 88% of second level schools by 2013. While the proportion of schools from which DARE applications are received is lower, applications for DARE have also grown from 73 per cent of second level schools (mainstream secondary, vocational, community/comprehensives) in 2010 to 78% of second level schools in 2012.

Figure 5.2: Proportion of mainstream second level schools from which at least one application was received



While the majority of applications received come from secondary schools, application levels are high across all school types for HEAR. Figure 5.3 illustrates that at least one application has been received from almost all community/comprehensive schools and 90% of secondary schools. In 2012, at least one application for HEAR was received from 83% of vocational schools. Levels of application are lower for DARE and this is evident across all school types. The previous pattern generally holds for DARE as rates are highest among community/comprehensive schools followed by secondary schools. Rates of application to DARE are however significantly lower among vocational schools, and in 2012, at least one application to DARE was received from 58% of vocational schools. This may reflect a lower level of engagement with DARE among vocational schools. Interestingly, on this point, vocational schools have a greater engagement with HEAR compared to DARE.

Figure 5.3: Proportion of mainstream second level schools from which at least one application was received



It is also useful to consider a number of key school characteristics with regard to HEAR and DARE applications to identify where the majority of applications for HEAR and DARE are coming from. The distribution of applications by school type is highlighted in Table 5.1. With regard to both HEAR and DARE, the majority of applications received reflect the structure of the second level sector. That is, the majority of second level schools are coeducational and almost two-thirds of HEAR and DARE applications are received from such schools. Likewise, the majority of applications are received from day schools rather than boarding schools; public schools rather than fee-paying schools, non-DEIS schools rather than DEIS schools; schools under catholic patronage; schools taught through English, medium/large sized schools, schools that do not provide the JCSP or the LCA and schools that provide the LCVP. While there is some variation between HEAR and DARE applicants, typically, the patterns are similar.

Table 5.1: Distribution of schools from which at least one application was received for HEAR and DARE

	HEAR			Distribution All Schools	DARE		
	2010	**2011**	**2012**		**2010**	**2011**	**2012**
Gender Mix							
Single sex Boys	15.3	15.4	14.9	15.0	16.9	16.6	16.8
Single sex Girls	20.3	20.4	20.4	19.0	21.1	21.3	21.6
Coed	64.4	64.1	64.7	66.0	62	62.1	61.5
Fee-Paying[51]							
Fee-Paying	3.8	4.7	4.1	8.0	9.8	8.8	9.2
Public	96.2	95.3	91.8	92	90.2	91.2	90.8
DEIS Status							
DEIS	29.6	29.2	29.8	27.0	20.5	21.3	20.7
Non-DEIS	70.4	70.8	70.2	73.0	79.5	78.7	79.3
Patronage							
Catholic	50.6	50.9	51.3	49.0	53.9	53.4	54.3
Minority Religion	4.9	5	3.1	4.0	6.4	6	5.1
Inter-denominational	44.5	44.1	45.6	48.0	39.7	40.6	40.6
Language of Instruction							
All students taught through Irish	4.7	5.5	5.3	6.0	4.2	4.6	5
Other	95.3	94.5	94.7	94.0	95.8	95.4	95
School Size							
Under 100	2.1	1.6	1.4	2.0	0.9	1.2	1.2
101-200	7.3	7.7	8.8	9.1	4.9	6.3	6
201-300	14.0	14.1	13.5	13.4	12.6	12.5	10.8
301-400	16.2	14.8	14.1	14.4	14.5	13.8	13.3
401-500	15.7	15.6	14.9	14.9	15.1	15.5	15.4
501-600	15.7	15.5	15.0	13.7	18.1	16.6	16.5
601-700	13.2	12.2	13.0	12.7	15.6	13.8	15.1
701-800	6.4	8.8	8.9	8.1	7.3	9.3	9.9
801 and over	9.4	9.8	10.3	11.3	10.9	10.9	11.7

[51] Fee-paying schools have been identified from the list for 2011/2012 published on the Department of Education and Skills website.

However, when we consider the *proportion* of schools by each school type, that have at least one application to HEAR or DARE, clear differences emerge both across school types and across schemes. Figure 5.4 illustrates the proportion of fee-paying and public schools from which at least one application was received for HEAR and DARE. It's immediately obvious that at least one application was received for HEAR from a higher proportion of public schools than fee-paying second level schools while the opposite is true for DARE: that is, at least one application was received for DARE from a significantly higher proportion of fee-paying schools than public second level schools.

While the majority of schools that have submitted at least one HEAR application are co-educational schools, a higher proportion of girl's single sex schools have at least one HEAR application than any other school type (91% relative to 85% of co-educational schools and 87% of boy's single sex. However, the relationship between gender-mix and HEAR applications was not statistically significant.

Figure 5.4: Proportion of fee-paying and public schools from which at least one application was received to HEAR and DARE 2010 -2012

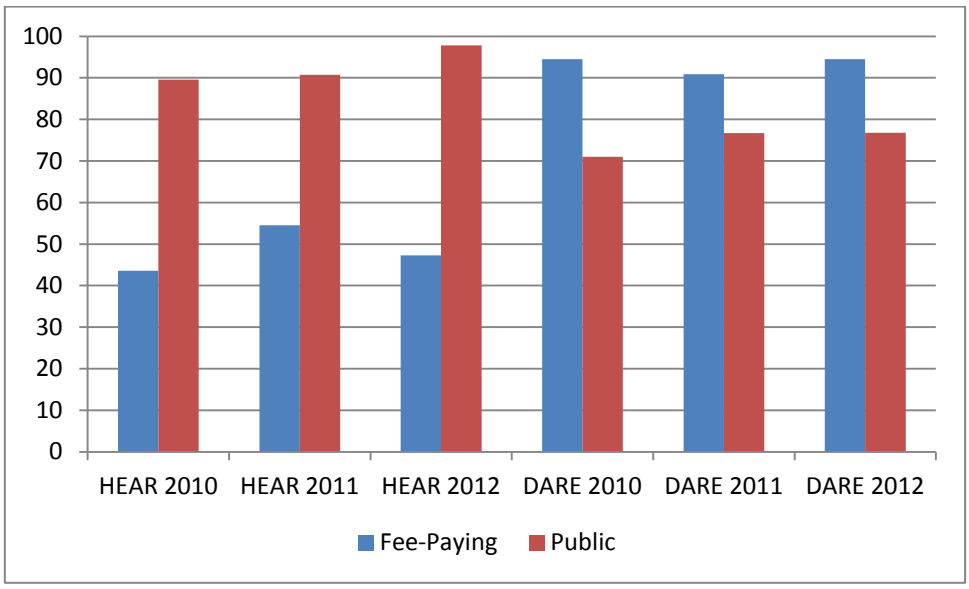
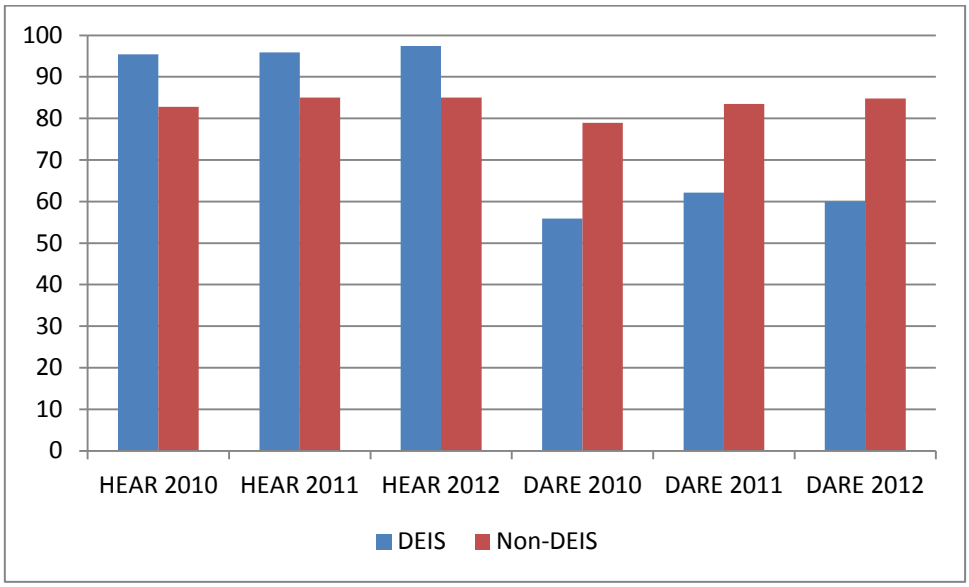


Figure 5.5 illustrates the proportion of DEIS and non-DEIS schools from which at least one application was received for HEAR and DARE. Table 5.1 showed that the majority of HEAR applications come from non-DEIS rather than DEIS schools (70:30 respectively). However, a significantly higher proportion of DEIS schools have submitted at least one HEAR application than non-DEIS schools (95% relative to 83%). Again, we find that the opposite is

true for DARE: that is, at least one application was received for DARE from a significantly higher proportion of non-DEIS schools than DEIS second level schools.

Figure 5.5: Proportion of DEIS and non-DEIS schools from which at least one application was received



5.3 What schools are most likely to submit HEAR applications?

Table 5.2 presents the results of a set of logit regression models of the school level factors predicting application to HEAR in 2010 and 2012. In both years, at least one application to HEAR was significantly more likely to come from DEIS than non-DEIS schools. In 2010 DEIS schools were 6.3 times more likely to have submitted at least one application to HEAR; by 2012 the odds of such had raised to 10.1. Community, comprehensive and secondary schools were more likely to have submitted at least one application in both years than vocational schools. As expected, all else being equal, fee-paying schools are less likely to have made at least one application relative to non-fee-paying schools. We also considered the type of curriculum on offer, with an expectation that greater differentiation in the curricula on offer is associated with a greater likelihood of application to HEAR. Interestingly, school level application to HEAR does not vary by the provision of the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP) or by the provision of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). However, schools providing the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) were 2.8 and 3.5 times in 2010 and 2012 respectively to have at least one application

to HEAR. Finally, the size of the student intake was also considered. In 2010, smaller are less likely to have made an application, relative to larger schools. This may suggest that over time, the size of the school is no longer a constraint on application. However, application to HEAR did not vary by school size in 2012.

Table 5.2: Logit Regression Model of the Characteristics of Schools from which at least one student submitted an applications to HEAR in 2010 and 2012

	(1) **2010 Applications**	(2) **2012 Applications**
Community/Comprehensive	3.13**	3.09**
	(1.03)	(1.03)
Secondary	1.96***	1.59***
Ref: Vocational	(0.35)	(0.43)
Under 200	-1.64*	-0.40
	(0.69)	(0.44)
Under 600	-0.10	-0.03
Ref: 600+	(0.48)	(0.32)
DEIS	1.88***	2.31***
Ref: Non DEIS	(0.49)	(0.61)
Fee-Paying	-2.78***	-2.73***
Ref: Non paying	(0.42)	(0.43)
Girls Single-Sex	0.10	0.90
	(0.48)	(0.51)
Boys Single-Sex	0.05	0.46
Ref: Co-ed	(0.47)	(0.49)
JCSP	-0.34	-0.53
Ref: No JCSP	(0.68)	(0.78)
LCA provided	0.72	0.35
Ref: No LCA	(0.42)	(0.46)
LCVP provided	1.04***	1.26***
Ref: No LCVP	(0.30)	(0.33)
Constant	-0.85	-0.49
	(0.74)	(0.30)
N	728	715

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Similar analyses were undertaken to consider the distribution of HEAR applicants across schools according to a number of school characteristics. The dependent variable used now is the number of HEAR applicants in a school as reported using the HEAR Form data, and the school is the unit of analysis. We estimated Tobit regression models for the number of applicants in a school as a function of the following school characteristics; school sector, school size, DEIS status and fee-paying status, curricula on offer at junior and senior cycle, and gender-mix. Traditional ordinary least squares (OLS) regression techniques assume that the error terms of the dependent variable are normally distributed. However, this is not the case with the distribution of HEAR and DARE applicants, since a significant number of schools do not submit applications to the schemes at all. Instead, we use a Tobit regression model which explicitly takes account of such a situation. Using data obtained from the NCSE, we also consider the influence of supports provided by the NCSE. While these data relate specifically to the academic year 2013-14, they are used here as a proxy for potential supports provided to each school.

Table 5.3 identifies the factors associated with having larger numbers of HEAR applications in 2010 and 2012. In both 2010 and 2012, DEIS schools, large schools, and schools that provide the LCA are more likely to submit a greater number of applications to HEAR. Across both years, vocational schools, smaller schools and fee-paying schools are more likely to submit a smaller number of applications to HEAR. Again, we find an under-representation among vocational schools. It would appear that school size is important for the number of applications rather than application per se. This may reflect the constraints of teaching in a small school given that larger schools are more likely to have a larger number of HEAR applicants. Likewise, curriculum differentiation is a better indicator for the number of applications to HEAR rather than application *per se*. Models 3 and 4 of Table 5.3 then include resources provided by the NCSE for schools in 2012. We find a significant association between the number of given supports in a school and the number of applications to HEAR: that is, the greater the number of resource hours or SNA hours, schools submit a greater number of HEAR applications.

Table 5.3: Factors influencing the number of HEAR applications in 2010 and 2012 (Tobit regression model)

	(1) **Number of HEAR Applications 2010**	(2) **Number of HEAR Applications 2012**	(3) **Number of HEAR Applications 2012**	(4) **Number of HEAR Applications 2012**
Community/Comprehensive	2.27	4.22**	3.13*	3.80*
	(1.24)	(1.36)	(1.35)	(1.36)
Vocational	-5.06***	-3.85***	-3.61***	-3.29**
Ref: Secondary	(1.05)	(1.15)	(1.13)	(1.14)
Less than 200 students	-6.76***	-5.41***	-3.68**	-4.78***
	(1.16)	(1.26)	(1.29)	(1.28)
Over 600 students	1.80*	2.43*	1.32	2.48**
Ref: 201-599 students	(0.80)	(0.85)	(0.91)	(0.86)
DEIS	6.67***	5.18***	3.51**	4.20***
Ref: Non-DEIS	(1.05)	(1.15)	(1.16)	(1.17)
Fee-paying school	-10.33***	-12.15***	-12.47***	-12.17***
Ref: Non-fee paying	(1.56)	(1.68)	(1.65)	(1.67)
JCSP on offer	0.67	2.86*	3.23**	2.95*
Ref: No JCSP	(1.17)	(1.29)	(1.26)	(1.27)
LCA offered	2.13**	2.33**	1.29	1.87*
Ref: LCA not offered	(0.81)	(0.85)	(0.89)	(0.89)
LCVP offered	1.78*	0.34	-0.14	0.11
Ref: LCVP not offered	(0.74)	(0.81)	(0.80)	(0.81)
Boys' single-sex	-2.20	-.535	-0.97	-0.54
	(1.17)	(1.26)	(1.26)	(1.27)
Girls' single-sex	-0.17	1.28	2.28^	1.54
Ref: Co-educational	(1.09)	(1.21)	(1.20)	(1.20)
Number of Resource Hours			0.05***	
			(.011)	
Number of SNAs				0.38***
				(0.02)
Constant	7.37***	7.84***	5.91	7.26***
	(1.00)	(1.10)	(1.19)	(1.18)
Sigma				
	8.91***	9.18***	9.52***	9.61***
	(0.25)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.27)
N	728	715	704	704
R^2	0.052	0.04	0.05	0.04

5.4 What schools are most likely to submit DARE applications?

What schools are most likely to have at least one student who submits a DARE application? Table 5.4 presents the results of a set of logit regression models of the school level factors predicting application to DARE in 2010 and 2012.

In both years, vocational schools were significantly less likely to have submitted applications to DARE than other school types. That is, as with HEAR, community, comprehensive and secondary schools were more likely to have submitted at least one application in both years than vocational schools.

The size of school also is a determinant of a school submitting at least one application to DARE. Small and medium sized schools are significantly less likely to have submitted a DARE application than very large schools (600+) for both years, again perhaps reflecting the constraints that may come from working in a small school. DEIS schools are also significantly *less likely* to have submitted a DARE application than non-DEIS schools. Despite the relatively low proportion of DARE applicants who previously attended fee-paying schools (See Chapter 4), in both years fee-paying schools are more likely to have made an application to DARE: approximately five times more likely than non fee-paying schools. As before, we also considered the type of curriculum on offer, with an expectation that greater differentiation in the curricula on offer is associated with a greater likelihood of application to DARE.

In line with HEAR, schools providing the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) were more likely in 2010 and 2012 to have at least one application to DARE. Schools that provide the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP) were significantly less likely to have submitted at least one application to DARE in 2010, but the provision of JCSP did not differentiate DARE applicant schools from non-DARE applicant schools in 2012.

Table 5.4: Logit Regression Model of the characteristics of schools from which at least one student submitted an application for DARE in 2010 and 2012

	(1) 2010 Applications	(2) 2012 Applications	(3) 2012 Applications	(4) 2012 Applications	(5) 2012 Applications
Comm/Comp	1.34***	2.16***	1.89***	1.97***	2.14***
	(0.36)	(0.46)	(0.51)	(0.51)	(0.46)
Secondary	0.86**	0.95**	0.90**	0.82**	0.96**
Ref: Vocational	(0.28)	(0.30)	(0.31)	(0.31)	(0.30)
Under 200	-2.20***	-1.70***	-1.11**	-1.68***	-1.65***
	(0.33)	(0.35)	(0.41)	(0.39)	(0.35)
Under 600	-0.62*	-0.73**	-0.70*	-0.97**	-0.77**
Ref: 600+	(0.25)	(0.27)	(0.32)	(0.31)	(0.27)
DEIS	-0.26	-0.52	-1.13***	-0.88**	-0.59*
Ref: Non DEIS	(0.27)	(0.28)	(0.31)	(0.30)	(0.29)
Fee-Paying	1.98**	1.31*	1.16	1.29*	1.37*
Ref: Non paying	(0.64)	(0.64)	(0.64)	(0.64)	(0.64)
Girls Single-Sex	-0.34	0.15	0.40	0.26	0.23
	(0.32)	(0.37)	(0.38)	(0.38)	(0.37)
Boys Single-Sex	-0.14	0.20	0.08	0.22	0.20
Ref: Co-ed	(0.35)	(0.41)	(0.42)	(0.42)	(0.41)
JCSP	-0.76*	-0.44	-0.32	-0.42	-0.40
Ref: No JCSP	(0.31)	(0.32)	(0.34)	(0.33)	(0.32)
LCA provided	0.14	-0.24	-0.68*	-0.50	-0.27
Ref: No LCA	(0.23)	(0.25)	(0.27)	(0.26)	(0.25)
LCVP provided	0.57**	0.87***	0.71**	0.82***	0.90***
Ref: No LCVP	(0.20)	(0.22)	(0.24)	(0.23)	(0.22)
Resource Hours June 2013			0.02*** (0.00)		
SNA allocation June 2013				0.18** (0.06)	
Special class List					0.64* (0.32)
Constant	1.01***	1.13***	0.49	1.20***	1.05***
	(0.26)	(0.27)	(0.38)	(0.34)	(0.27)
N	728	715	704	704	715

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The number of resource hours and SNA hours allocated to each school exerts a positive influence on the probability of a school having at least one student that has submitted a DARE application across mainstream schools. Mainstream schools that have a special class are also more likely to have a submitted at least one DARE application. Chapter 4 earlier highlighted that students with Borderline Mild/Mild General Learning Difficulties, Specific Learning Difficulties or Emotional or Behavioural Difficulties (EBD) on average receive the largest number of resource hours (NCSE 2012). The positive association between resource hours and submission of at least one application, controlling for school size, may suggest that schools with a higher proportion of students with these disabilities are more likely to submit at least one application. Likewise, students with EBD, ASD and students with Physical disabilities receive on average larger SNA support than those with multiple disabilities, specific learning difficulties or sensory impairments. Thus, the positive association between SNA hours and submission of at least one application, controlling for school size, may suggest that schools with a higher proportion of students with these disabilities are more likely to submit at least one application to DARE.

We now consider the school level factors associated with greater numbers of DARE submissions, using the tobit regression method as before (Table 5.5). The findings are very much in line with the previous analyses. That is, the school level factors that influence at least one student in a school to submit an application to DARE are the same as the school level factors that influence larger numbers of students in a school to submit an application to DARE. However, it would seem that the variables that substitute as proxies for student composition (DEIS, fee-paying and NCSE supports) exert a stronger influence on the number of DARE applications in a school.

Table 5.5: Factors influencing the number of DARE applications in 2010 and 2012 (Tobit regression model)

	(1) 2010 Applications	(2) 2012 Applications	(3) 2012 Applications	(4) 2012 Applications	(5) 2012 Applications
Comm/Comp	0.64	1.48**	0.77	1.10*	1.42**
	(0.52)	(0.54)	(0.51)	(0.52)	(0.54)
Vocational	-1.37**	-1.50**	-1.38**	-1.15*	-1.49**
Ref: Secondary and Grind	(0.45)	(0.46)	(0.43)	(0.45)	(0.46)
Less than 200 students	-3.13***	-2.59***	-1.46**	-2.05***	-2.46***
	(0.53)	(0.53)	(0.52)	(0.52)	(0.53)
Over 600 students	2.31***	2.92***	2.06***	2.78***	2.95***
Ref: Between 201-599 students	(0.33)	(0.34)	(0.34)	(0.33)	(0.33)
DEIS	-0.96*	-1.04*	-2.06***	-1.72***	-1.11*
Ref: Non-DEIS	(0.46)	(0.47)	(0.46)	(0.46)	(0.47)
Fee-Paying school	4.53***	6.05***	5.88***	6.16***	6.16***
Ref: Non Fee-Paying	(0.58)	(0.59)	(0.55)	(0.57)	(0.59)
JCSP	-0.70	-0.45	-0.24	-0.42	-0.41
Ref: No JCSP	(0.52)	(0.53)	(0.50)	(0.51)	(0.53)
LCA Provided	-0.23	-1.06**	-1.76***	-1.46***	-1.09**
Ref: No LCA	(0.35)	(0.36)	(0.34)	(0.35)	(0.36)
LCVP on offer	0.84**	1.05**	0.75*	0.99**	1.08**
Ref: No LCVP	(0.32)	(0.33)	(0.31)	(0.32)	(0.33)
Boy's Single-Sex	-0.35	-0.46	-0.70	-0.38	-0.44
	(0.48)	(0.50)	(0.47)	(0.48)	(0.50)
Girl's Single-Sex	-0.70	-0.51	0.25	-0.17	-0.38
Ref: Coeducational	(0.46)	(0.47)	(0.45)	(0.46)	(0.47)
Resource Hours			0.03***		
June 2013			(0.00)		
SNA allocation				0.36***	
June 2013				(0.07)	
Special class					0.90*
List					(0.44)
Constant	1.96***	2.64***	1.26**	1.92***	2.46***
	(0.42)	(0.44)	(0.45)	(0.46)	(0.45)
sigma					
_cons	3.69***	3.81***	3.55***	3.66***	3.80***
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.12)
N	728	715	704	704	715

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

5.5 Summary

This chapter highlights an increase in the uptake of application to HEAR and DARE at school level between 2010 and 2012. With regard to HEAR, 86% of mainstream second level schools submitted at least one application in 2010 and this grew to 88% by 2012. 73% of mainstream second level schools submitted at least one application to DARE in 2010 and this grew to 78% by 2012. However, the analyses presented in this chapter highlight that the share of applications for each of the schemes from outside mainstream second level schools is typically very low, but has increased from 1.8% in 2010 to 2.6% of all applications in 2012. This warrants further attention at wider system level, given that young people under the age of 23 are also accessing higher education from outside the mainstream sector.

We examined the school level factors that are associated with submitting applications to HEAR and DARE over the period 2010-2012, and find considerable variation across the schemes, particularly with regard to DEIS and fee-paying schools. While DEIS schools are more likely to submit applications (and a greater number of applications) to HEAR, non-DEIS schools are more likely to submit applications to DARE, even when controlling for the NCSE supports in the school. Further, while non-fee-paying schools are more likely to submit applications (and a greater number of applications) to HEAR, fee-paying schools are more likely to submit applications to DARE. For the relatively moderate proportion of students with disabilities in fee-paying schools, a middle class advantage is likely to be at play. Based on the findings from the current and the previous chapter, it would appear that students with disabilities attending schools in more disadvantaged contexts do not have the same level of awareness, information and guidance in accessing the DARE scheme relative to students with disabilities in more disadvantaged contexts.

Chapter 6: Higher Education Decision Making among Applicants

6.1 Introduction

The starting point of this evaluation begins at the point of application, but using this secondary data, we cannot determine the characteristics of those who apply to higher education versus those who do not. Byrne, McCoy et al. (2010:88) using the School Leaver's Survey identified that levels of application to higher education via the CAO vary considerably across socio-economic groups, with strong differentiation between the two non-manual groups. School leavers from intermediate non-manual backgrounds have higher rates of application than those from the other non manual group, skilled manual groups and semi-unskilled manual groups (79% compared to in or around 66%). In comparison, almost 90% of those from professional backgrounds and 86% from farming backgrounds apply for a place in HE. For those among the non-manual group who chose not to purse HE, the overwhelming underlying reason was related to the intrinsic perception of HE to these young people, in particular, they felt that it was not for them. While there was evidence to suggest that working and earning was a pull, there was also evidence that academic self-image plays a strong role for young people in their decision-making around HE. Almost a quarter of the school leavers who did not apply to HE cited low performance expectations as a reason for that decision. Just one-in-six indicated that they had identified alternative (non-HE) education/training aspirations. To date, little is known about higher education decision-making among young people who have been identified as having a disability or a special educational need in the Irish context. NESSE (2012) highlights that in many countries, data on the post-school transitions for young people with disabilities is extremely limited. Furthermore, there is very little European research which provides a breakdown of post-school educational experiences of students with a disability compared to their peers. Scottish data indicates that a lower proportion of students with a disability move into higher education or employment compared to students without a disability (Riddell, Baron and Wilson 2001).

Previous chapters have identified (i) the characteristics of schools from which applications are received to HEAR and DARE, as well as (ii) the characteristics of individuals who successfully complete the HEAR and DARE application process and (iii) the characteristics of individuals who are deemed eligible for the HEAR and DARE schemes. The focus of this chapter is to consider HEAR and DARE in the wider context of application to higher

education. Specifically, we compare the higher education decision-making and outcomes among HEAR and DARE eligible applicants to all remaining CAO applicants.

The remainder of the chapter is set out as follows. Section 6.2 begins by comparing the profile of HEAR and DARE eligible applicants to all other CAO applicants. In section 6.3 the pattern of CAO choices among all CAO applicants is explored, including the level and nature of the courses for which applications are made. Section 6.4 then identifies how HEAR and DARE eligible applicants fare in terms of actually receiving an offer from the CAO, but also in the type of offers that they receive. Section 6.5 provides a summary of the findings.

6.2 Profile of HEAR and DARE Eligible Applicants

Chapters 3 and 4 identified the characteristics of applicants who were eligible for the HEAR and DARE schemes respectively in 2010 and 2012. We now consider the profile of HEAR and DARE eligible applicants relative to all CAO applicants. In doing so, we restrict the analyses to (i) those who made at least one *active* choice using CAO; (ii) those who are under 23, (iii) those who are school leavers specifically (we exclude FETAC applicants), and (iv) those who have sat at least 6 subjects in the Leaving Certificate. In these analyses, all applicants who were deemed eligible for both HEAR *and* DARE have been incorporated into the HEAR eligible group, due to the small number of applicants who reach eligibility for both.

Table 6.1 presents the distribution of CAO applicants according to the admissions route adopted. Clearly, over time, the share of HEAR and DARE eligible applicants has increased as a share of all CAO applicants from 6% in 2010 to 10.2% in 2012.

Table 6.1 Distribution of CAO Applicants by Admission Route 2010-2012

	DARE Eligible Applicants	**HEAR Eligible Applicants**	**All Remaining CAO Applicants**	**Total**
Application Year	%	%	%	%
2010	1.9	4.2	94.0	100.00
2011	2.4	5.9	91.7	100.00
2012	3.0	7.2	89.8	100.00

A profile of applicants according to the entry route is presented in Table 6.2. We continue to see clear gender, country of birth, nationality, school type attended and LC performance differentials when we differentiate those who were deemed eligible for HEAR and DARE relative to all CAO applicants. There is a clear gender differentiation according to the entry route considered: while the majority of HEAR eligible applicants are female, the majority of applicants DARE eligible applicants are male. There is not such gender differentiation evident among all remaining CAO applicants. In terms of country of origin, while the majority of all applicants were born in Ireland, one fifth (21%) of HEAR eligible applicants were born in a country other than Ireland in 2010. It would appear that the HEAR scheme in particular is capturing a more diverse group of students than the typical pool of CAO applicants (21% relative to 14% in 2010 and 24% relative to 17% in 2012). However, such differentiation is less evident among DARE eligible applicants (11% in 2010 and 12% in 2012). These patterns are also replicated in terms of nationality.

Table 6.2 provides information on the distribution of CAO applicants by the previous education institution attended. While almost 59% of eligible DARE applicants had previously attended a secondary school, this was the case of 46% of HEAR eligible applicants. Further, a third of HEAR eligible applicants had previously attended vocational schools relative to a lower proportion of eligible DARE and other CAO applicants (17% and 20% respectively). Attendance at both fee-paying second level schools and non-government funded fee-paying schools (‘grind schools’) is more evident among DARE eligible applicants than other CAO applicants. 18% of DARE eligible applicants had attended a fee-paying school relative to just 9% of all CAO applicants, and a further 6% of DARE eligible applicants had attended a ‘grind’ school compared to just 4% of all CAO applicants.

Table 6.2 Profile of CAO applicants in 2010

	DARE Eligible	**HEAR Eligible**	**All Remaining CAO**	**Total**
Gender				
Male	56.8	41.0	47.8	47.7
Female	43.2	59.0	52.2	52.3
Country of Birth				
Ireland	88.8	79.0	86.0	85.8
Britain and UK	5.7	9.3	6.4	6.5
EU other	1.3	4.1	2.2	2.3
Rest of World	4.1	7.6	5.3	5.4
Nationality				
Irish	97.8	88.5	93.9	93.8
Nationality other than Irish	2.2	11.5	6.1	6.2
School Type				
Secondary	58.5	46.0	60.2	59.6
Community/Comprehensive	17.8	20.6	15.9	16.2
Vocational	17.1	32.7	19.3	19.8
Non-Gov Funded Fee-Paying (Grind)	5.8	0.6	4.1	4.0
Fee-paying school	18.2	0.8	9.2	9.0
DEIS	9.4	49.6	12.5	13.9
Average LC Points	326.96	340.90	355.64	354.49
Up to 150 points	4.2	3.8	5.0	4.9
155-200	6.8	5.2	6.1	6.0
205-250	13.7	10.6	9.2	9.3
255-300	16.5	14.4	11.6	11.8
305-350	18.4	19.2	14.7	15.0
355-400	16.4	19.0	16.3	16.4
405-450	12.7	14.1	15.0	14.9
455-500	7.3	9.5	11.9	11.7
505-550	3.3	3.1	7.1	6.8
555-600	0.9	1.2	3.2	3.1
25th Percentile	255	270	275	275
50th Percentile	330	345	365	360
75th Percentile	400	410	440	440

Considerable variation is also evident with regard to attendance at a DEIS school. Half of all HEAR eligible applicants had previously attended a DEIS school compared to just 9% of DARE eligible applicants and 12% of all remaining applicants. While the HEAR scheme draws significantly from and is over-represented in applications from DEIS schools; DARE eligible applicants attending DEIS schools remain under-represented (just 9% compared to 14% of all CAO applicants).

Finally, Table 6.2 highlights statistically significant differences in average levels of Leaving Certificate performance among applicants. On average, those who apply for higher education through the main entry route achieve higher average levels of attainment relative to those who apply through HEAR and DARE. Furthermore, HEAR eligible applicants on average have higher levels of attainment than DARE eligible applicants. Table 6.2 also provides a distribution of the points achieved in the Leaving Certificate for each of the groups, as well as quartile ranges, which highlight substantial attainment differences across the groups.

6.3: CAO Choices

6.3.1 Course Levels

We now consider the dynamic of CAO choices made by HEAR and DARE applicants relative to all remaining CAO applicants. In doing so, we consider the course levels that applicants apply for. Figure 6.1 below illustrates that while the majority of applicants make both Level 8 and Level 7/6 choices, just under a quarter of the total applicant group make Level 8 only applications, while 6% make Level 7/6 only applications. It would appear that HEAR and DARE applicants are likely to make greater use of the CAO process choosing both Level 8 and Level 7/6 courses, than other CAO applicants.

Figure 6.1: Course Level Applications of CAO Applicants by Admissions Route

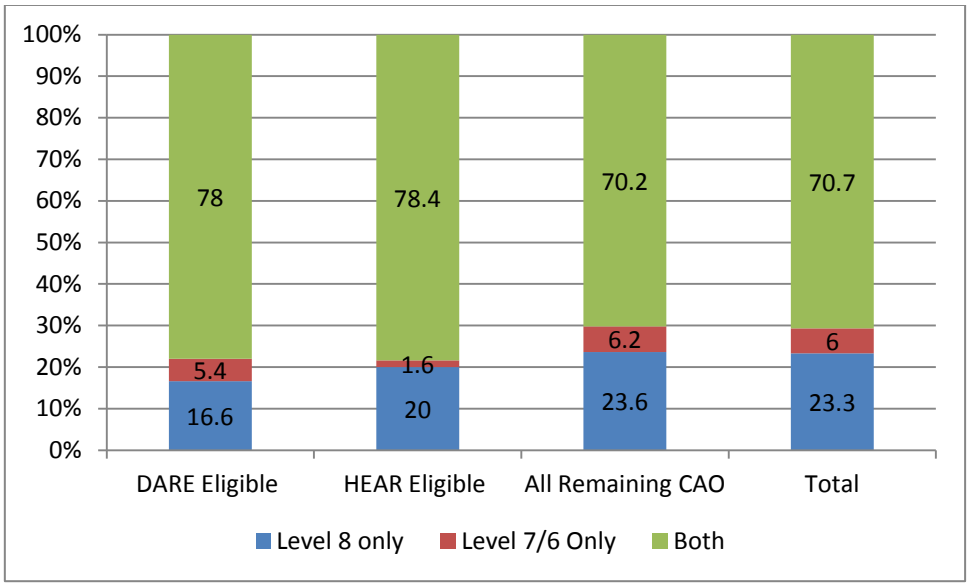


Table 6.3 then compares the dynamic of CAO choices of HEAR and DARE eligible applicants relative to HEAR and DARE ineligible (also targets of the schemes) and all remaining applicants. The data are modelled using multinomial regression methods, with controls for gender, age, school type attended, school characteristics including DEIS and fee-paying status, and a measure of Leaving Certificate point attainment. The analysis reveals that DARE applicants are significantly less likely to make choices based on only Level 8 than all other CAO applicants, while HEAR applicants are significantly less likely to make choices based only on Level 7/6 relative to all other CAO applicants, all else being equal.

Males, those attending secondary schools, and those attending fee-paying schools as well as those with higher levels of attainment in the Leaving Certificate (particularly over 400 points) are more likely to be 'strategic' applicants, applying only to Level 8 courses. While HEAR ineligible applicants along with DARE applicants are less likely to be 'strategic' applicants, HEAR eligible applicants do not differ significantly in this regard to all other CAO applicants.

Table 6.3 Multinomial regression model of factors associated with applying for a Level 8 only versus both Level 8 and Level 7/6 course; and applying for a Level 7/6 only versus both Level 8 and Level 7/6 course, 2010

	(1)	(2)
	Level 8 only versus both Level 8 and Level 7/6	Level 7/6 only versus both Level 8 and Level 7/6
Male	0.17***	-0.93***
Ref: Female	(0.02)	(0.05)
Age 18	-0.10***	-0.35***
	(0.02)	(0.05)
Age 19-22	0.125^	-0.30**
Ref: 17 or younger	(0.07)	(0.12)
Irish nationality	-0.470***	0.39***
Ref: nationality other than Irish	(0.05)	(0.09)
Vocational	-0.225***	0.43***
	(0.03)	(0.05)
Community/Comprehensive	-0.096*	0.32***
Ref: Secondary and other	(0.03)	(0.06)
Fee-paying school	0.178***	-0.78***
Ref: Non-fee paying	(0.04)	(0.15)
DEIS	-0.279***	0.26***
Ref: Non DEIS	(0.05)	(0.06)
HEAR Ineligible	-0.266***	-0.86***
	(0.04)	(0.08)
HEAR Eligible	-0.008	-1.67***
	(0.06)	(0.19)
DARE Ineligible	-0.294***	0.18
	(0.09)	(0.12)
DARE Eligible	-0.289**	-0.28^
Ref: all other CAO applicants	(0.10)	(0.16)
Leaving Certificate Points		
0-150	-1.118***	2.45***
	(0.09)	(0.08)
155-200	-1.130***	2.12***
	(0.08)	(0.08)
205-250	-1.090***	1.48***
	(0.07)	(0.08)
255-300	-0.996***	0.85***
	(0.06)	(0.08)
355-400	-0.037	-0.85***
	(0.04)	(0.08)
405-450	0.464***	-1.74***
	(0.04)	(0.20)
455-500	1.021***	-3.41***
	(0.04)	(0.58)
550-600	1.436***	-16.42***
Ref: 305-350	(0.05)	(578.6)
Constant	-0.76***	-4.12***
	(0.05)	(0.12)

Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Just 6% of CAO applicants make Level 7/6 applications only. Males are less likely to do so than females, as are older applicants than younger applicants. CAO applicants whose nationality is other than Irish are more likely to apply for Level 7/6 only relative to Irish nationals. CAO applicants attending vocational and community/comprehensive schools are more likely to do so than those attending secondary schools, as are those attending DEIS rather than non-DEIS schools. Applicants attending fee-paying schools are less likely to apply for Level 7/6 courses only. Applicants who subsequently have lower attainment in their Leaving Certificate are significantly more likely to apply for Level 7/6 course than those with higher levels of attainment, particularly those with 300 points or less. All HEAR applicants (both eligible and ineligible) are significantly less likely to make choices based only on Level 7/6 relative to all other CAO applicants, all else being equal. However, DARE applicants do not differ significantly in this regard compared to all other CAO applicants.

6.3.2 Fields of Study at Level 8

We now consider the fields of study that CAO Level 8 applicants apply for, and examine whether the choices of HEAR and DARE applicants differ significantly from all other CAO applicants. Table 6.4 provides a summary of the CAO choices of all CAO applicants, and makes a distinction between the admission routes. In doing so, it presents the percentage of each of the groups that make *at least one Level 8 application* to each field of study. The table is presented hierarchically, listing the fields of study according to the share of the CAO sub-population that make choices at Level 8. At the top of the list is Arts and Social Science for which 63% of CAO applicants made at least one Level 8 application, and at the bottom of the list is Dentistry, for which just 1.2% of CAO applicants made at least one Level 8 application.

Table 6.4: Level 8 CAO Choices of 2010 Applicants by Field of Study and Admission Route

	DARE Eligible	HEAR Eligible	All Remaining CAO	Total
Arts/Social Sciences*	64.8	67.8	62.9	63.1
Administration/Business	46.0	42.9	45.1	45.0
Science/Applied Sciences	41.5	44.3	44.3	44.2
Engineering/Technology*	29.8	21.3	25.9	25.8
Education*	13.8	25.0	21.4	21.4
Nursing*	12.8	16.0	13.2	13.3
Law*	7.6	10.9	12.0	11.9
Other Health Care	10.5	10.1	11.0	11.0
Art and Design*	6.5	4.2	5.6	5.5
Human Medicine^	4.0	4.1	5.1	5.1
Physiotherapy	2.4	3.4	3.6	3.5
Architecture^	4.4	2.6	3.3	3.3
Built Environment^	3.6	2.3	2.3	2.3
Pharmacy	1.7	1.8	2.2	2.1
Veterinary Medicine	1.6	0.9	1.4	1.4
Dentistry*	0.9	0.5	1.3	1.2

*Denotes significant association, ^ denotes association approached significance

The analyses reveal that there is considerable variation in application to Level 8 courses by field by study. Furthermore, the descriptive analysis presented in Table 6.4 reveals that there are statistically significant differences in application rates across the groups in a number of fields. HEAR eligible applicants are over-represented relative to all other CAO applicants with regard to Arts and Social Sciences, Education and Nursing, but are under-represented in Art and Design. DARE eligible applicants are over-represented in applications to Engineering/Technology, and to some degree Architecture and the Built Environment (both approached significance). On the other hand, DARE eligible applicants are under-represented in a number of professional fields of study including Education, and Law. Both DARE and HEAR eligible applicants are under-represented in Dentistry relative to all remaining CAO applicants (0.9% and 0.5% compared to 1.3% respectively). Furthermore, the association between applications to Human Medicine and the application route approached significance, with DARE and HEAR eligible applicants under-represented relative to all remaining CAO applicants (4% and 4.1% compared to 5.1% respectively).

In just six fields of study there was no significant difference in application rates across the groups. These include Administration/Business, Science and Applied Sciences, Physiotherapy, Pharmacy, Other Health Care and Veterinary Medicine.

6.3.3 Further Differentiation across Level 8 courses

We also provide information on the share of each group that make at least one CAO application for a range of different types of Level 8 courses. A number of different types of CAO courses are considered:

- '*supplementary entry courses*' defined as courses that make use of supplementary admission processes including interview/portfolio/further testing[52];
- '*500 points courses'*, defined as courses for which 500 points was the lowest point score achieved by an applicant who received an offer of a place on the course[53];
- '*500 median points courses'*, defined as courses for which 500 points was the median score among applicants who received an offer of a place on the course;
- '*Professional courses, median 500'*, defined as professional courses for which 500 points was the median score among applicants who received an offer of a place on the course. These include Medicine, Architecture, Engineering, Education, Business/Finance, Law, Psychology, and other medical related courses,
- and finally courses which have been defined as '*restricted courses'*.

Table 6.5 provides a description of the share of each group of CAO applicants that applied for these particular courses in 2010 and in 2012. While there is considerable consistency in the CAO choices of HEAR and DARE eligible applicants relative to other applicants, there are again a number of statistically significant differences in application rates across the groups. We find that DARE eligible applicants have significantly higher application rates for courses which have an alternative/supplementary admissions route (i.e. portfolio, interview) in both years than other applicants. 8% of DARE eligible applicants make at least one application to a course that adopts a supplementary application format compared to 6.6% of all 2012 CAO applicants respectively.

[52] Applicants to undergraduate medicine are excluded from this definition. It is important to note that many of these courses that have a supplementary entry mechanism also include a general minimum point threshold.
[53] The data relating to minimum point and median point thresholds has been obtained from the CAO website.

Table 6.5 Proportion of 2010 CAO applicants who apply to specific types of Level 8 courses

	DARE Eligible		HEAR Eligible		All Remaining CAO		Total	
	2010	**2012**	**2010**	**2012**	**2010**	**2012**	**2010**	**2012**
N Level 8 Applicants	752	1,202	1,754	2,930	37,707	35,064	40,213	39,196
500 median point courses	39.0	44.8	45.2	47.7	42.9	48.8	42.9*	48.6*
Any Teaching Course	19.5	17.7	31.6	26.6	26.8	23.5	26.8*	23.6*
500 point courses	24.2	32.5	25.3	30.2	25.4	33.2	25.4	32.9*
Restricted course	12.4		9.6		11.7		11.7*	
Supplementary application	7.7	8.0	5.0	5.6	6.4	6.6	6.4*	6.6*
Professional Occupations (median 500 courses)								
Other Medical related	14.0	12.1	13.9	11.9	13.9	13.2	13.9	13.0
Education (median 500)	6.6	6.1	13.9	12.6	12.8	12.2	12.7*	12.0*
Business/Finance	6.4	5.7	5.4	5.3	7.1	7.9	7.0*	7.6*
Psychology	7.0	6.8	6.6	5.8	5.8	5.9	5.8	5.9
Law	4.0	4.0	4.2	3.2	5.2	4.1	5.1	4.0*
Medicine	4.0	3.9	4.1	3.1	5.1	3.7	5.0	3.7
Engineering	0.9	4.3	1.6	4.5	1.9	5.7	1.8	5.5*

Note: * Denotes statistical significance in that year.

DARE eligible applicants are under-represented in and have considerably lower application rates for courses which involve teaching, particularly with regard to primary and post-primary school teaching but also with regard to 'high points' teaching courses. Table A3 in the Appendix shows that in 2010 9.7% of CAO applicants applied for primary school teaching relative to just 2.9% of DARE eligible applicants. While 27% and 22% of CAO applicants applied for some form of teaching course in 2010 and 2012 respectively, the corresponding rates were significantly lower for the DARE eligible group in both years (19% and 17%). HEAR eligible applicants on the other hand are over-represented in teaching applications, at all levels, but particularly at post-primary level.

Table 6.5 also indicates that there is remarkable consistency in terms of application rates to courses with a minimum entry requirement of 500 points across all groups in 2010, but that HEAR eligible applicants are under-represented in application to such courses in 2012. However, further analyses of Level 8 courses for which 50% of applicants who received a place have achieved at least 500 points reveal that DARE eligible applicants are significantly under-represented on these courses, relative to all other CAO applicants (42.7% compared to

46.5% of all CAO applicants in 2012). Further disaggregation of this group reveals statistically significant differences in application rates with regard to Business/Finance, Education and Engineering. DARE eligible applicants continue to be under-represented in Education courses while both HEAR and DARE applicants have lower application rates to high point Business/Finance and Engineering courses compared to all remaining CAO applicants. While both HEAR and DARE applicants have lower application rates to Medicine and Law compared to all remaining CAO applicants, the relationship approached significance only. For Architecture, Engineering, Psychology, other medical related courses there was no significant difference in application rates across the groups. These patterns of application will be considered later in this chapter in an analysis of CAO acceptances.

6.4: CAO Offers and Acceptances

6.4.1 Any CAO Offer

Typically, the share of CAO applicants that receive a CAO offer over the offer period has increased over time, and this is true across admission routes. A greater share of DARE eligible and HEAR eligible applicants receive an offer relative to all remaining CAO applicants in all years between 2010 and 2012 (Table 6.6). In 2012, 11.5% of DARE eligible applicants and 15.6% of HEAR eligible applicants did not receive an offer for higher education entry.

Table 6.6: Share of CAO applicants who receive a CAO offer, 2010-2012

Year of Application	DARE Eligible	HEAR Eligible	All Remaining CAO Applicants	Total
	%	%	%	%
2010	70.4	71.3	67.2	67.5
2011	87.0	86.4	84.9	85.0
2012	88.5	85.4	86.1	86.1

HEAR ineligible and DARE ineligible applicants are included in the category of ‘All Remaining CAO Applicants’. In both years, HEAR eligible and DARE eligible applicants

have higher offer rates than HEAR ineligible and DARE ineligible applicants. 58.5% of the 4,198 HEAR ineligible applicants received an offer, while 79.4% did so in 2012. Those who submitted incomplete financial information typically had lower offer rates in 2012 (72.6% compared to 85.5% of applicants who had complete information but who were deemed ineligible). With regard to DARE, in 2010, 59.4% of the 1,036 DARE ineligible applicants received a CAO offer. This was the case for 78% of the 1,022 DARE ineligible applicants in 2012. As with HEAR, those who submitted incomplete information had a lower acceptance rate compared to those with complete information but who were deemed ineligible (67.9% compared to 81.9% respectively). In 2012, over one fifth of DARE ineligible and HEAR ineligible applicants did not receive a CAO offer (21.8% and 20.6% respectively).

How do HEAR and DARE eligible applicants fare in the CAO offer process, all else being equal? Table 6.7 presents the results of a logistic regression model of the factors associated with receiving a CAO offer for all applicants in 2010. The findings indicate that males are more likely to receive a CAO offer than females; those aged 18 and 19 are more likely to receive an offer than younger applicants. Applicants who are Irish nationals are more likely to receive an offer than those who do are not. There is little variation across school types, even with the addition of school characteristics which may reflect the socio-economic composition of the school: DEIS and fee-paying. That is, attending a DEIS or a fee-paying school results in no significant difference in the probability of receiving a (any) CAO offer. However, applicants attending community/comprehensive schools are significantly less likely to receive an offer than those attending secondary schools in particular. When we take Leaving Certificate performance into account, in line with expectations, those with higher Leaving Certificate points are more likely to receive an offer. With regard to HEAR and DARE applicants, HEAR eligible and DARE eligible applicants, all else being equal, are 1.5 times more likely to receive a CAO offer than other CAO applicants.

Table 6.7 Logistic regression model of factors associated with receiving any CAO offer, receiving a First Preference offer, receiving a Level 8 offer for applicants 2010

	(Model 1)	(Model 2)	(Model 3)	(Model 4)
	Any CAO Offer	First Preference Course	Level 8 versus Level 7/6	University versus other HE
Male	0.48***	0.37***	-0.22***	0.26***
Ref: Female	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.03)
Age 18	0.33***	-0.12***	0.18***	0.07*
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.03)
Age 19	0.47***	-0.42***	0.35**	0.09
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.11)	(0.09)
Irish nationality	0.17**	-0.03	-0.12	-0.12
Ref: nationality other than Irish	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.09)	(0.07)
Vocational	-0.01	0.19***	-0.34***	-0.19***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.04)
Comm/comp	-0.11**	0.18***	-0.25***	-0.06
Ref: Secondary	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.04)
Fee-paying school	-0.01	-0.41***	0.36***	0.32***
Ref: non fee-paying	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.05)
DEIS school	-0.01	0.22***	-0.10	-0.26***
Ref: non DEIS	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.06)
HEAR Ineligible	-0.00	-0.10*	0.08	0.08
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.05)
HEAR Eligible	0.47***	0.31***	0.73***	1.09***
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.10)	(0.08)
DARE Ineligible	-0.04	0.14	-0.19	-0.10
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.12)	(0.10)
DARE Eligible	0.42***	0.55***	0.65***	0.90***
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.13)	(0.11)
LC Point score	0.01***	0.00***	0.03***	0.02***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	-4.39***	-1.53***	-9.70***	-8.00***
	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.16)	(0.12)
N	42,786	28870	28870	28870
R^2	0.28	0.027	0.49	0.32

Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

6.4.2 1st Preference Acceptance

Table 6.8: Percentage of CAO applicants who accept a 1st preference CAO offer, by entrant route 2010-2012

Year of Application	DARE Eligible	HEAR Eligible	All Remaining CAO Applicants	Total
	%	%	%	%
2010	60.5	60.6	51.3	51.9
2011	61.2	57.1	50.9	51.5
2012	62.0	60.3	54.4	55.1

The share of CAO applicants that receive a first preference offer has increased from 52% in 2010 to 55% in 2012. Table 6.8 highlights that both HEAR and DARE eligible applicants have higher first preference acceptance rates than other CAO applicants. Model 2 of Table 6.7 presents the results of a logistic regression model of the factors associated with receiving and accepting a first preference offer. Males, younger applicants, those attending vocational or community/comprehensive schools, those attending DEIS and non-fee paying schools as well as those with higher Leaving Certificate performance are more likely to receive and accept a first preference offer. Both HEAR and DARE eligible applicants are significantly more likely to receive a first preference offer than all other applicants. The odds ratio indicates that HEAR applicants are 1.4 times more likely to receive a first preference offer than all other applicants, and DARE eligible applicants are 1.7 times more likely to do so. However, HEAR and DARE ineligible applicants did not differ significantly from all remaining CAO applicants in their likelihood of receiving a first preference offer.

6.4.3 Level of Course Accepted

Approximately three-quarters of offers that are accepted are for Level 8 courses (Table 6.9), and there is little differentiation across the groups. Model 3 of Table 6.7 presents the results of a logistic regression model of the factors associated with receiving and accepting a Level 8 offer relative to a Level 7/6 offer. Males are less likely than females to receive and accept a Level 8 offer. Older applicants are more likely to do so, as are those who previously attended

a fee-paying school and those with higher levels of attainment in the Leaving Certificate. Candidates who previously attended vocational or community/comprehensive schools are less likely to receive and accept a Level 8 offer compared to those who previously attended secondary schools. However, applicants who previously attended a DEIS school did not differ significantly from those who attended non-DEIS schools in their likelihood of receiving and accepting a Level 8 offer. All else being equal, HEAR eligible and DARE eligible are more likely to accept a Level 8 course, the odds ratio indicates that HEAR applicants are twice as likely to accept a Level 8 offer than all other applicants, and DARE eligible applicants are 1.9 times more likely to do so.

Table 6.9: Share of CAO applicants who accept a Level8 CAO offer, by entrant route 2010-2012

Year of Application	**DARE Eligible**	**HEAR Eligible**	**All Remaining CAO Applicants**	**Total**
	%	%	%	%
2010	70.5	76.6	74.8	74.8
2012	74.0	76.2	76.8	76.7

6.4.4 Type of HE Institution Accepted

Just over half of those who accept a CAO offer do so for a course that is undertaken in a university. Table 6.10 provides an overview of the distribution of acceptances by type of institution for each of the groups under investigation. Typically, HEAR and DARE applicants have higher acceptance rates at universities than all remaining CAO applicants. Furthermore, in both 2010 and 2012 almost three quarters of HEAR and DARE eligible applicants accept a course at a HEAR or DARE institution (Table 6.10).

As before, multivariate analyses were conducted to examine the factors associated with accepting an offer for a University relative to any other HE institution. The results are presented in Model 4 of Table 6.7. Males, those attending fee-paying schools and candidates with higher Leaving Certificate performance are more likely to attend a university than any other higher education institution. Candidates who previously attended vocational schools or DEIS schools are less likely to do so. All else being equal, the association between type of higher education institution attended and type of entry route remains strong. That is, HEAR

eligible applicants are 2.9 times more likely to attend a university while DARE eligible applicants are 2.4 times more likely to do so.

Table 6.10: Distribution of type of institution accepted, by entrant route 2010-2012

	DARE Eligible	**HEAR Eligible**	**All Remaining CAO Applicants**	**Total**
2010				
% University	55.4	59.8	52.7	53.1
% Institute of Technology	38.9	30.4	37.7	37.4
% Other	5.7	9.8	9.6	9.5
% HEAR Institute	71.1	77.8	65.1	65.8
% DARE Institution	73.2	74.4	62.5	63.2
2012				
% University	56.7	56.8	53.4	53.8
% Institute of Technology	37.7	34.4	38.1	37.8
% Other	5.6	91.2	8.5	8.4
% HEAR Institution	73.9	72.7	67.6	68.2
% DARE Institution	80.9	72.8	69.6	70.2

6.4.5: Application and Acceptance Dynamic by Field of Study

Section 6.3.2 considered the fields of study that CAO Level 8 applicants apply for, and examined how the choices of HEAR and DARE applicants differ from all other CAO applicants. This section now examines the percentage of applicants who accepted a course by field of study. Table 6.11 below presents the number of acceptances to each field of study as a percentage of applicants who made at least one application to that field at Level 8. The analysis reveals a number of interesting patterns. In the first instance, it's evident that there is considerable variation by field of study. Furthermore, there are statistically significant differences in acceptance rates across admission routes in a number of fields including Engineering/Technology, Arts and Social Sciences, Education and other Health Care fields[54].

[54] Because of the small number of HEAR or DARE eligible applicants that accepted a place, it is not always possible to determine statistical tests for all fields.

Table 6.11: CAO Acceptances by Field of Study as a % of 2010 Applications

	DARE Eligible	HEAR Eligible	All Remaining CAO	Total
Administration/Business	31.2	32.2	33.9	33.8
Engineering/Technology*	30.4	26.0	33.7	33.4
Arts/Social Sciences*	32.9	31.2	28.5	28.7
Science/Applied Sciences	24.7	26.8	24.7	24.8
Law	22.8	22.0	19.3	19.4
Architecture ~	15.2	34.8	18.6	19.0
Art and Design ~	16.3	5.5	19.1	18.6
Built Environment ~	18.5	19.5	17.8	17.9
Education*	16.3	21.5	17.0	17.2
Nursing	19.8	18.2	16.9	17.0
Pharmacy ~	15.4	15.6	17.1	17.0
Human Medicine ~	26.7	25.0	16.1	16.5
Veterinary Medicine ~	25.0	6.7	10.7	10.9
Other Health Care *	16.5	14.1	8.8	9.2
Dentistry~	14.3	22.2	8.1	8.5
Physiotherapy~	22.2	8.5	7.7	7.9

Note: ~ represents courses with very small numbers (>7) of HEAR or DARE eligible applicants' * denotes statistical significance

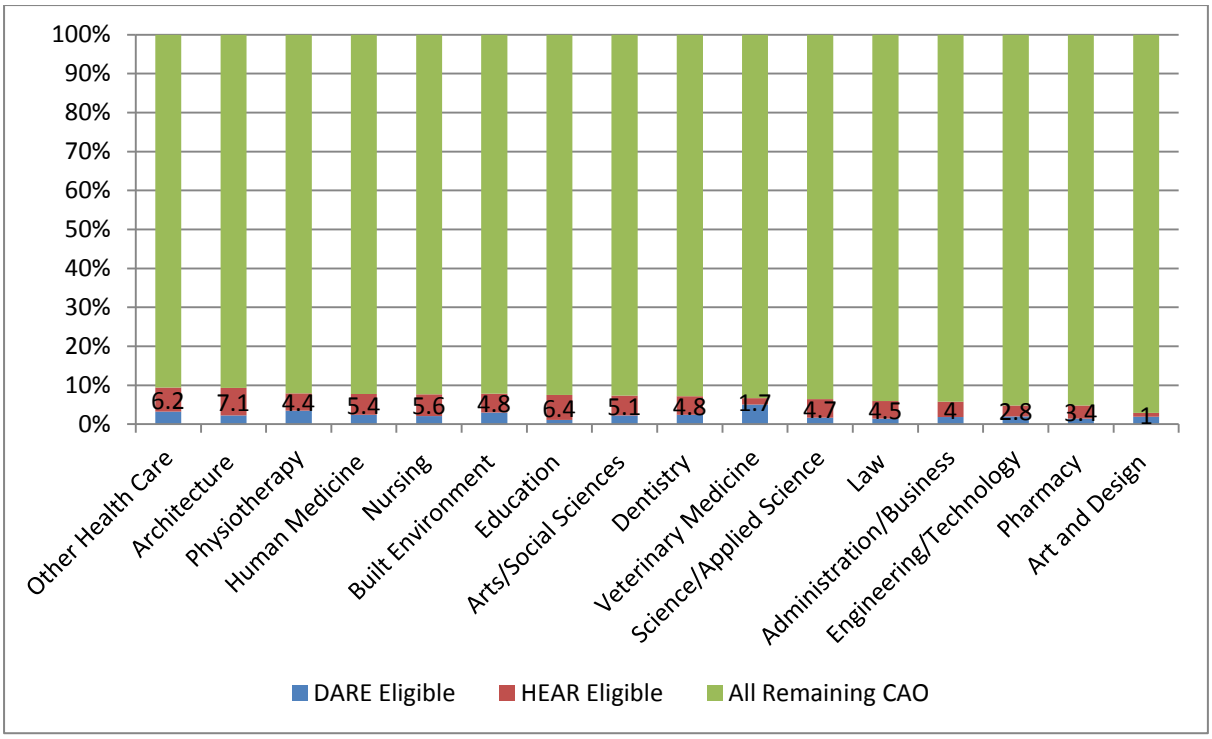
From Table 6.11 we can determine the following:

- HEAR eligible applicants are under-represented in both application to and acceptance of courses in Engineering/Technology
- HEAR and DARE eligible applicants are over-represented in both application to and acceptance of courses in Arts and Social Science courses.
- DARE eligible applicants are under-represented in both application to and acceptance of courses in Education
- HEAR and DARE applicants are over-represented in acceptance of Other Health Care courses.

The distribution of HEAR eligible, DARE eligible and all remaining CAO applicants by field of study is presented in Figure 6.2. We find considerable variation in the distribution of applicants by admission route across fields of study. HEAR eligible acceptances reached and surpassed at least 5% of the total acceptances across a number of fields, with the exception of

Veterinary Medicine, Engineering/Technology, Pharmacy or Art and Design. DARE eligible applicants had a much lower representation across all fields.

Figure 6.2: Distribution of Acceptances by Field of Study and Admission Route, 2010



We now re-visit our conceptualization of Level 8 courses in different ways, to include courses that adopt a supplementary admissions mechanism (i.e. portfolio, interview); high points courses, restricted courses, and a range of professional courses in 2010 and 2012. In doing so, we now consider acceptance rates across these courses.

Table 6.12 presents the number of acceptances to each type of course as a percentage of applicants who made at least one application to that field at Level 8. We identify a number of significant changes between 2010 and 2012. There is increasing differentiation across admission routes in terms of acceptance on courses that can be deemed 'high point courses' including those that are filled by applicants with at least five hundred points and 'high point median courses' (courses that are filled by applicants half of whom have attained five hundred points). That is, DARE eligible applicants have considerably greater representation on these courses relative to all CAO applicants while HEAR eligible applicants are considerably under-represented. Between 2010 and 2012, we also find the persistence of an

earlier pattern whereby DARE eligible applicants are significantly under-represented in Education relative to other groups.

In 2010 a number of professional courses that were filled by applicants, half of whom have attained five hundred points, had ten or less HEAR eligible or DARE eligible acceptances. These include Medicine, Engineering, Business/Finance, Law, Psychology, and Education courses. However, by 2012, greater numbers of HEAR eligible and DARE eligible applicants are accessing such courses, but with the exception of Education courses.

Table 6.12: Acceptances by Type of Course, as a Percentage of Applicants, 2010 and 2012

	DARE Eligible		**HEAR Eligible**		**All Remaining CAO**		**Total**	
	2010	**2012**	**2010**	**2012**	**2010**	**2012**	**2010**	**2012**
500 median point courses	23.2	31.0	19.4	21.9	20.3	26.9	20.3	26.6*
Any Teaching Course	13.6	15.0	17.3	18.1	15.2	20.4	15.3	20.1*
500 point courses	23.6	29.4	19.0	21.9	16.7	22.7	16.9*	22.9*
Restricted course	12.4		9.6		11.7		11.7*	
Supplementary application	22.4	25.0	17.2	23.3	24.5	30.1	24.2	29.5
Professional Occupations (median 500 courses)								
Other Medical related	23.8	15.1	14.4	14.9	12.8	11.7	13.1*	12.1
Education (median 500)*	16.0~	12.3~	16.0	14.3	15.5	20.8	15.6	20.2*
Business/Finance	14.6~	23.2	9.5~	16.1	16.7	16.3	16.5*	16.5
Psychology	11.3~	20.7	7.0~	9.9	6.9	9.8	7.0	10.2*
Law	23.3~	25.0	23.0	23.7	15.5	17.6	15.9	18.2
Medicine	26.7~	23.4	25.0	14.1	16.1	21.3	16.6	20.9
Engineering	0.0~	25.0	3.6~	15.2	10.8	23.1	10.5	22.6

~Denotes that the numbers of DARE or HEAR who accept a place are very small in that year (<10); *Denotes statistical significance

6.5 Institutional Variation

Table 2.1 of Chapter 2 highlights the considerable variation across institutional contexts in terms of the undergraduate student intake according to the size of the cohort, the share of under 23s, the percentage that disclose a disability, the level of courses on offer and the previous educational qualifications that are recognised.

In the majority of HEAR/DARE institutions, HEAR and DARE represent just one element within a much broader programme of access initiatives that target mature students, and young adults with a disability and/or from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Table 2.1 also highlighted variation across institutions in the access initiatives that are offered to young adults (under 23) that are currently provided by HEAR and DARE higher education institutions. Four institutions provide local access programmes to young adults: namely institutions 3, 5, 6, and 13. For all other institutions, HEAR and DARE represent the single access programmes for young adults, some of which morphed from pre-existing access initiatives, while others represented a first approach to access. Typically there was considerable support for supplementary access routes across institutions, but was also coupled with a frustration with the lack of co-ordination of existing routes (such as FETAC) to higher education for young adults.

Applications and Acceptances

How do HEAR and DARE applications and acceptances play out across institutions? We highlight variation across institutions through an examination of applications and offers in HEAR and DARE institutions in 2010 and 2012 using the following metrics:

(i) We first consider variation in the demand for Level 8 courses in each institution by admission route. This metric is devised by presenting the number of applicants that made at least one Level 8 application to each individual institution as a percentage of the total number of applicants that used that admissions route.

(ii) We then consider the dynamic of applications and acceptances (or the degree of 'institutional selectivity') for each institution, and make comparisons across admission routes. This metric is devised by presenting the number of acceptances to each institution as a percentage of the total number of applications to that institution, by admission route.

(iii) Finally, we consider the distribution of total acceptances across institutions, by admission routes.

Demand for Level 8 courses across institutions

Table 6.13 highlights considerable variation in Level 8 applications across institutions. However, what is particularly evident is that the Institutional Level 8 choices of DARE eligible and HEAR eligible applicants are very much in line with the wider cohort.

That is, across institutions, Level 8 choices of DARE eligible and HEAR eligible applicants are very much in line with the wider cohort. We find that there is considerable demand for Level 8 courses among HEAR eligible and DARE eligible applicants across institutions, but particularly in each of the universities and one institute of technology that participates in the scheme. For example, 43% of DARE eligible and 39% of HEAR eligible applicants applied at least once to HEI 2, which is very much in line with 42% of all remaining CAO applicants.

Table 6:13: Institutional Variation in the Percentage of Level 8 Applicants by Entry Route, 2012

HEI	DARE Eligible	HEAR Eligible	All Remaining CAO	All CAO
UCD	42.9	39.5	42.0	41.9
DIT	38.9	37.9	32.1	32.8
TCD	31.9	25.3	27.8	27.8
DCU	28.9	34.6	29.1	29.5
UL	24.7	24.2	23.6	23.7
NUIG	24.5	29.9	26.6	26.8
NUIM	23.5	30.3	24.3	24.7
UCC	23.0	21.0	23.8	24.0
CIT	12.5	8.5	10.4	10.3
AIT	8.4	8.7	8.2	8.3
NCI	6.2	7.2	3.5	3.9
Mary Immaculate	4.7	6.7	6.6	6.6
St Patrick's College	3.4	7.2	7.1	7.0
St Angela's Sligo	2.4	4.5	2.7	2.8
Mater Dei	2.0	2.8	1.4	1.5
Marino Institute of Education	1.3	3.7	4.1	4.0
Pontifical University Maynooth	0.8	1.1	0.7	0.7
Church of Ireland College of Education	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3

Dynamic Between Applications and Acceptances Across Institutions: Institutional Selectivity

The degree of institutional selectivity is highlighted in Table 6.14. This table allows an examination of the dynamic between applications and acceptances for each institution by admission route. According to our findings, institutional selectivity of DARE eligible applicants in institutions that offer DARE ranges considerably from 8.3% to 29.7%. That is, 8.3% of DARE eligible applicants who made at least one Level 8 choice to HEI 10 (a College of Education) received and accepted an offer from that institution. On the other hand, almost

30% of DARE eligible applicants who made at least one Level 8 choice to HEI 1 (a University) received and accepted an offer from that institution. With regard to HEAR, the range extends from 6%-28.8%, and is slightly more broad than for DARE or the general admission route. It is interesting to note that in HEIs 1, 5, 2, 6, 13, (Universities and one Institute of Technology), DARE eligible applicants experienced less institutional selectivity than those who were admitted through the HEAR or the general entry route. Likewise, HEAR eligible applicants experienced less institutional selectivity in HEIs 9,4,5,7,3,15 (a mix of institutions) compared the DARE or the general entry route.

Table 6:14: Institutional Variation in the Percentage of Level 8 Applicants that Accepted an Institutional offer, 2012

HEI	DARE Eligible	HEAR Eligible	All Remaining CAO
	%	%	%
Church of Ireland College of Education	n/a	11.1	28.3
UCC	29.7	28.8	27.8
Cork Institute of Technology	24.7	18.4 (n/a)	25.0
Mary Immaculate	14.0 (n/a)	24.4	24.6
NUIG	23.1	24.0	22.8
St Patrick's College	7.3 (n/a)	15.2	20.4
UL	23.6	22.6	20.4
UCD	21.5	15.3	20.4
TCD	26.6	18.9	19.2
National College Ireland	20.3	21.0	17.6
DIT	25.1	15.1	17.2
NUIM	17.7	18.6	14.9
Athlone Institute of Technology	13.9	10.2 (n/a)	14.6
DCU	16.1	17.9	14.5
Mater Dei	8.3	9.9	11.7
St Angela's Sligo	4.2 (n/a)	6.0	10.1
Pontifical University Maynooth	10.0	18.8	9.1
Marino Institute of Education	n/a	9.1	6.8

Note: (n/a) denotes that the institution does not participate in the admission route

Variation in the distribution of Successful Applicants across admission routes 2010 and 2012

Table 6.15 provides information on the distribution of successful CAO applicants who applied, received and accepted an offer, by admission route. Across institutions, the

representation of HEAR and DARE eligible applicants has increased considerably between 2010 and 2012. By 2012, a considerable number of institutions are reaching and exceeding a typical target of 5% of the student intake for HEAR but the same cannot be said for DARE. While these percentages are of course sensitive to the base-line number of students who are admitted across institutions, they highlight clear differences across institutions with regard to the contribution of the schemes in facilitating the transition to higher education.

Table 6.15: Distribution of Successful CAO Applicants (those who Accepted a CAO Offer) by Admission Route, 2010 and 2012

	DARE Eligible		**HEAR Eligible**		**All Other CAO**	
HEI	2010	2012	2010	2012	2010	2012
UCC	2.0	3.2	4.8	6.9	93.2	90.0
UCD	1.9	3.4	3.8	5.4	94.3	91.2
DCU	1.7	3.3	6.3	10.4	92.0	86.2
NUIG	1.4	2.8	6.1	8.8	92.5	88.4
UL	2.6	3.6	5.5	8.3	91.9	88.1
TCD	2.5	4.9	3.6	6.7	93.9	88.4
NUIM	2.3	3.3	6.6	11.0	91.1	85.7
St Patrick's College	0.6	0.5	5.9	5.8	93.5	93.6
Mary Immaculate	0.2	1.3	4.6	7.5	95.3	91.2
Mater Dei	2.2	2.8	6.5	11.1	91.4	86.1
CICE Church of Ireland	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.7	100.0	96.3
National College of Ireland	3.0	5.2	4.6	16.1	92.5	78.7
DIT	3.6	5.3	6.9	7.5	89.5	87.3
Pontifical University	0.0	3.1	3.3	21.9	96.7	75.0
Marino Institute of Education	1.1	0.0	8.6	9.0	90.3	91.0
St Angela's Sligo	0.0	3.7	5.5	8.3	94.5	88.1
Athlone	3.2	3.2	2.6	6.2	94.2	90.6
Cork	2.2	4.6	2.1	4.6	95.7	90.9
	1.7	3.0	4.9	8.8	93.5	88.2

Variation in Policy and Process across institutions

How can extensive differences across institutions participating in the schemes be explained? While the HEAR and DARE schemes are centrally co-ordinated through uniform assessment criteria, the evaluation has identified that there are significant differences across institutions participating in the schemes in terms of admissions policy and process. As previously outlined, participating institutions have pre-existing differences which were in place before the schemes became 'national'. However, differentiation across institutions (such as in terms of the average socio-economic intake of the student body, or the share of non-public funding for the institutions) meant that the scheme was interpreted in very different ways across institutions. In the following section we outline some of the key tension points across institutions with regard to (i) the definition and implementation of quotas; (ii) variation in pre and post-entry supports across institutions.

The definition and implementation of quotas:

Participating institutions are encouraged to implement a quota for HEAR and DARE into the general admissions policy. All participating institutions are currently operating quota. However, as highlighted in Table 6.16, there is considerable variation across institutions in (i) the actual quota that is set, and (ii) the definition of the quota. In the interviews with admissions staff, it was evident that the setting of HEAR and DARE quotas are influenced by broader institutional drivers, including developments in the wider institutional widening access policy, but also wider institutional goals. That is, some institutions have defined quotas specifically for HEAR and DARE while others merge HEAR and DARE quotas into existing institution-wide quotas as in the case of many of the universities participating in the schemes (see Table 6.16). It was recognised in these interviews at times that HEAR and DARE comprise a single component of a range widening access initiatives. To this end, Heads of Access and Disability spoke about two tensions; firstly, a tension between what the schemes seek to achieve and institutional policy in this regard. Secondly, they highlighted a tension between national widening access policy and the implementation of institutional policy.

The issue of setting and adhering to quotas for HEAR and DARE was often contextualised in terms of increasing student numbers, and subsequent constraints on space and resources as a result of admitting greater numbers of HEAR and DARE eligible students.

Admissions staff highlighted issues around constraints on space and resources and the requirement to support incoming students with the necessary practical and laboratory facilities. To this end, space and resources were viewed as a constraint to increasing quotas for some courses.

Table 6.16: Summary of HEAR and DARE Admission Policy across Institutions

HEI	HEAR Admission Policy	DARE Admission Policy
UCC	Minimum of 5% for HEAR and 5% for DARE of undergraduate intake. 3% reduced points quota in all undergraduate programmes.	
UCD	Minimum of 15% in all undergraduate courses, shared across three target groups to include HEAR, DARE and Mature Students	
DCU	10% of places on all courses	5% on all courses
NUIG	20% quota for all undergraduate courses, shared across three target groups to include HEAR, DARE and Mature Students.	
UL	5% of places on all courses for HEAR, and 5% for DARE	
TCD	22% (with a baseline of 18%) quota in all courses; shared across 3 access target groups to include HEAR, DARE & Mature Students.	
NUIM	5% of all undergraduate courses	4% of all undergraduate courses
St Patrick's College	Up to 5% of each undergraduate programme	N/A
Mary Immaculate	Up to 5% of each undergraduate programme	N/A
Mater Dei	Up to 10% on each course shared between HEAR and DARE	
CICE Church of Ireland	Up to 10% on the programme	N/A
National College of Ireland	No set quota, but will implement	
DIT	Minimum of 5% of places on all programmes.	5% on all courses.
Pontifical University	4%	
Marino Institute of Education	5%	N/A
St Angela's Sligo	Small number of places reserved on specific courses	N/A
Athlone	N/A	Places in all programmes, no quota
Cork	N/A	2% of undergraduate intake

The definition of the quota varied considerably across institutions, as some typically attribute the quota to all HEAR or DARE applicants, in the absence of making a distinction between those who achieve a sufficient number of points for entry into a course, and those who secure

a reduced point offer. While institutions typically argue that they consider only those who have secured a recommended or reduced point offer, as we will see in the next Chapter, this reality is not borne out in the administrative data. As a result, the research team was left with the impression that the process across and within institutions is in constant flux in terms of the dynamic between different types of HEAR and DARE students. Recent developments within institutions may also have been prompted as a result of this evaluation.

In terms of the mechanics involved in the actual allocation of reserved places, typically institutions use a 'sub-quota' or 'mini-CAO' system. Registrars and those working in admissions spoke extensively about '*getting in as many as possible*' within the 'sub-quota'. However, because the schemes are ultimately aligned to Leaving Certificate performance, the allocation of HEAR and DARE applicants to quotas is very much linked to Leaving Certificate points thresholds across courses. On this note, we also identified that there is no shared minimum point threshold, or agreed minimum point reduction for courses or fields of study across institutions. We also identified that not all institutions adopt an actual minimum points threshold, thus, there can be considerable variation in the actual numerical reduction of points. While some institutions adopt a 'sliding-scale' which attributes a greater reduction in points to high point courses, most institutions typically adopt a 50-60 point reduction policy. Point reduction policy was also viewed by internal and stakeholders to have a considerable bearing on the transition chances of the most disadvantaged students. There was one university that was viewed by other admissions staff to have implemented what was sectorally viewed as a more 'radical' minimum point threshold policy. While typically concerns were articulated about the dangers of reducing points extensively and setting 'unrealistic expectations' for students, the institution in question adopted a more broad consideration of the applicants, focusing on matriculation requirements and subject-choices as well as Leaving Certificate attainment, before making an offer.

In terms of the actual mechanics, it was evident from the administrative data that not all institutions use the agreed coding conventions for HEAR and DARE candidates in the CAO process (i.e. those coded for a 'merit' versus a 'reduced' point). In addition, typically Registrars and admissions staff favour more commands that could be written into the CAO offers programme so that the highest achieving HEAR and DARE applicants are automatically entered into the system '*so that they don't loose out'*.

Interestingly, the relationship between access and disability staff and the Registrar and admissions also varied considerably across and within institutions. Some had a very close working relationship during the offer season, which was perceived to result in a full set of offers being made. In other institutions, while admissions staff typically would liaise and update access and disability staff, they did not have the same working relationship. Both models of working were perceived to have an impact on the composition of the offers made.

Finally with regard to the definition and implementation of quotas, we identified that the allocation of reserved places for DARE eligible applicants is not uniform across participating institutions, as some institutions have begun to prioritise some disability groups over others. Typically these groups are identified in national access policy as targeted groups.

Variation in pre and post-entry supports across participating institutions

Our institutional visits identified that there is considerable variation in the pre-entry and post-entry supports that are provided across institutions. In terms of pre-entry supports, as highlighted in Chapters 3, 4; those working on the schemes argued that since the 'nationalisation' of HEAR and DARE, pre-entry supports are less common at institutional level. Few participating institutions engaged in pre-entry supports at primary level. While the majority of participating institutions have designated liaison schools in their local area; the Communications operation group was often responsible for disseminating information widely about the schemes.

The academic, social and personal supports vary across institutions, as well as the ways in which HEAR and DARE applicants are targeted for these supports given increasing pressure via greater numbers. In terms of post-entry financial supports, access staff in most institutions highlighted concerns that the agreed financial supports for HEAR students have declined considerably in recent years, as increasing numbers access the schemes. Those working in access, disability and student support services highlighted that institutions adopt different models of generating institutional income, which was viewed to have a bearing on the financial supports that are offered to HEAR and DARE students. Institutions also varied in the distribution of 'core' funding, particularly with regard to HEAR applicants. While some institutions retain 'core' funding specifically for HEAR applicants, others adopted a different approach.

6.6 Summary

This chapter has placed its focus on the comparison of the CAO choices of HEAR and DARE applicants relative to all remaining CAO applicants. In doing so, we draw on the CAO and the HEAR/DARE data to consider patterns in higher education decision-making. In defining our population data of CAO applicants and in an attempt to compare like-with-like; we restrict our analyses to the sub-population of (i) those who made at least one *active* choice using CAO; (ii) those who are under 23; (iii) applicants who were not FETAC applicants and; (iv) those who sat at least 6 subjects in the Leaving Certificate. Further, all HEAR and DARE eligible applicants have been incorporated into the HEAR eligible group, due to the small number of applicants who reach eligibility for both.

We began with a consideration of the profile of HEAR and DARE applicants in more depth relative to all CAO applicants, and identified substantial differences across the admission routes. Clearly, each route (including the main entry route) is targeting a different type of applicant. There is greater gender differentiation evident among the scheme applicants than all other CAO applicants. That is, HEAR eligible applicants are predominately female, while DARE eligible applicants are predominately male. There is greater differentiation in terms of country of birth and nationality among HEAR eligible applicants relative to the typical CAO applicant, however DARE applicants are under-represented in this regard. With regards to the school sectors that applicants previously attended, while the majority of DARE eligible and remaining CAO applicants had previously attended secondary schools, almost one-third of HEAR eligible applicants had previously attended a vocational school. Attendance at both fee-paying second level schools and non-government funded fee-paying schools ('grind schools') is more evident among DARE eligible applicants than other CAO applicants. 18% of DARE eligible applicants had attended a fee-paying school relative to just 9% of all CAO applicants, and a further 6% of DARE eligible applicants had attended a 'grind' school compared to just 4% of all CAO applicants. Half of all HEAR eligible applicants had previously attended a DEIS school compared to just 9% of DARE eligible applicants and 12% of all remaining applicants. While the HEAR scheme draws significantly from and is over-represented in applications from DEIS schools; DARE eligible applicants attending DEIS schools remain under-represented (just 9% compared to 14% of all CAO applicants). On average, those who apply for higher education through the main entry route achieve higher average levels of attainment relative to those who apply through HEAR and DARE.

In section 6.3 we then considered higher education decision making by exploring CAO application data. There was no evidence to suggest that the schemes are being used strategically, counter to concerns raised by a small number of those working on the schemes. That is, the majority of HEAR and DARE eligible applicants make full use of the CAO process, choosing courses both at Level 8 and Level 7/6. HEAR applicants are significantly less likely to make choices based only on Level 7/6, compared to all other CAO applicants. There was no significant difference in the likelihood of HEAR applicants making '*strategic choices'* based on choices of only Level 8 courses compared CAO applicants that do not apply to higher education through the schemes. However, DARE applicants are significantly less likely to make '*strategic choices'* based on only Level 8 relative to other applicants.

Given that large numbers apply to Level 8 courses, we examined the dynamic between applications to and acceptances of Level 8 courses by field of study in 2010. In just six fields of study there were no significant differences in application rates by admission route: these include Administration/Business, Science and Applied Sciences, Physiotherapy, Pharmacy, Other Health Care and Veterinary Medicine. DARE eligible applicants (predominately male) were over-represented in applications to Engineering/Technology, and to some degree Architecture and the Built Environment. We also found that DARE eligible applicants were under-represented in a number of professional fields of study including Education and Law. Both DARE and HEAR eligible applicants were under-represented in Dentistry and to some degree Human Medicine. HEAR eligible applicants (predominately female) were typically over-represented in applications and acceptances to Arts and Social Sciences and Education, but under-represented in both applications to and acceptances of Engineering/Technology. DARE eligible applicants were also over-represented in both application to and acceptance of courses in Arts and Social Science courses. A consistent pattern emerged across both years, whereby DARE eligible applicants were under-represented in both application to and acceptance of courses in Education. While the numbers accessing these courses were small, both HEAR and DARE applicants were over-represented in acceptance of Other Health Care courses. In 2010, a review of the distribution of applicants by admission routes across fields of study identified that HEAR eligible acceptances reached and surpassed at least 5% of the total acceptances across a number of fields, with the exception of Veterinary Medicine, Engineering/Technology, Pharmacy or Art and Design. DARE eligible applicants in contrast had a much lower representation across all fields.

We conceptualized applications to Level 8 courses in different ways, to include courses that adopt a supplementary admissions mechanism (i.e. portfolio, interview); high points courses, restricted courses, and a range of professional courses in 2010 and 2012. In doing so, we sought to identify whether differences exist across different types of courses according to the admission route taken. In both years, DARE eligible applicants draw on the greater flexibility provided in admissions, as this group had significantly higher application rates (8% compared to 6.6%) for courses which have an alternative/supplementary admissions mechanism (i.e. portfolio, interview) than other applicants. However, they were not more likely to accept such courses, compared to other CAO applicants.

Using data published by the CAO, we identified courses that had a minimum of 500 points as an entry requirement; and courses for which half of applicants who received a place had achieved at least 500 points. Our earlier analyses identified that on average, those who apply for higher education through the main entry route achieve higher average levels of attainment in the Leaving Certificate relative to those who apply through HEAR and DARE. HEAR eligible applicants were under-represented in both applications to and acceptances on courses that resulted in a minimum of 500 points as an entry requirement in 2012 but not in 2010, suggesting increasing differentiation. DARE eligible applicants were under-represented in application rates to courses for which half of applicants who received a place had achieved at least 500 points in both years. However, in both years the DARE eligible group were over-represented in the acceptance of such courses. Between 2010 and 2012, we also find the persistence of an earlier pattern whereby DARE eligible applicants are significantly under-represented in both applications to and acceptances of Education relative to other groups. These divergent findings across admission routes suggest differentiation in the use of the reduced points mechanism across courses and across years. Furthermore, in 2010 a number of professional high point courses achieved ten or fewer HEAR eligible or DARE eligible acceptances. These included Medicine, Engineering, Business/Finance, Law, Psychology, and Education courses. However, by 2012, greater numbers of HEAR eligible and DARE eligible applicants were accessing such courses, but with the exception of Education courses.

Finally, we then explored in Section 6.5 institutional differences in terms of applications and acceptances, using a range of metrics. We began by addressing the dynamic of higher education provision in the Irish context. Firstly, we explored institutional variation in the demand for Level 8 courses across participating institutions. Across institutions, the

demand for Level 8 courses by DARE eligible and HEAR eligible applicants was very much in line with all CAO applicants. We identified that the demand for Level 8 courses is greatest in each of the universities and one institute of technology that participates in the scheme. Between 23-43% of DARE eligible applicants and 21-39% of HEAR eligible applicants applied to these institutions.

Secondly, we then considered the dynamic between applications and acceptances within institutions for each of the admission routes, placing emphasis on the concept of 'institutional selectivity'. Our descriptive analyses identified considerable variation in institutional selectivity across institutions, but not to a great degree within institutions. That is, participating institutions were more likely to differ from each other, in the dynamic between applications and acceptances, than across admission routes within institutions. There were however a small number of exceptions. For example, in a number of universities and one Institute of Technology; DARE eligible applicants experienced less institutional selectivity than those who were admitted through the HEAR or the general entry route.

Thirdly, we then considered the distribution of admission routes among successful applicants (those who secured and accepted a CAO offer) by institution. Across institutions, the share of successful applicants accessing higher education through HEAR and DARE has increased considerably between 2010 and 2012. There is clear evidence of the expansion in numbers accessing the schemes. By 2012, the majority of institutions are reaching and exceeding a typical HEAR target of at least 5%. However, the same cannot be said for DARE, and there is considerable variation across institutions. While these percentages are of course sensitive to the base-line number of students who are admitted across institutions, they highlight clear differences across institutions with regard to the contribution of the schemes in facilitating the transition to higher education.

Drawing on the institutional visits and institutional documentation; the final section sought to explain extensive differences across participating institutions. While the HEAR and DARE schemes are centrally co-ordinated through uniform assessment criteria, we have identified that there are significant differences across the institutions participating in the schemes in terms of admissions policy and process. Specifically, we point to some of the key tension points across institutions with regard to (i) the definition and implementation of quotas; (ii) the use of the reduced points mechanism; and (iii) variation in pre and post-entry supports across institutions.

Chapter 7: Participation in, Progression through and Experience of Higher Education

7.1 Introduction

This final empirical chapter now considers participation in and progression through higher education. In doing so, we consider how HEAR and DARE eligible applicants fare in two important transition points: (i) the transition from acceptance of a CAO offer to participation in higher education by November 2010; and (ii) progress through higher education, in particular the transition from first to second year. Section 7.2 focuses on participation while the focus of section 7.3 is on progression. Section 7.4 then draws on the qualitative research to provide insights into the perspectives of HEAR and DARE entrants who have made the successful transition to higher education and who have progressed beyond first year. Section 7.5 provides a summary of the findings.

7.2 Participation in Higher Education

In all, 88% of those who received and accepted an offer made the transition to higher education in 2010. There was no significant difference in participation rates of DARE eligible and HEAR eligible applicants compared to those who did not access higher education through the schemes.

Table 7.1: Rates of Participation in and Progression through Higher Education by Admissions Route, 2010

	DARE Eligible	HEAR Eligible	All CAO	Total
Participation	88.7	89.7	87.9	88.0
Progression	73.4	78.7	78.0	77.9

To date, little is known in the Irish context about the cohort of CAO applicants who receive and accept an offer for higher education, but who do not progress to higher education. Trends in applications to HE in the UK suggest that there is a higher rate of rejection by university of

applicants from social class groups other than the professional and intermediate groups (Collier et al., 2003). However, in the Irish context, McCoy, Byrne et al., (2010) found no significant differences according to socio-economic background in the chances of receiving a CAO offer. However, over 90 per cent of young people from professional backgrounds accepted a CAO offer relative to just three-quarters of those from semi-skilled and unskilled manual backgrounds. Young people from the other non-manual group also had a below average rate of acceptance, as did those from farming backgrounds. The intermediate non-manual group had an acceptance rate on a par with that of young people from employer/managerial groups.

The main reasons for not accepting an offer related to the applicant having secured an alternative education/training pathway, delaying entry to higher education to take up a 'gap' year, or to repeat the Leaving Certificate in order to secure higher points for a preferred course. For the intermediate non-manual group, financial concerns figured strongly, reflecting vulnerability owing to financial pressures or ineligibility for state financial support. School leavers from the other non manual group were more likely to cite that not being offered their preferred course or college was the main reason for non-entry. Such school leavers were also very critical of their educational experiences at second level, particularly the teaching and learning methodologies employed. Furthermore, issues relating to a lack of access to information about the HE application process, the type of programmes on offer, the financial supports in place all constitute a barrier for young people in making the transition to higher education.

Using the administrative data collated for this evaluation, Table 7.2 now presents the results of a logistic regression model of the factors associated with participation in higher education. Drawing on our data, the model accounts for gender, age, country of birth, and previous attainment in the Leaving Certificate (not shown in Table 7.2 below). Conditional on acceptance of a CAO offer, males are significantly more likely to make the direct transition to higher education than females. Older students are significantly less likely to do so than younger students. Conditional on receiving an offer, those who were born in the EU are significantly more likely to make the transition while those who were born elsewhere are less likely to make the transition. Both HEAR eligible and DARE eligible applicants are significantly more likely to make the transition to higher education, relative to all other applicants, all else being equal. However, DARE ineligible applicants are less likely to make the transition.

Table 7.2: Logistic Regression model of the factors associated with making the transition from Acceptance of a CAO offer to participation in Higher Education by November 2010

	(1)
Male	0.24***
Ref: female	(0.04)
Age 18	-0.09*
	(0.04)
Age 19-22	-0.43***
Ref: 17 or younger	(0.07)
Born in UK	-0.10
	(0.07)
Born EU	0.29*
	(0.13)
Born Rest of World	-0.36***
Ref: Born Ireland	(0.07)
HEAR Eligible	0.35***
	(0.09)
HEAR Ineligible	0.01
	(0.06)
DARE Eligible	0.29*
	(0.13)
DARE Ineligible	-0.25*
Ref: All other CAO	(0.11)
Constant	1.39***
	(0.05)
N	28885
R^2	0.0654

7.3 Progression from 1st year to 2nd year

To date, research on progression through higher education is in its infancy. However, more recently, a number of studies have focused attention on retention and progression through higher education (TAP 2010; Denny et al., 2010; Kenny et al., 2010; Mooney et al., 2010; McCoy and Byrne 2010; UCC PLUS+ 2011; DCU Access Service 2011; Keane 2011b; Keane 2013). In many of the institutional studies the students attribute their initial progression to higher education, as well as their retention and success, to the general and targeted supports of the Access programmes (TAP 2010; Denny et al., 2010; Kenny et al., 2010; UCC PLUS+ 2011; DCU Access Service 2011; Keane 2011b). While studies have addressed pre-entry and post-entry initiatives that seek to improve retention, very little evaluation of such initiatives has taken place, and the issue of college-readiness has not been explored in the Irish context. Furthermore, Keane (2013) highlights that there are no retention targets for specific under-represented groups in the Irish context.

Recent work carried out by the HEA indicate that the IoT sector has significantly higher non-complete rates and probabilities compared to the universities (22% at degree level versus 9% respectively), and point to significant differences across socio-economic groups and across fields of study (Mooney et al., 2010; McCoy and Byrne 2010). However, McCoy and Byrne (2010) highlight how significant differences in retention and progression rates across HEIs decline significantly once the social composition of the student intake is taken into account. Furthermore, when previous educational performance in the Leaving Certificate, a key determinant of progression through HE is taken into account, socio-economic differences in progression are largely mediated through Leaving Certificate performance. However, the skilled manual group continues to have a greater risk of non-progression than the semi-skilled manual group, a group which may be experiencing difficulty in accessing state financial support on entry to HE.

We now consider progression through higher education and the association between the supplementary admission routes and progression in particular. Table 7.1 showed that 78% of participants made the transition from 1st year to 2nd year in 2011/12. There is statistically significant variation in progression rates by admission route. That is, a significantly greater proportion of HEAR eligible applicants progressed to 2nd year relative to HEAR eligible entrants and all other entrants (79% compared to 73% and 78% respectively). The first model of Table 7.3 considers raw probability chances of entrants according to the admissions route

used. All DARE entrants (both eligible and ineligible) are significantly less likely to progress to second year, as are HEAR ineligible entrants. There was no significant difference in progression chances among HEAR eligible and all other entrants.

Model 2 then considers how entrants from the different admission routes fare when we take into account gender, age, country of birth, and household socio-economic group. Males are less likely to progress than females, as are older entrants (those aged 19-22 on entry) than younger entrants. We also find that all else being equal, entrants who were born in the UK and those born in countries outside of Ireland, UK, and the EU are significantly less likely to progress than those born in Ireland. While there is considerable missing data on parental socio-economic group on entry to higher education, Model 2 reveals that both entrants from the HEA target socio-economic groups and those for whom parental socio-economic information is missing are significantly less likely to progress to second year than those who do not fall into the targeted socio-economic groups. We find that the effects from Model 1 hold when these individual level factors are taken into account. All DARE entrants (both eligible and ineligible) are significantly less likely to progress to second year, as are HEAR ineligible entrants. As before, there was no significant difference in progression chances among HEAR eligible and all other entrants.

Model 3 then includes a dummy variable indicating 1 if entrants have received a grant and 0 for otherwise. Entrants who have secured a grant are less likely to progress to second year than those who have not. Grant receipt can be interpreted in this context as a proxy for economic disadvantage. However, the introduction of the grant variable reduces the size of the coefficient for HEAR ineligible entrants indicating that the combination of ineligibility for the schemes and financial need increases the odds of *not progressing* to 2nd year. For the DARE eligible group, the introduction of the grant variable increases the size of the coefficient indicating that the combination of eligibility for the schemes and financial need reduces the odds of not progressing to 2nd year. We now find that with the introduction of a proxy of economic disadvantage, among those who applied to a supplementary route, only DARE eligible and HEAR ineligible entrants are less likely to progress to second year.

When the introduction of previous Leaving Certificate performance is considered, there are no longer statistically significant effects of the alternative entry routes on the chances of progression. That is, before we compared like-with-like in terms of points attainment at Leaving Certificate, the HEAR eligible group did not differ significantly in progression

chances relative to all other entrants; while the HEAR ineligible and all DARE applicants were significantly less likely to progress. We now find that comparing like with like, the admissions route *per se* does not directly have a bearing on progression chances. Rather, progression chances are largely determined by previous Leaving Certificate performance, which mediates the effects of the admissions route. With the introduction of previous Leaving Certificate performance in the model, we now find that those who receive a grant are significantly more likely to progress from first year to second year. These results hold even when higher education characteristics are taken into account.

Table 7.3: Logistic Regression model of the factors associated with progression to 2nd year

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Entry Route	Individual Characteristics	Grant Receipt	Previous LC Attainment	Higher Education Characteristics
HEAR Eligible	0.08	0.06	0.11	0.09	0.13
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
HEAR Ineligible	-0.24***	-0.21***	-0.18***	-0.10	-0.10
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
DARE Eligible	-0.19*	-0.19*	-0.24*	0.10	0.13
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.11)
DARE Ineligible	-0.33***	-0.24**	-0.16	0.10	0.10
Ref: all other entrants	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Male		-0.46***	-0.59***	-0.39***	-0.39***
Ref: Female		(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Age 18		0.04	0.09**	0.01	0.01
		(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Age 19		-0.45***	-0.39***	-0.24**	-0.23**
Ref*: Younger entrants*		(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Born in UK		-0.11*	-0.14*	-0.18**	-0.17**
		(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Born EU other		-0.16	-0.17	0.02	0.02
		(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Born Rest of World		-0.14*	-0.08	0.06	0.07
Ref: Born Ireland		(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Target SEG Group		-0.15***	-0.13***	0.07	0.06
		(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.04)
SEG unknown		-1.81***	0.07	-0.07	-0.04
Ref: All other SEG		(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Grant receipt			-0.12***	0.15***	0.15***
Ref*: No grant*			(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.04)
0-200 points				-1.40***	-1.44***
				(0.12)	(0.12)
205-250 points				-0.91***	-0.95***
				(0.07)	(0.08)
255-300 points				-0.52***	-0.56***
				(0.06)	(0.06)
355-400 points				0.60***	0.66***
				(0.05)	(0.05)
405-450 points				1.05***	1.13***
				(0.05)	(0.06)
455-500 points				1.49***	1.59***
				(0.06)	(0.07)
505-550 points				1.59***	1.78***
				(0.08)	(0.09)
555-600 points				1.20***	1.50***
Ref: 305-355 points				(0.10)	(0.12)
Level 8 course					-0.03
Ref: Level 7/6					(0.05)
University					-0.14**
Ref: other HE institution					(0.05)
High points course					-0.28**
Ref: course <500 points					(0.11)
Constant	0.81***	1.62***	1.70***	0.85***	0.89***
	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.06)
N	29220	29220	25725	25725	25725
R^2	0.004	0.1067	0.1089	0.1021	0.1028

The analyses were replicated, this time differentiating between merit and recommended offers (as well as those who were unspecified in the CAO data), and those who were deemed ineligible for the schemes (see Table 7.4). In essence the findings from the previous model hold. That is, comparing like with like in terms of previous attainment, the admissions route *per se* does not directly have a bearing on progression chances. However, there are some interesting findings up to that point. With regard to HEAR, entrants who came 'in on merit' and did not require a reduction in points for entry were significantly more likely to progress to 2nd year, before the LC points were included in the model. There was no significant difference in progression chances among HEAR recommended groups and all other entrants, and the HEAR unspecified entrants are less likely to progress. With regard to DARE, there was no significant difference in progression chances among both DARE merit and unspecified groups and all other entrants. However, DARE recommended applicants were significantly less likely to progress to 2nd year.

These findings suggest that the admissions route does not bear an independent effect when a range of variables are considered which may influence progression to higher education[55]. This is not a negative finding: rather the progression chances of HEAR and DARE eligible applicants, just like all other entrants to higher education, are largely determined by their previous attainment in the Leaving Certificate. Section 7.3 now considers the student experience of higher education.

[55] This finding persists even when we restrict our analyses to progression chances among students in each of the participating institutions.

Table 7.4: Logistic Regression model of the factors associated with progression to 2nd year

	(1) Entry Route	(2) Individual Characteristics	(3) Grant Receipt	(4) Previous LC Attainment	(5) 3rd Level Characteristics
DARE Merit	0.16	0.19	0.18	-0.08	-0.05
	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.25)	(0.25)
DARE Recommended	**-0.31***	**-0.31***	**-0.32***	**-0.00**	**0.08**
	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.16)
DARE Unspecified	**-0.42***	**-0.29**	**-0.29**	**0.37***	**0.35**
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.19)
DARE Ineligible	**-0.21***	**-0.15**	**-0.16**	**0.09**	**0.09**
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.11)
HEAR Merit	**0.47****	**0.48*****	**0.55*****	**0.02**	**0.04**
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)
HEAR Recommended	-0.00	-0.01	0.06	0.07	0.15
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.12)
HEAR Unspecified	**-0.48*****	**-0.43****	**-0.37***	**0.21**	**0.19**
	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)
HEAR Ineligible	**-0.23*****	**-0.23*****	**-0.18****	**-0.10**	**-0.10**
Ref: all other entrants	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Constant	1.29***	1.67***	1.70***	0.85***	0.89***
	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.06)
N	25631	25631	25631	25631	25631
R^2	0.0021	0.0193	0.0197	0.1017	0.1024

*Gender, age, country of birth, LC attainment, and course and HE characteristics not shown here

7.4 Contribution of the Schemes to National Targets

7.4.1: Contribution of HEAR

We now consider how the schemes contribute to national Access targets. Contextualising the schemes within the national context, the evaluation has identified a tension in the definition of disadvantage adopted in the national policy rhetoric and that used by the schemes. The HEAR scheme offers '*places at reduced points to school leavers from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds'*. This directly feeds into the *National Action Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education* which seeks to achieve an entry rate of at least 54 per cent for all socio-economic groups by 2020. The report highlights the following:

> '*The traditional target groups of semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers remain significantly below national averages and the non-manual group currently derives least benefit from higher education. In statistical terms, effective educational institutions and education systems are called on to achieve three major goals: to raise the mean attainment level; to reduce attainment variance and disparity, and to decrease the correlation between students' performance and their social background.*

> *This articulation of the objectives of education reinforces the fact that "reducing inequality is integral to fostering the quality of education systems". It also provides a framework within which the socioeconomic targets can be formulated. The objective of raising the mean achievement level is embodied in the national level target to raise entry rates to higher education to 72 per cent by 2020. In terms of achieving reductions in the variance and in the correlation between social origins and educational outcomes, the socio-economic targets in this plan are based on the principle that no group should have an entry rate to higher education that is less than three-quarters of the national average by 2020*'.

While the *National Action Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education* defines socio-economic disadvantage in socio-economic group terms (specifically focusing on semi-skilled, unskilled manual workers and non-manual groups); the HEAR schemes adopt a more broad *additive/intersectional* definition of socio-economic disadvantage which includes socio-economic group as one possible indicator of a range of indicators but for which eligibility is determined strongly by income. For the admissions cycle 2009-2012 those whose parent/guardian meet the following SEG codes were deemed eligible on SEG grounds: semi-skilled manual workers, unskilled manual workers, non-manual groups, agricultural workers, as well as those on a state labour intervention scheme, those who never worked, housewives, permanently ill, student or applicant in the care of the state. As a result of this disparity, some applicants from the HEA targeted socio-economic groups will not reach *SEG eligibility* because they are not screened as a result of the submission of missing or incomplete financial documentation. Table 7.5 (and Table A4 in the Appendix) indicates that this is the case for 28% of the non-manual group, 33% of the semi-skilled manual group, 29% of the unskilled manual group, and 30% of agricultural workers. While the majority of the HEA targeted socio-economic groups who apply to HEAR reach overall HEAR eligibility, just 40% of the non-manual group, 33% of the semi-skilled, 40% of the unskilled manual group and 26% of agricultural workers do not reach HEAR eligibility. Thus, HEAR potentially has the effect of reducing the sample of HEA socio-economic targeted groups to those who are most disadvantaged by selecting firstly on income, and secondly through the use of further social and cultural indicators. In doing so, HEAR is likely to 'select-out' the more advantaged among the targeted SEG groups, and assist those in accessing higher education who are more disadvantaged within these groups[56].

[56] A direct comparison of all CAO applicants with regard to SEG is not available using the administrative data in this study.

Table 7.5: Eligibility for SEG and overall HEAR Eligibility by the Socio-Economic Profile of Applicants (Dominance Approach)

	Eligibility for SEG				
Household Socio-Economic Group (If Father is Farmer or Own Account Worker, status is dominant)	Screened and Ineligible	Not Screened for Financial Indicators	Screened and Eligible	Overall HEAR Eligibility	Overall Distribution of HEAR Eligible
Employers and Managers	64.2%	28.5%	7.3%	25.0%	4.7%
Higher Professional	70.4%	29.6%	0.0%	14.8%	0.3%
Lower Professional	67.5%	32.5%	0.0%	19.9%	2.0%
Non Manual	1.2%	26.5%	72.3%	60.0%	36.0%
Skilled Manual	65.4%	29.8%	4.8%	29.8%	5.3%
Semi-Skilled Manual	4.4%	28.7%	66.9%	56.8%	10.4%
Unskilled Manual	3.0%	26.0%	71.0%	59.2%	7.9%
Own Account Workers	28.2%	24.6%	47.2%	46.6%	11.2%
Farmers	36.3%	21.7%	42.0%	40.0%	4.7%
Agricultural Workers	8.7%	21.7%	69.6%	73.9%	0.5%
All others gainfully employed	17.9%	74.4%	7.7%	10.3%	0.1%
Unknown	27.9%	40.7%	31.4%	40.9%	16.8%
Total	25.9%	29.8%	44.3%	45.6%	100.0%

Table 7.6 then provides information on the contribution of HEAR to all acceptances in 2010 and 2012, and all higher education entrants in 2010[57]. In 2010 HEAR eligible applicants represented 4.4% of all CAO acceptances and this had increased to 7.4% by 2012. Within the HEAR eligible cohorts for both years, HEAR reduced point applicants constitute 44% of HEAR eligible acceptances, and this group constitute 1.9% of total CAO acceptances in 2010 and (an increase to) 2.4% of acceptances in 2012. However, in 2012, HEAR reduced point applicants constitute just 33% of HEAR eligible acceptances, a decrease in the share of recommended HEAR offers in the HEAR eligible pool.

[57] HEA Higher Education entrant data was available for 2010 only.

Table 7.6: Contribution of the HEAR scheme to 2010 Acceptances and Entrants and 2012 Acceptances

	All Acceptances 2010		**All Entrants 2010**		**All Acceptances 2012**	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
HEAR Eligible	4.4	1,272	4.8	1,224	7.4	2170
Of which						
HEAR On or Above Point	1.4	415			2.9	844
HEAR Reduced Point Offer	1.9	557			2.4	716
HEAR Unspecified	1.0	299			2.1	606
HEAR Deferrals	0.0	1			0.01	4

7.4.2 Contribution of DARE

Likewise, a further tension is evident with regard to the definition of students with disabilities in the national policy rhetoric and that used by the schemes. While the National Access Plan sets specific targets around students with physical, sensory or multiple disabilities, the DARE scheme defines disability in a more inclusive manner, drawing on a range of disabilities which includes but extends beyond physical or sensory disabilities. Further, students with disabilities who apply to the DARE scheme are assessed on the diagnosis of the disability rather than on the basis of disability per se. As a result, at times the DARE scheme has been criticised as adopting a medical approach. Further, as the schemes currently stand, it is not possible to identify students with multiple disabilities, as applicants are assessed on the basis of need in the primary disability. Table 4.8 in Chapter 4 highlights that students with physical or sensory disabilities fare well in terms of the submission of complete applications and/or eligibility for the schemes. However, it is the case that some students with physical or sensory disabilities do not access the scheme based on assessment of need.

There is also evidence that gains have been made with regard to DARE eligible offers over time. In 2010 DARE eligible applicants represented 1.9% of all acceptances and this had increased to 3.3% by 2012 (Table 7.7). Within the DARE eligible cohorts for both years, DARE recommended applicants constitute 45% of DARE eligible acceptances, and this group constitute 0.8% of total acceptances in 2010 and (an increase to) 1.2% of acceptances

in 2012. However, in 2012, DARE recommended applicants constitute just 36% of DARE eligible acceptances, a decrease in the share of recommended DARE offers in the DARE eligible pool.

Table 7.7: Contribution of the DARE scheme to 2010 Acceptances and Entrants and 2012 Acceptances

	All Acceptances 2010		**All Entrants 2010**		**All Acceptances 2012**	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
DARE Eligible	1.9	560	1.8	457	3.3	960
Of which						
DARE On or Above Points	0.39	115			1.3	394
DARE Reduced Point Offer	0.86	250			1.2	351
DARE Unspecified	0.66	192			0.7	213
DARE Deferrals	0.01	3			0.0	2
Overall Contribution	6.3	1,832	6.6	1,681	10.7	3,130
Total		28,870		25,369		29,389

Table 7.8: Disability Targets: number of students enrolled in HE

Category of Disability	**2003/04**	**2006/07**	**2010/11**	**2013/14**	**DARE Categories**	**DARE Eligible 2010**
Physical Disability/ Mobility Impairment	175	190	285	380	Physical Disability	33
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	94	126	189	252	Deaf	17
Blind/Visual Impairment	76	65	98	130	Blind	10
Multiple Disabilities	48	85	127	170		
					Mental Health	35
					Ongoing Medical	71
					Other	17
					Specific Learning Diffculty	172
					ADD	25
					Autism	30
					Dyspraxia	35
					Neurological	12
Total	393	466	699	932		457

NOTE: HEA figures sources from HEA 2008: 65

Table 7.8 provides the numbers of DARE eligible applicants who progressed to higher education among the 2010 cohort. While in all 1,025 DARE applicants made the transition to higher education, DARE eligible applicants constituted 45% of the total group. In all, DARE eligible applicants represent 12 per cent of the HEA target for students with a physical disability/impairment and 9 per cent of the HEA target for students who are deaf/hard of hearing and students and 10 per cent of the HEA target for students who are blind/visually impaired respectively for the academic year 2010/11. Section 7.5 now considers the student experience of higher education.

7.5 Student Experience of Higher Education

Identity and Relationships with Access and Disability

A key finding of this research is of how students are engaging with their identity as a recipient of the 'HEAR' or 'DARE' schemes, and how this is affecting their relationship with other students – both those who are not recipients of the same scheme, and those who are. Despite applying for the scheme, students were often unaware of their specific status as a 'HEAR' or 'DARE' student, drawing instead on the title of 'Access' to confirm their identity. In one particular institution, the Access identity was very strong, embodied through a society by that title, and professionalised in the eyes of students through the constant advertisements of career opportunities – both by students in the society, and by the 'Access' Office (by the HEAR Officer). Most institutions however, claim a more modest HEAR presence with students largely associating the concept of 'HEAR' with administrative support only from the Access office. As quite a few students felt that they had never used the office for this, or other purposes, they either declined or pulled out of the focus group interviews.

By contrast, the DARE identity tends to be quite weak and invisible across institutions, visible only through the physical manifestation of disability. The following is an example of this.

> *Q And do you feel there's a DARE identity on campus? Or do you think people just fit in, you know, with...?*
> *A Yeah, I haven't really experienced that. No, I've felt that there isn't, kind of, I suppose an identity of that at all. It's more of that, regardless of where you would come from it's just... People just fit in to the kind of mix of... It kind of integrates into*

everything fully so there isn't really, I suppose, as I would see it, a specific DARE identity, I'm not going to say... That's kind of irrelevant.

Q I'm just wondering what your experience of the interaction is like here with other students?
A I think it's fairly good because I mean I'm like, some people in secondary school, like I find college students to be more kind of open to disability and open to meeting new people, so I think it's fairly good to be honest.
Q How about yourself? (Student 2)
A Well I don't really have that problem because mine's not visible or anything, you know like, so you'd be talking to me and you'd never know that I had dyslexia like.

Students' relationship with the Access office

There is near unanimous praise by students for the work of the Access Office across institutions in higher education in Ireland. This work is variously defined as providing mentoring support for students during their transition from second to third level, providing administrative support in promoting awareness of academic processes and form filling, providing emotional support during times of personal and academic stress, and providing a mechanism for social networking among other HEAR/DARE students.

Descriptions of the HEAR and DARE Officers tend to be highly personalised and intimate, varying from 'mummy' to 'big sister', while the Access Office as an entity within the college was described as a family, and as 'being there' for the student in good times and bad. Students recalled instances when their officer would ring them to check that they had completed forms for processes such as re-sitting an exam, and how they would chide the student for their attitude towards study, while also providing a ready and sympathetic ear for their woes. In both examples, students appear to accept and agree with the involvement of the officer in their lives – both when rebuking and consoling the student – as they would a member of their family.

A. It's just a fantastic scheme like
A. Yeah
A. Brilliant, there's no person in the entire scheme that would say it's bad
A. The staff are the best like, they're fantastic, like

A. I don't know how I would have got through it without being in [Access support for HEAR], I don't know, it would have been a totally different experience
A. Especially in first year
A. It's just a backup home like, kind of like parents, your friends, just you can always

go to them, it's weird
A. Home away from home kind of thing, you know

This relationship is created from students on their entry into college, through the induction week for HEAR/DARE students, then fostered post entry through a variety of social events and administrative support to the student throughout their time in college. The time allocated to, and type of activities involved in the induction week varies per institution, but offers a broad overview of the college experience, focusing on academic, social and financial aspects. For many students, the initiative provides a space to make friends from among those on the scheme.

> *But [our orientation programme] was definitely great to smooth you into things and even to have a few people and you do, like you still recognise them around and you say ah hi'ya. And like you might have never spoken to them and can't even remember their names but you recognise the face and it is like they are still friendly.*

For some students, the impact of the induction week is considerable, as they describe how they became close friends with the people who they met or lived with, during that time. One such group of students spoke of how they have continued to live on campus, together, and claim a much closer friendship with each other, regardless of the fact that they all study different courses, than with students on their own courses. In one institution, the relationship between the students and the Access office has been formalised into an Access Society. Students in a different institution also spoke about their identity as 'Access' students, describing how on foot of encouragement from the Access Office, they set up an Access society in their college and organise outings and events for fellow Access students.

> *A ….It's a society so anyone can do it but I think people, I mean it sounds kind of funny, I think people are a bit intimidated when they see 'oh, all these Access students, why would they do it' but like it's just the same as any other Society, we just go bowling, we go out, we go…*
> *….It's basically trying to keep the people from that orientation week still together as friends.*
> *….It's just like a little reunion every now and again. I just love it, I think it's…*

Not all students seek or perceive the support in such intimate terms. Some students are more instrumental in their engagement with the Access office, viewing it as a conduit to financial or academic support.

That's been good, I've found that very positive. You know, in general, what happened was the initial meeting, the meeting and then after that really a series of meetings, I think it's one a month and check in and I think, I find that useful...

So they did, they did help me with, I got an allowance for printing which was brilliant, fantastic, so helpful because like other people have to put money on the thing and I just, I can print out whatever I want throughout the year, I never run out of money so it's very handy to print out lectures, slides and everything and then assignments and things.

And then they give me like an allowance in exams, so that's handy as well, kind of similar to what I got in the leaving cert. so that's quite helpful and I needed that this year actually as well. But there's not too much interaction, I suppose it's kind of more on my part that there's not interaction, like it's there if I need it, they always kind of like, they say like we're there if you need it.

Yeah I would go straight to them because I know that they have time to see me and I wouldn't be waiting in the queue for hours like to talk to somebody you know, they probably have pull (emphasis added), I don't know, I never had any problems, but if I did I'd know that like I have their phone numbers, so I can like text Jenny or Anne or whatever like no problem.

Other students have chosen to interact with the Access office on a pseudo professional level through mentoring roles on the induction week. They describe their admiration for the work of the Access office, and explain how they wanted to contribute to and support its work.

Yeah, I'm in final year, as I said I like getting involved, I have been involved in practically everything that the Access service has to offer and I've been involved in student unions and I was chairman of the society as well so I've done the whole shebang as well.

However, while some students recognise the work of the Access service in quite positive terms, they also regard the support as potentially domesticating to their own trajectory in the college environment. In an effort to be independent, these students are more likely to seek the support of their subject Department, than the Access office.

Not all students that we spoke to felt comfortable being a recipient of the HEAR scheme. One student described how her friend resisted being introduced in these terms to other students who are not part of the scheme, in part due to tensions surrounding the criteria and benefits of being a HEAR recipient. Thus while some students embrace a HEAR 'identity', for others, it is a source of tension and social stigma.

A I suppose my one's different, but she's also ashamed to say she's on Access as well.
Q Really?
A No way!
A Yeah, unless it's other Access people.
A Because she said there was a girl, she won't say the, like I remember last year saying like 'oh did you get the email off Jane' or something and then like the girl she was with was like 'who's Jane?', and then she looked at me and she was throwing daggers at me as if to say 'don't you dare say who Jane [Access officer] is', and I'm like 'Oh I'm on Access' or something like that,

....I think some people don't realise the realities of other people's situations, ...I had to go up and get a hospital appointment for something and my friend was kind of like sure why can't you just reschedule it and I was like well, you know, it took six months to get the hospital appointment, and he was like but sure can you not get it within three weeks with the VHI and I was like well I can't afford VHI, whereas, you know, he's like 'does everyone not have VHI' and I was like 'no', you know, most people don't at this stage. So there is, there is definitely, you know, I've seen people who have came up from this background and they would have had…
Q And how obvious is that in [your institution]?
A I don't know really, I just depends on different people, some people would say like, you know, when you'd say 'oh I'm on a grant or I'm on Access' they'll say 'oh well it's good that you have that opportunity to go' and you know, they'll respect it, whereas other people will say 'well, you know, what, what, you know, you have it easy, don't you, you don't have to pay for anything, so there's a bit of a difference, depends on the people I suppose.

In two institutions students were unable either to identify the role of the Access Office in their college, or name the Officer of the HEAR or DARE scheme. In each of these two institutions, a tutor rather than officer was identified as providing support to the students. However, as the role of this tutor is primarily rather than pastoral, and discipline or subject specific, this means that students who are not studying this subject cannot avail of the same support. Those students who were in a position to seek the tutor's support, described their experience of studying with the tutor in glowing terms, and actively compared the very positive type of interaction which they enjoyed with him, to that of the lecturer of the same subject area. In institutions where subject specific tutor support was provided to all students in the college, in addition to access support, students said that they were more likely to approach the tutor rather than HEAR or DARE Officer. However, students stated that they were glad that the Access support was available if they needed it.

Despite general awareness of the presence of the Access Office on campus, many students were unaware that a specific HEAR or DARE Officer was available as support to them, and in some institutions, students did not know the identity of the HEAR/DARE Officer. Neither was the student was aware of their status as a HEAR student. In the case of DARE students, most were aware of the Disability Support Officer on campus rather than the DARE Officer, and had a reasonable amount of dealings with that Officer. The same students were unaware and uncertain of their status as a DARE student.

Peer relationships

The importance of the social life of a college to the student varies considerably. This partly depends on five main factors: the size of the college; the existing social network of friends which the student has already accumulated through school in their neighbourhood; if they live on campus or choose to commute to college; their level of engagement with social activities on campus through clubs and societies, and their view of college as a holistic experience for personal development or as a means to an end. From their discussions of the social aspect of college, the overwhelming finding is that students do not engage as much socially as they do academically, or even see the same value in engaging socially as academically.

Notwithstanding this, some students describe themselves as involved in societies such as Vincent de Paul, The Tea Society, Gaming Society and others. Others talk more generally about socialising with friends from accommodation on campus, off campus, from their class, and from their home town. Some make the spatial distinction between friends at home and at college, saying that the two sets of friends rarely if ever, mix. Usually when this is the case, friends in their home town claim the more dominant relationship, as the friends in college become absorbed in the academic, rather than social milieu of the student's life.

However, this dimension of the social is not a product of the spatial configurations of neighbourhood and college alone, as one student summarised the comments of many students when he described how social networking among certain groups of students from the school classroom, through to the college theatre hall, operated to exclude other students from entering the same groupings of friendships.

A I don't, like I said earlier, I don't really like my class because it's so big and I used to wonder why there were so many people from Dublin in [particular institution] but it's just because a quarter of Irish people are from Dublin.
Q Right

A So they, like they would all go, like a lot of them would have gone to school together so it's kind of cliquey... But no like people are really nice because they have their group of friends because they've been with them in school and then I have my friends from Halls and other, like two of my housemates from Hall, like I never really fell into like a group and I don't really mind because it's good in college because you can come and go to college and then go home and have fun, you understand.

The size of the institution is also an issue for some students. So too is the risk of social isolation which is fully accepted by the student when applying for a course. With the larger college, students talk about knowing people by the building that they attend for courses, and through clubs and societies. Students do accept that the larger class size (and attendant difficulty in creating friendships from frequency of contact) is an inevitable characteristic of the larger college, and rationalise their socialising patterns according to the 'campus friends', 'course friends' and people that they still know from their neighbourhood or town.

Q And is it a different experience because you have now lived off campus as well as on campus, and is there much of a difference between?
C It makes you appreciate the people you meet on campus
C Because I still know people from Blackrock, that you'd meet them and say "hello and blah blah" but it's just people you meet on campus that they actually are genuinely your friends, and it's how you meet a lot more people
Q And how do you build that up? How do you make that distinction?
B Oh like I definitely got to know far more people, it's just because you know, it's kind of like your course friends and then your campus friends, and the campus friends group but it's a lot bigger I'd say as well
Q And which would you describe yourselves as being closer to?
B Oh my campus friends
Q Why?
C Just I think ***they're more like me****, anyone I've met on campus. Whereas people on my course, I do get on with*

In the larger Dublin based colleges, students are divided in their view as to whether the social dynamic of their college is merely diverse and integrated with only geographical rather than social divisions, or whether it is segregated along socio-economic lines.

With the smaller sized college, students are more reticent when explaining the social dynamic between students. Initially describing the college as a place where 'everyone knows everyone', and where 'everyone is really friendly', this then leads to a discussion of its drawbacks. Outlined among these is the lack of privacy from gossip from the night before, a palpable sense of segregation between degree programmes, and a level of discomfiture with the dual role of lecturer as friend in the clubs and societies context and as professional in the class hall. This last has prompted fears and speculation of favouritism between lecturers and certain students, as not all students within a class will be involved in the same club or society as their lecturer. Ironically, while the students raised this as an issue which involves the lecturer, the effect is to create tension between students – both within the class context and within the college.

Students are acutely aware of other degree course offerings in the smaller institution, and in teacher training colleges in particular students spoke of the tension between different class groups. This tension is created partly by the comparison of points required for different degrees, by the comparison between the emphasis underpinning the type of degree (such as liberal or professional), and the workload associated with the degree. A further line is then drawn between those students who gained entry to the degree course on a meritocratic basis, and those who were recommended for a place. It is unclear as to whether this line is constructed by the students or lecturers, or by both, but is clear that it is an issue for students, subsumed into their identity as a HEAR student.

Relationship between lecturers and students

When talking of their relationship or interaction with lecturers, students were markedly less positive. However in most cases, students rationalised this in terms of the context within which interaction takes place, identifying factors such as the different roles of the Access Officer and lecturer, and large class size as inhibiting a more informal style.

> *A I think there is a big difference to me in the way we talk to, in the Access Centre, and the way we talk to our lecturers. Because our lecturers I find it is really formal, and you only ask them a question if something is genuinely you don't understand.*
>
> *A Eh, the Access Office is a lot more personal, obviously they know your case, and they're a lot more welcoming maybe than lecturers, the lecturers just seem too busy to*

be constantly like have questions to answer for all students, so it is completely understandable.

Students in the larger college rationalised the lack of interaction with their lecturers as due to large class size. Understanding the constraints of this environment, they referred instead to their relationship with tutors.

Q How about with the lecturers then, how do you find the interaction with the lecturers?
A Well to be honest with you, because I'm doing Arts the classes do be bigger.
Q Okay.
A And like I, we do have one tutorial all right that we, tutorials would be smaller groups that you're allowed to ask questions in and like they'll be taken on by PhD students or Doctorate students but in the discipline, but what happens with them then is that like the attendance of them would be poor you see.
Q Okay.
A So then the discussion is not stimulating, like it's fine because you can email lecturers but most of the classes are big, you see, in Arts, so.

Those undertaking courses in areas such as Science, Computers and Architecture talked at length about the more intimate relationship which they enjoyed with their lecturers as they progressed through their degree.

Q Right. What about the interaction with the lecturers then and with the staff in general A Ah, they're deadly
Q ….what's it like here?
A Ah it's good.
….They, you can have a good laugh with them like, you can.
….Yeah, you can have a laugh.
….And you feel like they're actually more, like sometimes you feel like they're colleagues like, and some of them would be colleagues, some of them would.
Q Really?
A Well yeah because you'd be working, with research you're working in their labs and that's the way, if that's the way it is then you're, like you're colleagues and they'd, they'd have a different relationship to, like you're working for X are you? You're working with a lecturer..
….Yeah, with X.
…..He's never there.
….Some of them, they're working with lecturers and there's a very, like gives a different sense of relationship and they treat you as a colleague, they don't treat you as a student, they treat you like they treat their PhD students during that time.
A As in you don't have to do this, like they don't Spoon-feed you, they tell you….

> *….Yeah, you kind of, you work together on, so you have your specific research project, you're trying to, you're aiming to have a specific goal at the end, so if you're coming across a problem the two of you will work it out between you.*

Notably, this relationship only became possible once they had progressed beyond the large class size of first year, and when their course required more lab (one-on-one) time of them. This atmosphere is partly fostered through smaller class sizes in these disciplines, and appears to exist regardless of the size of the institution.

> *Always been very approachable like, even just sitting around they would always chat. It's just, they've always been very helpful, always tried to be as inclusive as they can be really. Like I don't think you could say more about them, they do go out of their way for you.*
>
> *They are brilliant, they are a really lovely bunch of people. You could go to them any time if you have a problem and even if you are upset or whatever they don't mind listening to you and giving you advise and whatever. They are really a lovely bunch. Who really, really want to help you in any way.*
>
> *For me anyway, I wouldn't come over here [the Access Office] that much like, I actually would go to lecturers before I go to HEAR or DARE, that's just, my lecturers are very approachable like, very small course we're in so they know us well and they'd do anything for us.*

Another student studying arts in a different institution commented that:

> *A The lecturers? It's actually very good, like you're encouraged to, they keep in contact with you as well like through the email system and stuff and through moodle, so they kind of, you know, keep in, keep in touch and they, a lot, a lot of the lecturers give you the option all right, just if you have any questions to email, come to them after class, you know, they'll wait around for like ten, fifteen minutes if you need to talk or whatever, about say stuff due, like tests coming up or, you know, like if you have any questions and they encourage like, you know, kind of feedback and a lot, a lot of them like are very approachable.*

In general, the interaction tends to be much more formal and hierarchical for courses such as Arts, Educational programmes, Applied Social Studies or Languages. Many students taking these courses were quite negative about their perception of lecturers' interest in them as students, using vocabulary such as 'disinterested', 'uncaring', 'condescending' to describe same. In some cases, this perception of disinterest extended to their perception of the lecturer's own lack of interest in their subject area, as students gave examples of how lecturers would read their notes from slides and rush away at the end of a class. Notably,

these examples were not confined to the larger universities, but extended to the smallest type of institution.

However, in some institutions, there were inconsistencies in students' accounts of the approachability of lecturers from specific departments within the faculty of arts, for example. While some were vehement in their praise of lecturers' availability and support for students, others disagreed with this verdict about the same department.

Similar to the pseudo professional role of the student in his/her relationship to the Access Office and subsequent impact on the relationship between staff and student, one student described himself as a 'peer tutor' to other students in his department. He explained that this involves providing support to peers on style and formatting in their assignments, for which he is paid by the hour. The criteria for this role includes receiving a first class honours in his assessments in first year, to then be considered for the role in second and third year. He explains how he was mentored as a second year student by a third year student, and now provides consultations for first year and second year students in a common room, alongside other peer tutors. He was very enthusiastic about the role and the support which he receives in his role from the Support Officer in his department. Notably, he stated that if he needed help with any aspect of college, he would go to this Officer rather than the Access Office.

Against this backdrop, the same student was dismissive of the clubs and societies on offer in the college, saying that there was nothing of intellectual interest to engage him. Instead, he spoke in very positive terms about the social dynamic of his department, which included lecturers, other tutors (including the Support Officer), and the students who would visit him in the common room during his consultation hours.

For many DARE students their disability affects their sense of identity in a more fundamental and complex way and in some cases, influences a greater drive to succeed academically. They are less inclined to be critical of specific lecturers than HEAR students, and talk more about negotiating their learning within the generalised context of the college environment.

> *Q Okay, okay. How about your own experience with lecturers?*
> *A Yeah, it's great. Sometimes you're kind of afraid to tell them and say I have dyslexia, because I don't want them to look down on me as small, do you know that kind of way, because I do a lot of in-class assessment...and I don't want them to look at my paper and say oh Jesus this fella, I'll have to look out for a few spelling mistakes here now and he definitely wouldn't deserve a, I don't know, an A like.*

> *...I've only ever really told one lecturer and that's because I was like, it was a tough lecture now and I just needed to get the notes and things because I was missing a few from in class so I just told her and just asked her if I could record and things like that. And I passed that anyway, not a bother, and I did well enough in it so I don't think she looked down on me in anyway and I'd say she helped me out more than anything. But, I don't know, I'm just, I'd be wary of it just in case it did happen that I wouldn't be able to say get a mark that I maybe do deserve because they'll be thinking in the back of their head, oh hold on, this fella probably doesn't, he's not able to get an A, do you know.*

However, all students tend to be highly critical of their lecturers – their lecturing style, mode of assessing students, availability and knowledge of their subject – and this is affecting the relationship between lecturer and student. In many cases, students remarked that they expect lecturers to be 'entertaining', to be 'fun', 'tell a joke' at the beginning of class, and not be 'boring'. In addition, one or two students said that they would ask questions with the intention of 'finding out a lecturer', while others stated that they. While the student of the smaller class size tends to be more sympathetic and more positive in their engagement with the lecturer, it could also be that the greater sense of intimacy fostered by the small number factor, also engenders a sense of loyalty on the part of the student towards the lecturer. This might in turn encourage the student to take a more active academic role than the student of the larger class size, rationalised by the student as adopting the role of 'colleague' alongside the lecturer.

What is very clear from student accounts is that a number of factors are playing a significant role in the interpersonal relationship with lecturers. One factor is the HEAR or DARE identity of the student itself, which is playing out alongside other factors such as pedagogy, the relationship of the lecturer to the class as a whole, their own background and pathway into college, the structuring and sequencing of the course, and the assessment workload. While all students accept assessment as a requisite of college life, many complain about the organisation and structuring of assessment by lecturers

Academic aspect

When asked about the academic aspect of college life, the biggest issue for students was their assessment workload. While by and large, there was general acceptance of the type of assignments they were expected to do, students complained that the deadlines for the

submission of assignments tended to come together in one week. This, it was felt, betrayed a lack of communication between lecturers rather than intended hardship for the students, as students acknowledged that some lecturers would try to accommodate students' requests to move a deadline when they realised that the assigned date was coinciding with those given to other subject areas. In every institution, the same suggestion was offered by students: to stagger the dates for submission of assignments.

In addition to dates given for the submission of assignments, students also complained about the lack of information provided about an assignment. They stated that in some cases, little to no guidance is provided by the lecturer regarding their expectations for the assignment, no structure regarding content or format is provided, and very little feedback is subsequently provided on the assignment itself. Rarely is the student provided with a marking guide. This complaint comes on foot of student bewilderment with the sequencing of courses and in some institutions, the relevance of a particular module to the degree itself. In turn, this does little to soften student frustration and perception of these as unnecessary academic hurdles, and arguably, exacerbates annoyance regarding other issues such as the delivery of a lecture which otherwise might not generate as much tension.

The experience of DARE students with the academic aspect of college life holds a different emphasis to that of the HEAR student. For some, the learning supports that they require have already been incorporated into the teaching culture of the department, so their critique of the institution is directed towards more exogenous factors such as the spatial layout of a campus or building. For others, the lack of understanding of the effect of disability – regardless of type – on the learning process means that the student feels further disabled in higher education. One student commented that being treated 'like everyone else' is 'bad' because it betrays a lack of understanding of the way in which disability interacts with the process of learning. The same student said that this lack of understanding is not just confined to learning, but extends to the everyday realities of living with a disability.

> *A I think everybody is quite understanding with people with disabilities but I don't think they understand, I don't think they know what's it like to be a person with disabilities so they will never fully understand it, so.*
> *- Yeah.*
> *Q Yeah.*
> *A They're kind of sympathetic towards you but they don't really understand where you're coming from.*

For some students, there is a lack of certainty about which staff knows about their disability. As each DARE recipient was required to submit detailed medical and personal information about their disability, the manner in which academic staff in particular then approaches the student in relation to an issue stemming from the lecture or an assignment, can give rise to confusion as to how that information is being used or interpreted.

In their interviews, DARE students spoke of the need for accommodation on assessment deadlines or in relation to a request for mechanical support in the lecture hall. In both respects, most students commented that lecturers were very obliging and interested in learning more about their disability. However some students argued that lecturers tend to treat them in the same way that they would treat any other student. This, they maintained, was not helpful, and was interpreted as a lack of understanding of the nature of disability as the student is "already at a disadvantage" [to other non-disabled students]. It is important to note however, that this was not the general view of DARE students who spoke very highly of both lecturing and Access staff.

Instead, a number of observations were advanced by DARE students regarding the accessibility of the campus and buildings. Ramps at entry points to buildings are too steep for certain wheelchairs, difficulty in getting around the campus, poor sound quality in lecture halls, poor accessibility in lecture halls for wheelchairs, and poor signage on the office doors of academic staff, were some of the list of complaints and suggestions put forward. One student who is visually impaired and uses a cane, recalled how on his request for directions to a lecturer's office, he was told the number of the office door rather than provided with a spatial configuration for the same. He gave this as an example of how the dominant culture of communication and mode of teaching in the college environment doesn't cater for a disability such as visual impairment. Saying that, he stated that there is a clear consciousness and effort made by his department to cater for his needs.

> *A I'm not sure if lecturers are, if all lecturers are a hundred percent aware of how to kind of deal with visually impaired people in their lecture halls. Now, I would have to say the vast majority of lecturers that I've experienced are very helpful and accommodating but I think it might be good if they got kind of debriefed as to how to communicate things non-visually for example.*

Both HEAR and DARE students actively draw comparisons between different colleges, often in order to highlight the positive aspects of their own college. Both sets of students talked

freely about their determination to succeed academically, with one student remarking "people admire Access students more for working harder".

Transition into third level

Without exception, students spoke of college life in quite positive terms, with most describing the transition from second to third level as manageable. This, they attributed to the support of the induction week which, in some colleges, will have featured sample lectures and workshops on essay writing for example. Quite a few students spoke of the "freedom", the "independence" which they enjoyed in the move to college, describing the Access office as "your safety net", enabling a 'seamless' and 'easy' transition.

> *A I found it difficult at the start*
> *Q Right*
> *A As I said in First Year, the first few weeks I found extremely hard, the change of scenery and the change of structure and all that stuff. But everybody encounters that, from who I've talked to, all friends and family, everybody pretty much, so that's a normal thing. But in [my institution] I think they dealt with it very well, because for DARE and HEAR students we had an extra – I can't remember what it was called – but it was where you come in and get shown around and given a tour*
> *Q Right*
> *A And we were given kind of briefing classes on "this is how college works, this is how you take notes, this is how your timetable will be laid out" and that was extremely helpful because it gave us kind of a head start on other students coming in to college.*

Notably, other students described the same process as a 'culture shock', stating that in school, "you're totally spoon-fed". Some expanded on this notion, explaining that 'you're moving from knowing people and face-to-face contact to communicating through moodle'. One student exclaimed that in college 'you're expected to write like a professor', adding that 'school doesn't prepare you' for the experience. In their discussions, students were deeply critical of the way in which they were prepared for third level in their secondary schools.

> *A. I think all my friends like in college, we were all like discussing before like how come in secondary school we're not taught referencing or bibliographies, like how come they expect us to write these essays from like nonsense and then expect us to go to university where we have to do referencing and bibliographies and like thanks to here we got taught how to do all those things, they gave us all the information but like*

> *I had to pass that information on to my friends that didn't have it. They were like I don't know how to do write this, I was like well I have these sheets like, take a look at them.*

Without exception, all students that we spoke to considered the Access Office to be vital to their initial experience of higher education.

7.6 Summary

Our analyses of the participation and progression probabilities suggest that HEAR and DARE eligible entrants to higher education are faring well relative to the wider cohort of similar entrants. That is, HEAR and DARE eligible entrants are more likely to make the transition from acceptance of an offer to participation in higher education. Furthermore, while HEAR and DARE groups can be differentiated in progression patterns before previous attainment is taken into account, the analyses do not suggest that these groups are less likely to progress to second year. Rather, their progression patterns are very much in line with other higher education entrants.

Our interviews and focus groups with HEAR and DARE students spanned all institutions (where possible) involved with the scheme. We should keep in mind that our typical respondent tended to be the individual who has ongoing contact with the access office. Such respondents were much more likely to respond to our invitation to participate in the research. Therefore, we should be mindful that our findings relate to this specific group, and less so for the group of entrants who come in through the schemes, but who do not interact much with the access and disability offices.

Identity and relationships were a key theme across the interviews. For HEAR students there was a surprising comfort attached to being an access student, however, as previous research indicated, students were less likely to disclose their identity to 'outsiders'. For some students with a disability their relationship was more complex, and depended on the type of disability. For some, there was no choice but to disclose. For others it was an identity best protected.

Respondents spoke at length about the supports on offer from the access and disability offices and how these supports helped them navigate their way through higher education. For others that had less contact with the support services, it was often a comfort to know that support was there should they request it. The generic supports available to entrants was generally

viewed positively by entrants, as was the shift in the learning environment in making the transition from secondary to higher education. Students were in general critical of their lecturers and teaching and learning at higher education.

Chapter 8: Summary, Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

This evaluation has been guided by three overarching questions which the SDG and stakeholders sought to address:

(i) How do the schemes contribute to the realisation of institutional and national targets?
(ii) To what extent do the schemes meet the target groups' requirements?
(iii) What can be determined about the sustainability, scalability and replicability of the schemes?

In addressing these questions, the design of the evaluation centred around the institutions involved in the HEAR and DARE schemes, a sample of students participating in the schemes, key stakeholders involved in the schemes and comparison of HEAR and DARE applicants with the relevant cohorts of young adults who apply to higher education. In doing so, existing administrative data was used alongside new qualitative data collection with key stakeholders both internal and external; as well as interviews and focus groups with students participating in the schemes. In addition, visits were made to a number of the participating HEIs to provide contextual information for each of the institutions involved in the schemes. This chapter now provides a summary of the key findings, and draws conclusions and recommendations around the three main questions that the evaluation sought to address.

8.2 How do the schemes contribute to the realisation of institutional and national targets?

The evaluation sought to examine how the schemes contribute to the realisation of institutional and national targets through the following methods:

(i) A critical assessment of the assumptions underpinning education policy pertaining to widening access to higher education, and an assessment of how Irish policy is placed in comparative aspect;
(ii) Institutional case studies with particular focus on the workings of the reserved places across each of the HEAR/DARE schemes;

(iii) Interviews/focus groups with a range of internal and external stakeholders to gain perspectives on the adequacy and sufficiency of the indicators and the system of reserved places;

(iv) Quantitative analyses of the institutional and national uptake of the HEAR and DARE programmes across institutions.

8.2.1 HEAR and DARE in Comparative Aspect

The HEAR and DARE schemes in their 'compensatory' approach to educational disadvantage are rather unique in comparative aspect (with the exception of schemes in Canada and Australia). Approaches to widening access to higher education in other institutional contexts can take different forms: a general policy approach targeting all categories of students, or measures focusing on different under-represented groups or alternatively – in most cases – a combination of both (ECEA/Eurydice 2012). However, within contexts for which entry to higher education is based on terminal examinations and some metric of attainment, there are few educational systems that address the under-representation of groups in the approach taken by the HEAR and DARE schemes. Furthermore, while other institutional contexts are guided by the use of indicators in order to monitor under-representation at national level; few systems adopt the range of economic, social and cultural indicators as adopted by the HEAR scheme. In the case of Scotland, the transition to higher education is monitored through the use of performance indicators. Typically such indicators relate to school characteristics (such as the number of pupils that are eligible for free school meals), and area characteristics. The broad range of area characteristics typically include the following:

- IDACI score: the proportion of children under 15 living in families that are income deprived;
- Indices of Multiple Deprivation (Scottish measure similar to the deprivation score used by HEAR)
- POLAR2: proportion of 18-year olds who continue to higher education at age 18 or 19 (England)
- POLAR2 Adult Higher Education Rate: proportion of people aged 16-74 reported as holding a higher education (HE) qualification.

In some countries, higher education systems adopt a general policy approach in addressing the under-representation of certain groups. In doing so, they strive for creating an egalitarian environment that provides equal opportunities for all to participate in higher education. The rationale being that this will have a positive impact not only on overall participation in higher education, but also on the number of students from disadvantaged groups. While the majority of countries combine general policy actions with targeted measures, 13 countries concentrate on this more general approach. From the geographical perspective, the general policy approach is quite common in the Nordic countries, as in three of them – Denmark, Finland and Sweden – it is the main mechanism to address under-representation.

Regardless of the policy approach used to address the under-representation, ECEA/Eurydice (2012) identified that a limited number of countries (e.g. Armenia, Austria, Ireland, Finland and Norway) refer to quantitative targets to be reached. In Ireland for instance, the National Action Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013 sets very concrete objectives. In other contexts, (Finland) the aim of general policy approaches to widening participation seeks to increase participation of under-represented groups in line with their share in the entire population (for example proportional representation of the national population of migrants).

In a brief exploration of 'what work's' in widening access policy across diverse institutional contexts, it was evident that both the current direction of national policy with regard to Access and Participation in Higher Education, as well as key elements of the HEAR and DARE schemes, share aspects of 'what work's' across contexts. Thus, the evaluation team was left with the impression that despite the fact that the schemes are very much in their infancy, there is scope for future development of the schemes. However, we have also highlighted a number of key areas that should be adapted within the schemes in their future development.

8.2.2. To what extent do the schemes contribute to the realisation of institutional targets?

The evaluation has explored institutional variation in terms of the range of access programmes on offer and acceptance rates by admission routes. Thus, there is considerable variation across institutions participating in the HEAR and DARE schemes in terms of the context within which targets are set, but also the range of access activities on offer, in terms of pre-entry, post-entry and post-HE transitions. Through the evaluation, we have identified

that institutions differ substantially in terms of the composition of the undergraduate student intake, the demand for courses that are offered, the degree of institutional selectivity, in their funding structures and institutional plans and goals, but also specifically in their admission policies and practices relating to HEAR and DARE. Visits to the institutions and discussions with internal stakeholders revealed that institutional targets around access are largely guided by the targets which are set by the National Access Office. However, wider institutional policy can also have a bearing on institutional targets, particularly when HEIs are physically located within a context of social disadvantage. Thus, as Bowes et al., (2013) identify as a measure of best practice, HEIs should have some degree of flexibility in terms of the type of student that it seeks to target and the ways in which participation by under-represented groups can be achieved.

We identify significant differences across the institutions participating in the schemes in terms of admissions policy and process. Specifically, we point to some of the key tension points across participating institutions with regard to (i) the definition and implementation of quotas; and (ii) variation in pre and post-entry supports across institutions. While some HEIs adopt institution-wide targets (such as those in UCD, TCD and NUIG) which typically set a target for a certain percentage of the undergraduate intake across target groups (such as a minimum of 15% in all undergraduate courses, shared across three target groups to include HEAR, DARE and Mature Students) others set targets specifically around HEAR and DARE (typically 5% of the undergraduate intake for HEAR and a further 5% for DARE). Furthermore, the actual quota or target which is allocated to HEAR and DARE varies substantially across institutions.

Furthermore, we reveal that there is considerable variation across institutions in the realisation of institutional targets. When quotas for HEAR and DARE cannot be met due to lower Leaving Certificate performance of the applicants, HEIs typically substitute across target groups. As a result, the implementation of HEAR and DARE has not had a greater impact. Further consideration of the possibility of a reduction in the minimum point thresholds across institutions is required. Typically, HEAR is more successful than DARE in the realisation of institutional targets. In the 2012 data, we found that a considerable number of institutions are reaching and exceeding a typical target of 5% of the student intake for HEAR but the same cannot be said for DARE. However, we are left with the impression that the most disadvantaged HEAR eligible applicants who typically have lower Leaving

Certificate performance attainment, are at a disadvantage due to the maintenance and rigidity of minimum point thresholds within institutions.

More recently, there has emerged variation across HEIS in how DARE institutional targets are set, with some HEIs now prioritising HEA targeted disability groups (those with physical, sensory or multiple disabilities) over other DARE applicants with disabilities. In the absence of an evidence base of published data on the representation in higher education of all disability groups highlighted by DARE, this exercise seems premature. An examination of potential disproportionality for each disability group in the transition from second level to higher education is required to provide an evidence base. Greater agreement on admission policy and process should be a key feature of the future direction of the schemes.

Finally, the evaluation team has highlighted substantial institutional variation in funding mechanisms for HEAR and DARE. It is difficult to separate the distribution of funding and the ultimate financial costs of the schemes from other access initiatives operating at institutional level. This issue warrants greater consideration by the DARE/HEAR SDG, given the future policy direction of higher education (see below).

8.2.3 To what extent do the schemes contribute to the realisation of national targets?

Contextualising the schemes within the national context, the evaluation has identified that the national targets which seek to be achieved by the schemes are not stated in any documentation. Thus, in the first instance, the DARE/HEAR SDG should provide a plan of how both schemes seek to contribute to the realisation of national targets.

Contribution of HEAR

Chapter 7 highlights that the HEAR eligible applicants represent 4.4% of all CAO acceptances in 2010 and this increased to 7.4% by 2012. In all, HEAR eligible applicants represented almost 5% of new entrants in 2010. While the HEAR scheme emphasises that it offers places at *reduced points* to school leavers from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, just 44% of HEAR eligible acceptances related to reduced point offers, and this had declined to 33% in 2012. Because there was a lack of consistency across HEIs in terms of what constitutes a HEAR offer (on or above the points and/or reduced points eligible

applications), the contribution of HEAR in improving the participation chances of school leavers is not fully realised.

The evaluation has identified a tension in the definition of disadvantage adopted in the national policy rhetoric and that used by the schemes, which makes it difficult to estimate the contribution of the schemes to the realisation of national targets. The HEAR scheme offers '*places at reduced points to school leavers from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds'*. This directly feeds into the *National Action Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education* which seeks to achieve an entry rate of at least 54 per cent for all socio-economic groups by 2020. The report highlights the following:

> '*The traditional target groups of semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers remain significantly below national averages and the non-manual group currently derives least benefit from higher education. In statistical terms, effective educational institutions and education systems are called on to achieve three major goals: to raise the mean attainment level; to reduce attainment variance and disparity, and to decrease the correlation between students' performance and their social background. This articulation of the objectives of education reinforces the fact that "reducing inequality is integral to fostering the quality of education systems". It also provides a framework within which the socioeconomic targets can be formulated. The objective of raising the mean achievement level is embodied in the national level target to raise entry rates to higher education to 72 per cent by 2020. In terms of achieving reductions in the variance and in the correlation between social origins and educational outcomes, the socio-economic targets in this plan are based on the principle that no group should have an entry rate to higher education that is less than three-quarters of the national average by 2020*'.

While the *National Action Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education* defines socio-economic disadvantage in socio-economic group terms (specifically focusing on semi-skilled, unskilled manual workers and non-manual groups); the HEAR schemes adopt a more broad *additive/intersectional* definition of socio-economic disadvantage which includes socio-economic group as one possible indicator of a range of indicators but for which eligibility is determined strongly by income. For the admissions cycle 2009-2012 those whose parent/guardian meet the following SEG codes were deemed eligible on SEG grounds: semi-skilled manual workers, unskilled manual workers, non-manual groups, agricultural workers, as well as those on a state labour intervention scheme, those who never worked, housewives, permanently ill, student or applicant in the care of the state. As a result of this disparity, some

applicants from the HEA targeted socio-economic groups will not reach SEG eligibility because they are not screened as a result of the submission of missing or incomplete financial documentation. Thus, HEAR potentially has the effect of reducing the sample of HEA socio-economic targeted groups to those who are most disadvantaged by selecting firstly on income, and secondly through the use of further indicators. In doing so, HEAR is likely to 'select-out' the more advantaged among the targeted SEG groups, and provides assistance in accessing higher education to those who are more disadvantaged within these groups[58].

The evaluation team were left with the impression that much has been achieved by HEAR in contributing to national targets. However, reconsideration of the policies and processes surrounding targets/quotas within and across participating HEIs and the admissions process (allocation of reduced point offers, consideration of streamlining minimum point thresholds in some ways, planning how HEAR can contribute to national targets) could further extend the contribution that HEAR is currently making.

Furthermore, the DARE/HEAR SDG should consider improving communication and support for those groups who apply to the scheme but are more likely to submit incomplete applications (school leavers from lone parent families, school leavers born in EU countries). It may be that these groups are at a disadvantage in applying to the schemes through difficulties in accessing the necessary paperwork.

Contribution of DARE

Chapter 7 highlights that DARE eligible applicants represent 1.9% of all CAO acceptances in 2010 and this increased to 3.3% by 2012. In all, DARE eligible applicants represented almost 2% of new entrants in 2010. While the DARE scheme emphasises that it offers places at *reduced points* to school leavers with a disability, just 45% of DARE eligible acceptances related to reduced point offers, and this had declined to 36% in 2012. Again, because there was a lack of consistency across HEIs in terms of what constitutes a DARE offer (on or above the points and/or reduced points eligible applications), the contribution of DARE in improving the higher education participation chances of school leavers with a disability is not fully realised.

[58] A direct comparison of all CAO applicants with regard to SEG is not available using the administrative data in this study.

Likewise, a further tension is evident with regard to the definition of students with disabilities in the national policy rhetoric and that used by the schemes. While the National Access Plan sets specific targets around students with physical, sensory or multiple disabilities, the DARE scheme defines disability in a more inclusive manner, drawing on a range of disabilities which include but extend beyond physical, sensory or multiple disabilities. Further, students with disabilities who apply to the DARE scheme are assessed on evidence (and extent) of their disability, rather than on the basis of disability per se. As a result, at times the DARE scheme has been criticised as adopting a medical approach. Further, as the schemes currently stand, it is not possible to identify students with multiple disabilities, as applicants are assessed on the basis of diagnosis of the primary disability. Table 4.8 in Chapter 4 highlights that applicants with physical or sensory disabilities fare well in terms of the submission of complete applications and/or eligibility for the schemes. However, it is the case that some students with physical or sensory disabilities do not access the scheme based on how their disability has been assessed in the diagnosis process.

Chapter 7 provides the numbers of DARE eligible applicants who progressed to higher education among the 2010 cohort. While in all 1,025 DARE applicants made the transition to higher education, DARE eligible applicants constituted 45% of the total group. In all, DARE eligible applicants represent 12 per cent of the HEA target for students with a physical disability/impairment and 9 per cent of the HEA target for students who are deaf/hard of hearing and students and 10 per cent of the HEA target for students who are blind/visually impaired respectively for the academic year 2010/11.

The evaluation team were left with the impression that much has been achieved by DARE in the short time it has been in existence, and that it is clearly contributing to national targets. However, the scheme is very much in its infancy. The profile of DARE applicants and the schools that they come from (see below) suggests that the scheme is not reaching its potential in terms of targeting students with disabilities in second level schools. As well as reconsideration of the policies and processes surrounding targets/quotas within and across participating HEIs and the admissions process (allocation of reduced point offers, consideration of streamlining minimum point thresholds in some ways, planning how DARE can contribute to national targets) further outreach and pre-entry support provided by the scheme could lead to greater levels of success across all HEIs.

HEAR and DARE should consider its role in the wider context of the future direction of Higher Education. The *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* highlights the future direction of HE in terms of

- Implementing a steering and performance based framework for the system governance of higher education in Ireland
- Entering into agreements between the HEA and HEIs around performance compacts with institutional key performance indicators reflecting their contribution to overall system objectives, which is aligned with funding.

Furthermore, the *Higher Education System Performance Framework 2014-2016* seeks to:

- promote access for disadvantaged groups and to put in place coherent pathways from second level education, from further education and other non-traditional entry routes.

The delivery of this goal will be achieved through the delivery and implementation of a new National Access Plan from 2014, aligned with national priorities and system indicators, but also through a review of institutional access plans to ensure measurable outcomes against objectives of new plan.

With these ongoing developments, it seems timely that HEAR and DARE should publish a statement of how DARE and HEAR will contribute to the realisation of national targets. The evaluation team also recommend that ongoing collaboration and further agreement across institutions with regard to quotas and admission policy and practice be achieved, with a view to developing the next implementation of the schemes. Ongoing collaboration with key stakeholders including the National Access Office and the Department of Education and Skills are important for the future development of the schemes.

8.3 To what extent do the schemes meet the target groups' requirements?

The evaluation sought to examine the extent to which the schemes meet the target groups' requirements in the following ways:

(i) Quantitative analyses of existing administrative data to determine the characteristics and outcomes of young people who apply to, participate in and progress through the HEAR and DARE schemes.

(ii) Qualitative interviews and focus groups with HEAR and DARE students and internal and external stakeholders

Each of the empirical chapters (Chapters 3-7) considered the extent to which the schemes meet the requirements of the target groups. The empirical analyses presented across these chapters do not tell us anything about the body of second level students who are encouraged to apply to higher education because of the HEAR or DARE schemes. However, our analyses of the profile of applicants and the schools from which they apply allow us to draw inferences about those who are most likely to apply to the schemes.

8.3.1 HEAR

In Chapter 3 we sought to consider the robustness of the indicators used for the HEAR scheme. Administrative data gathered by the scheme allowed and examination of the indicators at individual level among HEAR applicants. Chapter 3 presented information on the correlation between each measure of disadvantage based on those who were screened for financial information. The strongest correlations were evident between income and welfare; and medical and welfare. That is, applicants who are eligible on one are likely to become eligible on the other. However, in general, the association between indicators was relatively weak. Furthermore, over time, the strength of the correlation between indicators on which applicants were deemed eligible has changed. This was particularly evident in the case of the income and DEIS indicators; the medical card and area indicators; the socio-economic and DEIS indicators; and the socio-economic and area indicators. Each of these combinations were no longer significantly correlated in 2012. It is unclear why such a change is evident across both years. However, there was a consistent pattern between 2010 and 2012 in the correlations between the HEAR measure of disadvantage (overall eligibility) and each HEAR indicator. The 'strongest' correlation has remained relatively consistent over time but has diminished somewhat – that of overall eligibility and income – while all other indicators have a weak/moderate correlation with overall eligibility.

Analyses were also undertaken at individual level using EU-SILC data to test the robustness of the indicators in the population. The analyses revealed that over half of all 16-22 year olds

were living in families with incomes below the relevant income thresholds[59]. This suggests that in the first instance, the scheme may be considered by half of all 16-22 years old school leavers. Given the high rates of eligibility based on income and medical card holding[60], and income and means-tested benefits[61]; further analyses were undertaken with the combination of these two indicators. The analyses reveal that the combination of income and medical card to a large extent, indicate young people who are potentially first generation students. That is, almost two-thirds are living in households where no-one had a degree, and over 90% are living in households where we estimate that no parent has a degree. Having a medical card alone increases the probability of living in a low parental education household by a factor of about 1.6. These indicators are effective in reducing the risk of targeting resources at highly education households.

Further, the combination of indicators (low income, means-tested benefit/medical card, and low SEG) is predictive of living in a household with lower levels of education. Nevertheless, even in households qualifying under these combinations anything between 30 and 35% contain parents or siblings educated to degree level or studying for a degree, or between 8.6% and 5.3% contain a parent who is educated to degree level or studying for a degree. While those administering the scheme are concerned about 'gaming' to a certain extent, it is likely that depending on the combination of indicators, some young people will have greater resources (cultural, social) at their disposal than others and legitimately access the scheme. If most HEAR eligible applicants were drawn from this relatively well-educated pool it would suggest that HEAR may be targeting resources at those for whom educational expectations were already quite high. It is also worth noting that the incidence of low education households among 16-22 year olds who would not qualify under these combinations is also relatively high at around 32-40%.

The combination of indicators (low income, means-tested benefit/medical card, and low SEG) is also predictive of living in a deprived household. Among the 16-22 year olds living in households that would qualify them for HEAR (using the combinations stated above), around half are living in deprived households, and 75% are from either deprived or/and low

[59] Previous exploratory analyses not presented here also found that over half of households in the EU-SILC with dependent children had incomes below the relevant thresholds.
[60] 81% of HEAR Eligible applicants achieved eligibility with a combination of Income and Medical card with either SEG/DEIS or area.
[61] 56% of HEAR Eligible applicants achieved eligibility with a combination of Income and Welfare with either SEG/DEIS or area.

educated households. Again, if most HEAR eligible applicants were drawn from the remainder 25% of households that do not experience deprivation and/or low levels of education, it would suggest that HEAR may be targeting resources at those for whom educational expectations were already quite high. The EU-SILC analyses presented here raise the question of which pools are school leavers who apply to the schemes most likely to come from?

In the internal and external stakeholder interviews and focus groups, there was considerable concern about the adequacy and sufficiency of the indicators used for HEAR. Typically, stakeholders were very concerned about the robustness of the approach in capturing educational disadvantage, and questions surrounding the verifiability of the indicators. Efforts have been made by those working on the HEAR scheme to verify the indicators, with ongoing communication with Government Departments and Agencies.

There was a concern particularly in some institutions with a higher average socio-economic intake that the HEAR programme was not successful in improving higher education participation rates among those attending the most disadvantaged local schools or those living in disadvantaged local communities. While HEAR operators were sure that the schemes are meeting at least some of the target groups, access officers often spoke of their concern about the adequacy of the indicators to capture long-term educational disadvantage as opposed to economic disadvantage, which is currently supported at policy level by the grant system.

However, the distinction between economic disadvantage and long-term educational disadvantage has been blurred because the reckonable income thresholds for eligibility to the HEAR scheme are considerably higher than the income thresholds for the grant scheme. Furthermore, eligibility for the HEAR scheme is a two stage process, the first step of which is contingent on reaching the income threshold. Many spoke about a need for an indicator to capture first generation students, or a need to weight the number of indicators that applicants meet. In effect, there was widespread concern that the scheme could possibly be displacing those who are long-term educationally disadvantaged. Typically the stakeholders both internal and external sought to reach a point at which the indicators as proxies for educational disadvantage are robust and verifiable. However, it could be argued that the future role and location of HEAR and DARE should be mapped out within the broad context of existing education policy and initiatives that seek to address social inclusion. For example, the DEIS programme currently represents a policy response to educational disadvantage at primary and

second level, yet this evaluation highlights an under-representation of students with disabilities accessing the schemes from disadvantaged school contexts.

Profile of HEAR Applicants

The HEAR scheme targets a more diverse profile of applicant than the typical CAO applicant. More females than males apply to HEAR, and a greater share of applicants who were not born in Ireland or who do not have Irish nationality are attracted to the scheme, compared to the typical profile of CAO applicant. HEAR applicants are more likely to have attended vocational schools compared to applicants who use other admission routes, schools which typically have a greater composition of students from working class and unemployed households. When reducing the pool of applicants to those under 23, those who have not submitted a FETAC application, those who had sat at least 6 subjects in the Leaving Certificate and who submitted their choices to the CAO upon completion of registration, we find that half of all HEAR eligible applicants had previously attended a DEIS school compared just 12% of CAO applicants. Finally, HEAR applicants have lower average Leaving Certificate attainment that the typical CAO applicant, but higher average attainment than those who apply to DARE.

The administrative data indicate an increase in the share of complete applications that are received for HEAR over the period 2010-2012 (from 62% in 2010 to 71% in 2012). The share of HEAR applications as a percentage of all CAO applications has also increased over time from 9.5% in 2010 to 10.6% in 2012. Data released by the CAO indicate that the HEAR share of CAO applications continues to grow. A number of stakeholders had expressed concerns about the application process and eligibility. Typically there was a concern that the application process may deter some young people from applying, or from submitting complete applications due to the volume of paperwork required.

Over the period 2010-2012, the percentage of HEAR applications that reach eligibility has increased. In 2010, 29% of all HEAR applications achieved eligibility and this increased to 46% in 2012. This pattern is also evident among HEAR applicants who submitted complete applications, with a substantial increase in eligibility from 46% in 2010 to 65% in 2012. Among the pool of applicants to the HEAR scheme, there was little evidence to suggest that those in more disadvantaged circumstances (using proxies such as attending DEIS schools, in

economically inactive or unemployed households, living in disadvantaged communities) are more likely to submit an incomplete application.

Further, there is evidence to suggest that conditional on submission of a complete application, those born in the EU, lone parents, applicants who attended a vocational school and those living in the most disadvantaged areas are more likely to become eligible for the scheme, relative to their (less disadvantaged) counterparts. While the results presented here are generally positive and indicate less of bias (than expected) among applicants, attention should be placed on understanding why all else being equal, we find that females and applications from young people born outside of the EU are less likely to be eligible in 2012.

With regard to HEAR, 86% of mainstream second level schools submitted at least one application in 2010 and this grew to 88% by 2012. However, the analyses highlight that the share of applications for each of the schemes from outside mainstream second level schools is typically very low, but has increased from 1.8% in 2010 to 2.6% of all applications in 2012. This warrants further attention at wider system level, given that young people under the age of 23 are also accessing higher education from outside the mainstream sector. Furthermore, our analyses of the profile of schools that submit applications to HEAR points to an under-representation among vocational schools.

8.3.2: DARE

The DARE scheme also targets a more diverse profile of applicant than the typical CAO applicant. More males than females apply to DARE, but the applicant cohort is less diverse in terms of nationality and country of birth than the typical CAO applicant. Attendance at both fee-paying second level schools and non-government funded fee-paying schools (‘grind schools’) is more evident among DARE eligible applicants than any other CAO applicant. 18% of DARE eligible applicants had attended a fee-paying school relative to just 9% of all CAO applicants, and a further 6% of DARE eligible applicants had attended a ‘grind’ school compared to just 4% of all CAO applicants. While the HEAR scheme draws significantly from and is over-represented in applications from DEIS schools; DARE eligible applicants attending DEIS schools remain under-represented (just 9% compared to 14% of all CAO applicants). On average, those who apply for higher education through the main entry route

achieve higher average levels of attainment relative to those who apply through HEAR and DARE.

The share of applications to the DARE scheme has also increased substantially over the period 2010-2012. As total applications have increased, so too have complete applications, from 79% in 2010 to almost 82% in 2012 when we restrict our analyses to those who are 23 by January 1st of the year of entry. DARE eligible applications have also increased over this period from 41% of all applications in 2010 to 55% in 2012. The increasing eligibility rate is also evident when we consider only complete applications: from 52% of complete applications in 2010 to 68% of applications by 2012.

There are some interesting patterns in terms of the characteristics of applicants that submit incomplete applications. Typically, they tend to be older applicants, those without a third language exemption, applicants who have received a smaller number of supports at second level, those attending non-fee paying schools; and those attending vocational schools. These findings may suggest that the application process may be biased against students with lower levels of resources or information necessary to access the documentation for application. There is however a *positive bias* in the application process toward those receiving a wide range of supports. More recently, students with physical or sensory disabilities are no longer significantly different in their likelihood to submit an incomplete application than students who disclose other disabilities.

When we consider the factors that are associated with eligibility for DARE among those who submit complete applications, we expect (and find) that few factors determine eligibility given that eligibility is dependent on 'need' or the extent of the disability. However, we find that the type of school attended (fee-paying), the number of supports received at second level and the nature of the disability influence both the application process and eligibility for the scheme.

73% of mainstream second level schools submitted at least one application to DARE in 2010 and this grew to 78% by 2012. However, the analyses highlight that the share of applications for each of the schemes from outside mainstream second level schools is typically very low, but has increased from 1.8% in 2010 to 2.6% of all applications in 2012. As with DARE, this warrants further attention at wider system level, given that young people under the age of 23 are also accessing higher education from outside the mainstream sector. Furthermore, smaller schools, DEIS schools, and vocational schools were less likely to submit applications to

DARE, while those attending fee-paying schools, greater NSEC supports and schools with LCVP (schools typically with a greater middle class composition) are more likely to do so. Non-DEIS schools are more likely to submit applications to DARE, even when controlling for the NCSE supports in the school. Further, while non-fee-paying schools are more likely to submit applications (and a greater number of applications) to HEAR, fee-paying schools are more likely to submit applications to DARE.

The school level analyses suggest that the intersection of disability and disadvantage is likely to constrain school leavers in accessing the scheme. Based on the findings presented in Chapters four and five, it would appear that students with disabilities attending schools in more disadvantaged contexts do not have the same level of awareness, information and guidance in accessing the DARE scheme relative to students with disabilities in more disadvantaged contexts. We also recommend changes to the DARE application and eligibility process and greater use of the reduced points mechanism alongside greater outreach to disability groups and under-represented school contexts in order to provide more equitable access to the scheme. The DARE scheme should address this issue in the immediate future and review its current policy and practice with regard to application, communication and admissions.

The final section of Chapter 4 summarized some of the key themes arising from the stakeholder interviews. Stakeholder perspectives of the schemes tended to be positive in general, particularly about the advances that have been made for students with disabilities in applying to higher education alongside applying for the DARE scheme. Stakeholders typically had concerns about a potential bias in the application process for DARE alongside disability and social class lines. That is, there was a concern that the scheme is not capturing greater numbers of students with physical, sensory and multiple disabilities over time. (The quantitative data would suggest this also). A further concern articulated by stakeholders relates to the intersection of disability and disadvantage.

Reasons for the low uptake of the target HEA groups typically were attributed to lower levels of prior academic attainment and lack of outreach around the DARE scheme by internal stakeholders. Internal stakeholders also expressed concern about the potential lack of agency that students with disabilities have in choosing the best college to support their needs. There was also a tension between DARE eligibility and the uptake of disability supports once entry had been negotiated. Internal stakeholders also spoke about the impact that the DARE

scheme has on their working lives, indicating that the screening of applications largely displaced the traditional activities of staff working on the ground, both pre and post entry.

CAO Choices of HEAR and DARE Applicants

We then considered higher education decision making by exploring CAO application data. HEAR and DARE applicants make good use of the range of choices at Level 8 and Level 7/6. This was reinforced in many of the interviews with admissions officers. We then considered higher education decision making by exploring CAO application data. There was no evidence to suggest that the schemes are being used strategically, counter to concerns raised by a small number of those working on the schemes. That is, the majority of HEAR and DARE eligible applicants make full use of the CAO process, choosing courses both at Level 8 and Level 7/6. HEAR applicants are significantly less likely to make choices based only on Level 7/6, compared to all other CAO applicants. There was no significant difference in the likelihood of HEAR applicants making '*strategic choices'* based on choices of only Level 8 courses compared CAO applicants that do not apply through the schemes. However, DARE applicants are significantly less likely to make '*strategic choices'* based on only Level 8 relative to other applicants.

We did find evidence of significant variation in rates of application and acceptances according to field of study. HEAR eligible applicants (predominately female) were typically over-represented in applications and acceptances to Arts and Social Sciences and Education, but under-represented in both applications to and acceptances of Engineering/Technology. DARE eligible applicants were also over-represented in both application to and acceptance of courses in Arts and Social Science courses. A consistent pattern emerged across both years, whereby DARE eligible applicants were under-represented in both application to and acceptance of courses in Education. While the numbers accessing these courses were small, both HEAR and DARE applicants are over-represented in acceptance of Other Health Care courses. In 2010, a review of the distribution of applicants by admission routes across fields of study identified HEAR eligible acceptances reached and surpassed at least 5% of the total acceptances across a number of fields, with the exception of Veterinary Medicine, Engineering/Technology, Pharmacy or Art and Design. DARE eligible applicants had a much lower representation across all fields.

In both years, DARE eligible applicants draw on the greater flexibility provided in admissions, as this group had significantly higher application rates (8% compared to 6.6%) for courses which have an alternative/supplementary admissions mechanism (i.e. portfolio, interview) than other applicants. However, they were not more likely to accept such courses, compared to other CAO applicants. HEAR eligible applicants have increasingly become under-represented in both applications to and acceptance of courses that resulted in a minimum of 500 points as an entry requirement. DARE eligible applicants were under-represented in application rates to courses for which half of applicants who received a place had achieved at least 500 points in both years. However, in both years the DARE eligible group were over-represented in the acceptance of such courses. These divergent findings suggest differentiation in the use of the reduced points mechanism across courses and across fields.

In terms of CAO offers, it would appear that eligibility for the schemes results in more favourable outcomes. DARE eligible and HEAR eligible are significantly more likely to receive a CAO offer, than all CAO applicants. They are also significantly more likely to receive a first preference offer, an offer in a university and a Level 8 offer.

Participation in and Progression through Higher Education

Our analyses of the participation and progression chances of those who apply to the schemes suggest that HEAR and DARE eligible entrants to higher education are faring well relative to the wider cohort of similar entrants. That is, HEAR and DARE eligible entrants are more likely to make the transition from acceptance of an offer to participation in higher education. Furthermore, while HEAR and DARE groups can be differentiated in progression patterns before previous attainment is taken into account, the analyses do not suggest that these groups are less likely to progress to second year. Rather, their progression patterns are very much in line with other higher education entrants.

Our interviews and focus groups with HEAR and DARE students spanned all institutions (where possible) involved with the scheme. We should keep in mind that our typical respondent tended to be the individual who has ongoing contact with the access office. Such respondents were much more likely to respond to our invitation to participate in the research. Therefore, we should be mindful that our findings relate to this specific group, and less so for

the group of entrants who come in through the schemes, but who do not interact extensively with the access and disability offices.

Identity and relationships were a key theme across the interviews. For HEAR students there was a surprising comfort attached to being an access student, however, as previous research indicates, students were less likely to disclose their identity to 'outsiders'. For some students with a disability their relationship was more complex, and depended on the type of disability. For some, there was no choice but to disclose. For others it was an identity best protected.

Respondents spoke at length about the supports on offer from the access and disability offices and how these supports helped them navigate their way through higher education. For others that had less contact with the support services, it was often a comfort to know that support was there should they request it. The generic supports available to entrants was generally viewed positively by entrants, as was the shift in the learning environment in making the transition from secondary to higher education. Students were in general critical of their lecturers which had an impact on their learning.

8.4 What can be determined about the sustainability, scalability and replicability of the schemes

A number of issues arose in terms of sustainability and the future direction of the schemes. Issues of sustainability were highlighted by internal and external stakeholders moreso than issues relating to scalability and replicability over the course of the fieldwork.

It was acknowledged that the schemes are very much in their infancy, and have been in operation for a short amount of time. Thus, there was the impression that based on the findings of this evaluation, the schemes could move into a new phase of development. There was considerable evidence of collaboration across institutions, but ultimately collaboration was limited in its scope due to issues relating to the setting of quotas and policy and practice pertaining to the allocation of reserved places.

In the first instance, there was a strong willingness by the internal stakeholders for the schemes to be relocated outside of the HEIs due to work pressures and concerns about displacement of outreach and post-entry support work. A central unit is currently the preferred model for the management of the scheme. However, external and internal stakeholders also argued that before such a development should arise, the indicators should

be robust, and greater co-ordination across institutions in the quota-setting and allocation of places should be achieved before such relocation could take place.

The ongoing increase in the number of applications to the schemes, (an increase in complete applications, and an increase in eligibility as outlined above), is likely to place considerable ongoing pressure in terms of the administration of the schemes. Given that half of all 16-22 years olds are within the income limits, it is likely that demand for the schemes will continue. However, the question of sustainability persists. Despite the considerable structural change in the past two years including the appointment of the DARE/HEAR co-ordinator and the establishment of the DARE/HEAR Executive, as well as operational efficiencies in the operational management of the schemes, internal stakeholders identified that there are significant challenges to the future operational sustainability of the schemes. Equity in the distribution of workload across individuals and across institutions is problematic where there are 35- 40 staff involved in the delivery of frontline operational tasks located across 18 HEIs nationwide and the CAO.

It was evident from the interviews with internal and external stakeholders that HEAR and DARE are also interested in building on and exploring additional synergies with other organisations with similar third level application assessment functions (e.g. Student Universal Support Ireland). Such synergies are likely to involve further changes in the current provision of HEAR and DARE, particularly in terms of reckonable income limits.

The issue of the replicability of the schemes was also addressed in the interviews. Internal and external stakeholders highlighted the need to replicate the DARE scheme in particular across all higher education institutions. However, external stakeholders expressed concern about the issue of verification of disability, and the emphasis on evidence of disability via diagnosis was often perceived to be a medicalised model. Others also identified the considerable degree of disconnect in policy across primary and post-primary; post-primary to higher education for pupils with SEN in terms of the dependency for resources and supports in education on a requirement of diagnosis as a pressing issue for all education sectors.

In terms of HEAR, stakeholders were more likely to question the need to replicate the scheme across a more diverse set of institutions, given current inequalities across the sector. In general, greater consolidation in the range of current transition pathways to higher education for young adults was viewed as a more pressing issue for the sector.

8.5 Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings, we highlight the following recommendations:

1. The future direction of HEAR and DARE should be mapped out within existing national and institutional higher education policy to include existing initiatives that seek to address social exclusion in the transition from second level to higher education. There are currently a number of tensions that exist between the schemes and the wider educational policy at primary and second level (such as DEIS action plan, allocation of resources and reasonable accommodations for children with special educational needs) but also higher education (disconnect between income thresholds for the maintenance grant and income thresholds for HEAR) that should be further thought through in order to make the schemes more effective.

2. The positive impact of the schemes for those who successfully access the schemes is evident in the profile of applicants, but also through acceptance and participation rates, and in terms of progression outcomes. However, we recommend that serious consideration is given to the DARE scheme in addressing the gap in terms of the intersection between disability and social disadvantage. Greater outreach to disability groups and under-represented schools is likely to have a positive impact, as well as changes in the structure of the application and eligibility process which may currently deter some groups from applying to the scheme. However, ultimately, the evaluation questions the validity of the continued use of the requirement to provide evidence of disability in determining eligibility for DARE. While the scheme currently collects a personal statement from the applicant and a second level academic reference, this information is not used in the eligibility process.

3. The evaluation has identified considerable institutional variation which impacts directly on the success of both HEAR and DARE: greater alignment across institutions with regard to agreements around minimum entry points, quota setting and matriculation requirements is recommended. However, we also recommend that HEIs continue to have a degree of flexibility in the profile of applicants that they target. In doing so, greater collaboration and sharing of best practice among participating institutions will provide the DARE/HEAR SDG with solutions as to how to address concerns that the scheme may not facilitate the most disadvantaged groups as a result

of the application process (in the case of DARE), concerns about rigid admission policies, practices and processes within and across institutions, including the suggested under-use of the reduced points mechanism. HEIs should also fufill their agreement around funding mechanisms for students who enter the schemes.

4. The evaluation team recommend the need for HEAR and DARE to provide a greater degree of flexibility in the transition to higher education, and advocate transparency and accessibility in pathways for young adults to access higher education. The question of the target population for policies and practices in widening access is complex, but should be afforded greater consideration by HEAR and DARE. Current specific policies on widening access remain overly complex and structurally unequal (i.e. the role of FETAC). Migrant groups, members of the travelling community and young adults in the care of the State should not be discouraged in accessing higher education. Furthermore, the schemes should clearly identify the alternative pathways to higher education for their target groups. This is important, given that not all students with disabilities and students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds who apply to the schemes make the transition to higher education through the schemes.

5. We recommend that the Strategic Development Group continue their work around the evaluation of the schemes, in order to provide a clear evidence base of the impact of the schemes. We recommend the ongoing assessment of HEAR indicators, which could inform the future direction of the schemes, particularly with regard to indicators relating to income and household education levels. We recommend that the scheme consider collecting data on parental education levels not as an indicator, but for future research purposes.

7. Each of the HEAR and DARE participating institutions should further promote the uptake of pedagogies for fairness and widening participation among lecturing staff. We recommend that participating institutions review processes relating to teaching and learning at higher education for a diverse student body to encourage pedagogies and practice for fairness. Participating institutions should also consider how to encourage the adoption of pre- and post-entry supports across institutions, but also

move beyond ‘Getting ready’ and ‘Staying in’ to include a systematic approach to ‘Getting on’.

- *Getting ready (pre-entry interventions)*
- *Staying in (post-entry supports)*
- *Getting on (moving beyond higher education)*

Appendix

Table A.1 Profile of HEAR Students

Institution	Gender	Course	HEAR Offer
UCC	Female	Social Science	Reduced Points
UCC	Female	BA	Reduced Points
UCC	Male	Medicine	Reduced Points
UCC	Male	Pharmacy	Reduced Points
UCC	Male	Science education	Reduced Points
UCC	Female	Genetics	Reduced Points
UCC	Female	Science	On or above point offer
UCC	Female	Commerce	On or above point offer
UCC	Male	Computer Science	On or above point offer
UCC	Female	Biological and Chemical	On or above point offer
UCC	Female	Arts	On or above point offer
UCC	Male	Government	On or above point offer
UCC	Male	BA	On or above point offer
UCC	Male	Genetics	On or above point offer
UCD	Male	BA Joint Honours	On or above point offer
UCD	Female	Commerce (International Business)	On or above point offer
UCD	Female	BA Joint Honours	On or above point offer
UCD	Female	Law	On or above point offer
UCD	Female	Law with Politics	Reduced Points
UCD	Female	Radiography	Reduced Points
UCD	Female	Medicine	Reduced Points
UCD	Female	Social Science	Reduced Points
UCD	Male	Science	Reduced Points

UCD	Male	BA JH	Reduced Points
UCD	Male	BBB Science	Reduced Points
DCU	Male	Nursing	Reduced Points
DCU	Female	Journalism	On or above point offer
DCU	Female	Journalism	Reduced Points
DCU	Male	Business	Reduced Points
DCU	Female	Languages	On or above point offer
DCU	Male	Science	Reduced Points
DCU	Male	Accounting	On or above point offer
DCU	Male	Computing	On or above point offer
DCU	Male	Humanities	On or above point offer
DCU	Female	Communications	On or above point offer
DCU	Female	Communications	Reduced Points
DCU	Female	Business	Reduced Points
DCU	Female	Business	On or above point offer
DCU	Male	Science	On or above point offer
DCU	Male	Science	Reduced Points
DCU	Female	Education	On or above point offer
DCU	Female	Education	Reduced Points
DCU	Female	Science	Reduced Points
DCU	Male	Science	Reduced Points
DCU	Male	Engineering	On or above point offer

DCU	Male	Business	Reduced Points
DCU	Male	Engineering	On or above point offer
NUIG	Female	Arts and Business	Not Specified
NUIG	Female	Medicine	Not Specified
NUIG	Female	Science	Not Specified
NUIG	Male	Arts	Not Specified
NUIG	Male	Bio-Medicine	Not Specified
NUIG	Male	Arts	Not Specified
UL	Male	Law	Reduced Points
UL	Female	Law	Reduced Points
UL	Female	Education	On or above point offer
UL	Male	Education	Reduced Points
UL	Male	Business	On or above point offer
UL	Female	Politics	On or above point offer
NUIM	Female	Biological Medical Science	On or above point offer
NUIM	Male	Arts	On or above point offer
NUIM	Female	Science	On or above point offer
NUIM	Female	Arts	On or above point offer
NUIM	Male	Arts	Reduced Points
NUIM	Male	Science	Reduced Points
St Patrick's College	Female	B Arts	Reduced Points
St Patrick's	Female	B Education	Reduced Points
College	Male	B Arts	Reduced Points

Mater Dei	Male	B Religious with Irish studies	Reduced Points
Mater Dei	Female	B Religious studies with History	On or above point offer
Mater Dei	Female	B Religious Education with History	On or above point offer
Mater Dei	Male	B Religion with English	Reduced Point
Mater Dei	Female	B Religious Education with History	On or above point offer
Mary Immaculate	Female	B Education	Reduced Points
Mary Immaculate	Female	BA Early Childhood	Reduced Points
Mary Immaculate	Male	B Education	Reduced Points
Mary Immaculate	Female	B Education	Reduced Points
Mary Immaculate	Female	B Education	Reduced Points
Mary Immaculate	Female	BA	Reduced Points
Mary Immaculate	Male	B Education	On or above point offer
Mary Immaculate	Male	B Education	On or above point offer
Mary Immaculate	Female	BA	On or above point offer
Mary Immaculate	Female	B Education	On or above point offer
Mary Immaculate	Female	B Education	On or above point offer
Mary Immaculate	Female	B Education	On or above point offer
Mary Immaculate	Female	B Education	On or above point offer
CICE	Female	B Science Education	On or above point offer
NC Ireland	Male	Business	On or above point offer

NC Ireland	Male	Computing (Higher Certificate)	On or above point offer
TCD	Female	Social Work	On or above point offer
TCD	Female	Arts	On or above point offer
TCD	Male	Arts	On or above point offer
TCD	Female	Law	On or above point offer
TCD	Male	Management Science	On or above point offer
TCD	Female	Arts	On or above point offer
TCD	Male	Law & French	On or above point offer
TCD	Male	BESS	Reduced Points
TCD	Male	Law	Reduced Points
TCD	Female	Law	Reduced Points
TCD	Male	Arts	Reduced Points
TCD	Male	Law	Reduced Points
TCD	Female	Arts	Reduced Points

Table A2: Profile of DARE Students

Institution	**Gender**	**Course**	**Disability Declared**	**DARE Offer**
UCC	Female	BAM - BA	Physical Disability	On or above point offer
UCC	Male	BSCBS - BSc (Biomedical Sciences) Joint UCC/CIT	SLD	Reduced Points
UCC	Female	B Commerce	NC	Reduced Points
UCC	Female	BSOC - Social Science	Physical	Reduced Points
UCC	Male	BA (Arts Music - Major)	VI	Reduced Points
UCC	Male	BAS - BA	SLD	Reduced Points
UCC	Female	BA Early Years and Childhood	Physical	Reduced Points
UCD	Male	BA Joint Honours	ADHD	Reduced Points
UCD	Male	BA Joint Honours	SOI	On or above point offer
NUIG	Female	Bio-Technology	SOI	On or above point offer
NUIG	Female	Arts	SOI	On or above point offer
NUIG	Male	Business Information Systems	ASD	On or above point offer
TCD	Male	BESS	Unspecified	Unspecified
NUIM	Male	B Arts	Unspecified	On or above point offer
TCD	Female	B Arts	Unspecified	On or above point offer
TCD	Male	B Arts (MH114)	Unspecified	Reduced Points
TCD	Female	B Arts	Unspecified	Reduced Points
TCD	Male	B Arts	Unspecified	Reduced Points
TCD	Male	Law	Unspecified	Reduced Points
Mater Dei	Female	B Religion with History	SOI	
NC Ireland	Male	Business	Unspecified	On or above

				point offer
NC Ireland	Male	Business Information Systems	Unspecified	On or above point offer
NC Ireland	Male	Computing	Unspecified	On or above point offer
NC Ireland	Male	Business	Unspecified	On or above point offer
NC Ireland	Female	Computing	Unspecified	Reduced Points
NC Ireland	Male	Computing	Unspecified	Reduced Points

Table A3: Percentage of 2010 and 2012 CAO Applicants who apply to Level 8 Education related courses by admission route

	DARE Eligible		**HEAR Eligible**		**All Other CAO**		**Total**	
	2010	2012	2010	2012	2010	2012	2010	2012
N Level 8 Applicants	752	1202	1754	2930	37707	35064	40213	39196
Any Teaching Course*	19.5	16.6	31.6	25.1	26.8	22.1	26.8	22.2
Post Primary Teaching*	9.2	7.9	16.4	12.2	12.7	9.3	12.8	9.5
Primary Teaching*	2.9	4.3	10.4	8.5	9.8	8.8	9.7	8.6
ECCE	9.3	6.3	10.9	9.4	9.7	8.0	9.7	8.1
SNA/Adult Education Teaching	0.9	1.1	1.7	1.7	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.3

*Denotes statistical significance

Table A4: Eligibility for SEG and overall HEAR Eligibility by the Socio-Economic Profile of Applicants (Father's SEG)

	Eligibility for SEG				
Father's Socio-Economic Group	Screened and Ineligible	Not Screened for Financial Indicators	Screened and Ineligible	Overall HEAR Eligibility	Overall Distribution of HEAR Eligible
Employers and Managers	61.2%	29.8%	9.0%	24.3%	5.5%
Higher Professional	71.0%	29.0%	0.0%	14.5%	0.8%
Lower Professional	65.1%	34.9%	0.0%	15.8%	1.9%
Non Manual	5.8%	29.4%	64.8%	51.5%	6.5%
Skilled Manual	42.3%	28.1%	29.6%	40.9%	13.9%
Semi-Skilled Manual	9.0%	27.9%	63.1%	53.3%	7.0%
Unskilled Manual	7.8%	24.7%	67.5%	57.1%	6.1%
Own Account Workers	27.3%	24.3%	48.5%	47.3%	10.6%
Farmers	36.2%	21.4%	42.4%	40.4%	5.3%
Agricultural Workers	4.9%	24.4%	70.7%	58.5%	0.5%
All others gainfully employed	9.7%	67.7%	22.6%	16.1%	0.4%
Unknown	20.4%	33.5%	46.1%	48.4%	41.4%
Total	25.9%	29.8%	44.3%	45.6%	100.0%

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