

Power, Privilege and Points

The Choices and Challenges of Third Level Access in Dublin

A Review of Current Practice in Third Level Access Programmes
in Dublin, with Recommendations towards a Model of Best Practice

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National University of Ireland Maynooth

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	iii
List of Tables	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Preface	v
<hr/>	
1. Executive Summary	1
Issues of Policy and Structure	1
How then is change possible?	1
Access Programmes in Dublin	1
Outcomes of Primary Research: Towards a Model of Best Practice	2
Conclusion and Recommendations	3
<hr/>	
2. Introduction	5
3. Access: the Policy and Research Context	6
3.1 Introduction	6
3.2 Access: The international context	6
3.3 Access in Ireland: Background	7
3.3.1 Introduction	7
3.3.2 The facts and figures for Ireland	7
3.3.3 The facts and figures for Dublin	8
3.3.4 General policy issues	9
3.3.5 Policy and funding in Ireland	10
3.3.6 Guidance	12
3.3.7 Students and part-time work	12
3.4 Access and the Higher Education Institutions	12
3.4.1 Background	12
3.4.2 Retention	13
3.4.3 Barriers to change	14
3.4.4 Access structures	14
3.5 Access at Second Level	14
3.6 Parents and Access	15
3.7 Summary	16
4. Access Programmes in Dublin	18
4.1 Introduction	18
4.2 Key role of Local Area Partnerships	18
4.2.1 Partnership strategies	18
4.2.2 The Northside Partnership Higher Education Support Scheme (HESS)	19
4.2.3 Blanchardstown Area Programme	20
4.3 School-based Programmes	21
4.3.1 Introduction	21
4.3.2 Ballymun Initiative for Third-Level Education (BITE)	22
4.3.3 Accessing College Education (ACE)	24
4.3.4 Clondalkin Higher Education Access Project (CHEAP)	26

4.4	Programmes in third-level institutions	28
4.4.1	Background	28
4.4.2	Trinity College Dublin	28
4.4.3	University College Dublin	30
4.4.4	NUI Maynooth	31
4.4.5	Dublin City University	32
4.4.6	Institute of Technology Tallaght (ITT)	35
4.4.7	The Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (ITB)	36
4.4.8	Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (DLIADT)	37
4.4.9	Dublin Institute Of Technology (DIT)	38
4.5	Summary	40
5.	Outcomes of Primary Research	42
5.1	Introduction	42
5.2	Second-level students on Access Programmes	42
5.3	Current third-level students from Access Programmes	42
5.4	Graduates of third-level who were on Access Programmes	44
5.5	Parents of students on Access Programmes	44
5.6	Access Programme staff and other key personnel	46
5.7	Summary	47
6.	Findings: Towards a Model of Best Practice	49
6.1	Introduction	49
6.2	Access meanings and agendas	50
6.3	Expectations	51
6.4	Policy formulation	52
6.5	Resources	53
6.6	Structures	53
6.7	Delivery	54
6.8	Participation	55
6.9	Towards a model of best practice for access	57
6.10	Summary	60
7.	Conclusion and Recommendations	62
	Recommendations:	
7.1	Tasks for the Department of Education and Science	62
7.2	Tasks for the National Office for Access	62
7.3	Tasks for Higher Education Institutions	62
7.4	Tasks for Access Programmes in local areas	62
	<i>Bibliography</i>	64
	<i>Glossary</i>	68
	<i>Appendix: list of those consulted for the research</i>	69
	<i>Publications of the Dublin Employment Pact</i>	70

List of Figures

Figure 4.1	The Access Framework: Developmental level	49
Figure 4.2	The Access Framework: Implementation level	50
Figure 4.3	SWOT Analysis of access provision	57
Figure 4.4	Barriers and motivators to accessing third-level education	58
Figure 4.5	Access Framework: An Integrated Model	59
Figure 4.6	A Model of Best Practice for Access	61

List of Tables

Table 1.1	Government per capita spending on Education 1995-1999	10
Table 2.1	DES Funding for Northside Partnership Higher Education Support Scheme	19
Table 2.2	Number of students on HESS 1999-2002	20
Table 2.3	BITE Students: Progression to Third-level	23
Table 2.4	BITE students: Progression to PLC	23
Table 2.5	Number of BITE students in third-level institutions 2000-2001	23
Table 2.6	Courses pursued by BITE scholarship recipients 2000-2001	24
Table 2.7	Destination of ACE school-leavers 1999-2001	25
Table 2.8	Number of ACE students progressing to third-level and PLC courses	25
Table 2.9	Progression of ACE Leaving Certificate students 2001	26
Table 2.10	Students entering third-level education prior to CHEAP	27
Table 2.11	Total numbers entering third-level education from the CHEAP schools	27
Table 2.12	Further and third-level education destinations of CHEAP Leaving Certificate candidates 1994-2001	27
Table 2.16	Student intake to DCU under direct entry programme	33
Table 2.17	Retention and Performance of North Dublin Access students	33
Table 2.18	Number of students taking part in North Dublin Access Programme 2000-2001	33
Table 2.19	Range of pre-entry supports for second-level students	41
Table 3.1	School-leaving age of parents	45
Table 3.2	Final school examinations taken by parents	45

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Many have given generously of their time, information and experience in contributing to this report. Access Officers and the staff of the Access Programmes we visited were always helpful and welcoming. Particular thanks are due to the students and parents who told us of their experiences and provided insight into the reality of third-level access in Dublin. A full list of those consulted for the research is included as an Appendix on page 69.

Preface

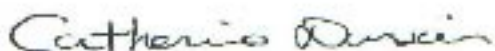
The challenge – how to achieve greater levels of participation in higher education among disadvantaged communities and how to widen participation by groups currently under-represented? This is a matter of particular concern in the Dublin region. Nationally, Dublin has the second lowest participation rate at third level (by county). This is despite the convenient location of many third level institutions, the investment in access initiatives, and the increasingly integrated approach by colleges, area based partnerships, schools, and community groups.

The National Development Plan 2000–2006 includes a €38 million allocation to third level access. This study commissioned by the Dublin Employment Pact presents a comprehensive picture of how access programmes have evolved over the past decade in Dublin. What is notable is the range, depth, and the level of innovation of projects. Many young people are benefiting from programmes at primary and second level, and young adults and mature students are increasingly supported during their course of study by innovative College and Area Based Partnership programmes. The Dublin Employment Pact was involved in this process, jointly supporting the pilot programme “Accessing College Education” (ACE) programme in Tallaght (1999–2000).

The current study assesses the effectiveness of programmes within second and third level institutions and at community and local level. Elements of good practice are identified and recommendations as to how these programmes can be strengthened and improved are highlighted. The successes as well as the weaknesses of initiatives are clearly established. Of particular interest is the dynamic process of interaction and integration between different programmes at second, and third level but also at community level, which has clearly begun to assert itself.

In a climate of more restrained and selective public spending, the importance of continued significant spending on redressing educational disadvantage must be maintained as a key principle. The dynamic expansion of effort with regard to access initiatives must be built on in a systematic and coordinated way, underpinned by research, analysis and appropriate investment. Woodrow et al (2000) remind us that “the redressing of chronic under-representation is not easy nor is it rapid or cheap”. The positive effects of such investment will contribute to social equity, social inclusion and social and economic progress. This study is intended as a contribution to the debate and to the key issues, which need to be addressed as we move forward.

The Dublin Employment Pact would like to thank Dr. Ted Fleming and Anne Gallagher for this excellent and thorough survey and report. The recommendations of the report should be studied carefully by all interested parties and the Pact will be seeking ways to ensure that they are acted upon.



Catherine Durkin
Chairperson
Education & Employment Working Group
Dublin Employment Pact

1. Executive Summary

Issues of policy and structure

Access to higher education is a topic of much current interest and recently the role of fee-paying schools in perpetuating advantage has captured headlines and generated public debate. The social class and economic resources of a young person are accepted key indicators as to whether or not they will access higher education. It is crucial, therefore, that the supports developed in recent years to assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds are continued.

The European Union and OECD regard access as a guiding principle of educational policy in the context of 'lifelong learning', and various reports have identified the goal of access as aiding economic growth and promoting social inclusion. By international comparison, Dublin occupies a unique place in the access league as its rates of access run counter to those of other capital cities. This is further emphasised within Ireland, where Dublin has the second lowest participation rate in higher education of any area outside Donegal.

How then is change possible?

Almost all public policy documents emphasise the importance of access: White Papers on Education and Adult Education, the National Development Plan (NDP), the Report of the Action Group on Access to Third-level Education, National Children's Strategy, the Report of the Steering Committee on the Future of Higher Education articulate the central role of access.

It is clear that access is a reflection of patterns of inequality that are the accumulated result of a disadvantage manifesting itself very early in the educational cycle. A number of reports highlight that for third level education to be equitable other parts of the schooling system must also be equitable.

While various funding mechanisms are in place, including the Third-level Access Fund and the Millennium Partnership Fund for Disadvantage, widening access in terms of numbers entering third-level education is only one aspect of the access issue. Increasing retention and student performance are just as important for an equitable third-level education sector, as is the elimination of barriers, including institutional rigidities.

The importance of parental influence on children's education is widely accepted: the Council of Europe emphasises this and says it is a more important indicator than occupational level or income. The "multiplier and ripple" effect across communities and the enhanced status of schools are other important consequences of successful access programmes.

The report outlines some of the elements of the broad picture of access, at global and local levels. In the Irish context the overall picture of inequality of access is particularly stark in Dublin. Policy developments and funding mechanisms provide a base from which to act on this context, but action on access will also have to tackle issues such as guidance provision and low retention rates to Leaving Certificate. In addition, the Higher Education Institutions have particular internal barriers. Studies of access interventions have identified selection of participants, parental involvement, levels of part-time work, and the problems posed by sets of assumptions and ideologies as areas in need of urgent attention.

Access programmes in Dublin

Access programmes have been developed across Dublin by Colleges and Institutes, by Area based partnerships in conjunction with local educational interests, by schools, again normally in a partnership arrangement with key players including community interests. They typically aim to improve academic performance, increase retention rates at school, increase participation rates at third level and promote awareness of the importance of education. Funding sources are equally varied. Programme delivery may take place at primary or second level or while students are attending College. Programmes are described in Chapter 4.

Area Based Partnerships in Dublin operate in the unique urban context of areas defined by multiple social disadvantage and low levels of social capital across the community, not least of educational capital or an 'education

culture'. In the area of third level access programmes Partnerships have made an important contribution to opening routes to third level education for children not traditionally availing of higher education. They have developed their own unique set of initiatives and supports. Local partnerships also represent a new way of looking at the relationships between schools and higher education colleges, as this relationship is now mediated to some degree by Partnerships.

Partnership support for access typically includes: Guidance and support to students when selecting a course of study, during and after study; assistance with participation costs, e.g. travel expenses, books, course fees, accommodation; provision of local study facilities – sometimes including reference materials and IT resources; at second level, sponsorship for participation in summer programmes such as language camps, Gaeltacht courses and Discovering University, participation in Area and Programme Committees and the Schools Completion Programme (2001).

Schools are also proactive in this process, with support not originally but now being provided from mainstream funding sources for programmes such as BITE in Ballymun, ACE & CHEAP in Tallaght and Clondalkin, and another programme in Blanchardstown. They offer interventions at all levels of the school system from primary, through post-primary and on to third level.

The school-based programmes typically include a combination of supervised study, Easter revision, scholarships, college links, parent awareness-raising and financial incentives. Funding comes from a variety of sources including the Department of Education and Science, Area Partnerships, third-level colleges and the private sector. Each school programme is linked with at least one HEI. Thus, in addition to the school-based provision, students now also participate in the activities of that HEI's Access Programme.

The key elements of the programmes at primary school, second level and at third and further education levels are examined with consideration to student numbers and progression.

Universities and Institutes of Technology have appointed Access Officers and offer an exciting range of programmes reflecting their interest in encouraging access. Entry mechanisms, programme elements at both pre-entry and post-entry and progression and retention, staffing, funding and future plans are examined. The growth of mentoring, financial and academic supports, orientation programmes for new students are normal in these programmes.

Increasingly, the provision for students in terms of third level access, is becoming area-based and collaborative, to the extent that many programme elements are cross-cutting, with input from schools, Partnerships and HEIs.

The fact that the overall numbers on such programmes are in some instances still relatively small serves to emphasise their vulnerability. The following chapters consider the opinions and experiences of those who participate in such programmes and other key stakeholders.

Outcomes of primary research: towards a model of best practice

In our primary research we consulted second-level students on access programmes, current third-level students, graduates of third-level who had been on access programmes, parents of students on access programmes, and access programme staff and other key personnel.

Students spoke very highly of these initiatives and told how in many cases the college that they visited, even when at primary school, was the one they subsequently attended, if the visit had gone well.

These students are the first generation of college students from their families. Some had always wanted to attend and others were prompted to do so by teachers or others they met on the access initiative. Parents had high hopes for their children, but also a bewilderment and lack of confidence in their own ability as parents to guide their children toward college. Practical access issues, especially transport services to college, were a surprisingly prominent concern.

Programme personnel also expressed clear needs, acknowledging the importance of parental involvement,

early intervention, relevant training for Access staff and sufficient funding to deliver comprehensive Access programmes at all levels.

The views and experiences of participants in Access Programmes are presented and in many cases, the responses of the research participants echo the concerns emerging in the policy and research outlined in Chapter Three. Their comments and opinions, together with issues raised in the literature and current policy on access, form the basis for the discussion and analysis in Chapter Five.

This chapter sought to establish the basis for identifying a model of best practice. Access is not a simple concept and refers to a range of sometimes competing meanings. These meanings and agendas and expectations surface in policies, which then determine how this policy is implemented on the ground. The impact of policy on programmes and their implementation are discussed under the headings resources, structures, delivery and participation.

The outcomes of the discourse in this Chapter are reflected in the practical recommendations in Chapter Seven.

Conclusion and recommendations

Best practice, requires that the issues raised in this research be addressed in such a way as to build on the strengths of existing provision and tackle the challenges of widening access to third-level education.

1. At the level of government policy, we recommend that the Department of Education and Science:

- Provide reliable, consistent, multi-year and greatly increased funding for measures to widen access to third-level education, even at a time when state resources appear to be diminishing.
- Adequately resource a National Office for Access with responsibility for the integration of access initiatives and policy development.
- Further increase the allocation of career guidance counsellors so that students have access to skilled and committed guidance throughout the school cycle.
- Provide adequate grant support to third-level students.
- Support the continuing development of courses on access issues and related skills as part of initial and in-service training for second-level and primary-level teachers, for guidance counsellors and for access practitioners.

2. Among the tasks of the National Office for Access we recommend that it:

- Monitor and implement practices to ensure consistent application of policy so as to minimise inequalities of provision for students in Access Programmes.
- Create, and resource, mechanisms and forums for innovation, reflection and policy development through establishing and supporting networks such as AMA, maintaining a database of information, relevant websites & ensure that practitioners establish links with, the European Access Network, Action on Access in the UK and the related journals, publications, and seminars.
- Collate up-to-date and reliable data on access so as to inform effective policy-making.
- Initiate a longitudinal study of school students to explore long-term change in patterns of access.
- Facilitate physical access to third-level education by encouraging public and private transport providers to serve the routes to third-level colleges.

3. We recommend that Higher Education Institutions:

- Access-proof and inclusion-proof admissions policies and practices.
- Address anomalies in points allocation to students with the Leaving Certificate Applied.
- Change the language requirement for entry to NUI colleges.
- Adopt a whole-institution approach to access by designating a staff member in each department with responsibility for liaising with the Access Service and ensure that access provision extends across all subject areas.
- Establish inter-departmental groupings to explore innovative methods of outreach, for example, participation in community learning festivals.

4. We recommend that Access Programmes in local areas:

- Maximise partnership and joint ownership within local-area structures such as Access Committees, with representatives of all the local stakeholders, including students, youth workers, community educators etc. with the support of a Programme Co-ordinator.
- Develop and implement monitoring and evaluation systems which can track the impact of the programme in terms of academic and other achievements, personal development, retention in school, progression to third-level, impact on family and community, impact on school systems.
- Seek to identify and involve different sectors of the target groups, i.e. not only pupils who are bright and determined, but also those who are quieter and sometimes marginalised, those who may have learning or behavioural difficulties, and those who are constantly excluded from programmes.
- Set conditions prior to the receipt of a financial incentive and monitor accordingly.
- Ensure consistency across access provision programmes with the active promotion of budding/mentoring systems, and develop forms of support other than monetary payments.

2. Introduction

This report presents the results of research undertaken for the Education & Employment Working Group of the Dublin Employment Pact by the National University of Ireland Maynooth into programmes which aim to increase participation in third-level education among students from communities where such participation is traditionally low.

Aims and objectives

The aim of this research is to provide an overview of Access Programmes in the Dublin area for school leavers from disadvantaged communities, with the following objectives:

- To describe existing provision
- To assess its impact on participation and retention in third-level education
- To identify gaps in provision
- To identify elements of best practice
- To make recommendations towards improvements in current policy and practice

Methodology

This report is based on documentary analysis, and primary research methodologies including interviews, focus group discussions, questionnaires and attendance at meetings and information sessions. The documents consulted include programme reports and evaluations, policy documents and research reports.

Report structure

The national and international contexts for a discussion of access provision are outlined in Chapter One; these include current national policy contexts and the issues emerging in the international literature on access. Chapter Two is an outline of existing programmes at second and third level. Chapter Three presents the findings of the primary research. Chapter Four is a discussion of the research findings and emerging themes. Chapters Five and Six include recommendations and proposals for best practice.

Report limitations

The aim of the report has been to take an overview of the programmes in operation. It has not been possible within the limits of this research report to deal in depth with the details of individual programmes. The report does not set out to evaluate individual programmes; instead it is hoped that by forging a synthesis of important themes and issues, and by raising questions, the debate on access in Ireland will be progressed and the effectiveness of all programmes may be enhanced.

3. Access: the policy and research context

3.1 Introduction

Access to third-level education is a topic of much current interest. Aspects of the issue, such as the role of fee-paying schools in progression to third level, have captured the headlines and generated public debate about the role of education in perpetuating or tackling disadvantage and inequality.

Access is part of a complex and interlinked system of educational provision in which developments and deficits at various points in the system impact on the whole. It is also part of a rapidly-changing context in which economic factors can radically alter the picture. Given the recent economic downturn, it is critical that the supports developed in recent years to assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds in accessing higher education are continued.

This report examines policy and practice in Dublin in relation to third level access, and aims to look behind the figures and the headlines to understand what is happening, where it might lead and to make suggestions for future action on the issue.

This chapter outlines some of the policy and research developments at international and national levels and is structured as follows:

- Access: The international context
- Access in Ireland:
- The facts and figures for Ireland
- The facts and figures for Dublin
- Policy and funding
- Guidance
- Students and part-time work
- Access and the Higher Education Institutions
- Retention
- Barriers to change
- Access structures
- Access at Second Level
- Parents and Access

3.2 Access: The international context

Access to Higher Education is a subject of major debate and policy change throughout Europe and globally. The European Union (European Commission, 1995) and OECD (1996) regard access as a guiding principle of educational policy in the context of 'lifelong learning', with core policy stating that there be a "quantitative expansion of learning opportunities to widen access to all" (OECD, 1999: 8). This principle of lifelong learning is based on two major driving forces: an economic imperative and a social inclusion objective. The emphasis on learning to sustain economic growth relates to a rapidly-changing knowledge-based economy needing more highly-skilled workers with scientific and IT skills. However, the philosophy of lifelong learning also means that Higher Education can no longer be the exclusive preserve of the traditional school-leaver. There is now a challenge to institutions to become more open, flexible and responsive to the motivations and needs of an increasingly diverse learning population.

Policy guidelines and statements from the Council of Europe approach access as an issue of equity. The Council defines access as the widening of participation in good quality higher education to all sectors of society; the extension of participation to include currently under-represented groups; and a recognition that participation extends beyond entry to successful completion (Council of Europe, 1999: 3). Such a definition supports an understanding of access as more than bringing increased numbers of students through the doors of the academy; it also implies a need to ensure their successful participation in the learning taking place there.

It is important to be aware of the distinction between widening participation and increasing access. Woodrow et al. (2000 : 165) sound a note of caution, stating that increasing access may be the easier objective to achieve and warning that "those with an interest in widening participation might need to keep a watchful eye on the way in which terminology is being used in debates about, and also in the enactment of, policy in this area." They remind us that "the redressing of chronic under-representation is not easy, nor is it rapid or cheap".

The Council of Europe has recognised that students from disadvantaged backgrounds experience two major types of exclusion at third level: overall, or 'horizontal' under-representation, and 'vertical' disparities of access to the most prestigious universities and courses (Council of Europe, 1996: 54). The lack of real progress in spite of numerical expansion is also highlighted:

There is no evidence to suggest that the expansion of higher education in Western Europe over the last decade has been accompanied by any significant change in the relationship between educational opportunity and socio-economic status. In this respect the term 'mass higher education' which is often used to describe participation rates of 30 percent and over is misleading. Higher education, in terms of its accessibility by all socio-economic groups, is clearly not for the masses. (Council of Europe, 1996: 55)

The Council is, however, optimistic about the potential for change in the newly-established links between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and schools in disadvantaged areas, seeing these as having "the potential of breaking the cycle of 'cultural reproduction', which is otherwise excluding some social groups long before they reach the admissions stage" (Council of Europe, 1996: 57-58).

Broadening access to under-represented groups also formed part of the agenda of the 1998 UN World Conference on Higher Education: "Access to higher education for members of some special target groups such as indigenous peoples, cultural and linguistic minorities, disadvantaged groups... must be actively facilitated" (UNESCO, 1998, Article 3(d): 22).

3.3 Access in Ireland: Background

3.3.1 Introduction

The dual impetus (economic growth and social inclusion) towards change in third-level participation outlined above also underpins the issue of access in Ireland. Demographic changes are an additional factor in Ireland which will alter the landscape of Higher Education in the immediate future. The number of school leavers is expected to fall from 60,000 to 48,000 by the year 2012, and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) projects a drop of 25 percent in the number of school-leaving entrants to higher education by 2015.

Skilbeck and Connell (2000), in their study of access initiatives in Ireland, describe the objectives and potential for widening access in higher education in very broad terms, referring inter alia to the twin goals of economic growth and social inclusion. They also identify the nature of the challenge ahead:

Widening opportunity for and in higher education has many benefits in strengthening democracy, achieving economic and social progress, advancing human rights, and improving the efficiency, quality and performance of the educational system. These matters are no longer in serious dispute. The task is to concentrate on ways and means, on improving data, evaluation and follow-through. (Skilbeck and Connell, 2000: 66)

3.3.2 The facts and figures for Ireland

Since 1982, a series of national surveys of entrants to higher education (Clancy 1982; 1988; 1995; 2001) has highlighted the inequalities of access to third-level education for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. In 1997 a young person whose father/mother was in the higher professional category was seven times more likely to attend higher education than one whose father was an unskilled manual worker. Although this differential has since fallen to four times, there are still large disparities between the participation rates of different socio-economic groups.

The overall rate of admission to higher education in Ireland has risen from 20 percent of school leavers in 1980 to 46 percent in 1998 (Clancy and Wall, 2000: 8). However, in the most recent study of the social background of higher education entrants from the 1998 full-time college entry (Clancy, 2001) large differences in levels of participation between socio-economic groups were found to persist. With one exception, the higher the social class the higher the participation ratio. Clancy found that:

- Fifty-eight percent of higher education entrants came from the four highest socio-economic groups, although these groups constituted only 37 percent of the relevant population.

- In contrast, the six lower socio-economic groups were seriously under-represented; only 41 percent of entrants came from these groups although they constituted 63 percent of the relevant population.
- The higher professional group was most strongly represented in higher education, taking almost twice the number of places which its proportionate size in the population would warrant. This group reached full participation in 1998.
- Agricultural workers and unskilled groups had only a third of the higher education places which their proportionate size in the population would warrant.
- Seventy percent of students in fee-paying schools went to college in contrast to 38 percent of vocational school students.
- Young people whose fathers were unemployed were significantly under-represented in higher education.

The vertical and horizontal disparities recognised by the Council of Europe are borne out by the Irish figures:

- Different universities and Institutes of Technology attract students from different socio-economic backgrounds. Higher Professionals are strongly represented in TCD and UCD. Manual groups are more inclined to attend NUI Maynooth, UCC and DCU. Students from the 'Farmers' social group opt for UL and NUI Galway (Clancy and Wall, 2000: 35). The IT sector is also class-stratified with Dublin colleges (DLIADT, DIT and ITT) having more entrants from the higher social classes than the ITs in Dundalk, Athlone, Tralee and Carlow.

3.3.3 The facts and figures for Dublin

Dublin occupies a unique place in the access leagues as its rates of access run counter to those of other capital cities. Higher access rates are normally associated with large urban areas, whereas Dublin has one of the lowest levels of admission to higher education in Ireland. It also has the lowest percentage of entrants receiving means-tested financial aid and the highest rate of social class inequality (Clancy, 2001: 177).

An analysis of access patterns in Dublin reveals that:

- Dublin had the second lowest participation rate nationally, at 38 per cent; only Donegal was lower, at 35 per cent.
- There are still large disparities in access between different postal districts of Dublin. Areas with a high concentration of lower socio-economic groups have low admission rates to Higher Education. The highest admission rates were in Dublin 18 (77 per cent) Dublin 6 (70 per cent), Dublin 4 (59 per cent), and Dublin 16 (56 per cent). In contrast, only one postal district in the North City had an admission rate in excess of 50 percent. The postal districts with lowest participation rates were Dublin 10 (7 per cent), Dublin 17 (8 per cent) and the North Inner City (9 per cent). Dublin 22 (13 per cent), Dublin 11 (14 per cent) and Dublin 20 (17 per cent) were also low.
- Although overall participation rates in Dublin have increased by 6 percent since 1992, there has been a decline in Dublin 11 (Finglas/Ballymun) from 21 percent to 14 percent and in Dublin 22 (Clondalkin/Neilstown) from 19 percent to 13 percent.
- Percentages can hide the depth of the geographic distribution of disadvantage. In the North Inner City (Dublin 1) only 17 out of a possible 205 students went to third level in 1998 and in Ballyfermot/Chapelizod 25 out of a possible 377. In contrast, the figures for Foxrock-Glencullen (Dublin 18) were 336 out of a possible 469 (Clancy, 2001: 124).
- Low levels of admission to higher education in Dublin are "characterized by a particular deficit in access to courses in the Institute of Technology sector" with admission rates for Dublin of about a third below the national average (Clancy, 2001: 125).

In the face of these figures we ask: 'how is change in such patterns to come about?' Raftery and Hout (1993) maintain that relative inequalities between classes are likely to change only when demand for third-level education from the privileged class is saturated. This stage has been reached in Ireland. Raftery and Hout's analysis suggests that as provision increases and/or as the size of the college-going age cohort decreases there will be scope for further reductions in inequality. However, as Clancy (2001: 173) points out, in countries

such as Sweden and the Netherlands it has been possible to reduce inequalities before saturation of attendance by privileged groups. Such progress may be linked to general policies towards equalisation of socio-economic conditions in the wider society or it may follow from specific policy interventions in education.

In Ireland, against the background of changing contexts and persistent inequality, specific policy interventions in education have been developed. These are outlined below.

3.3.4 General Policy Issues

National Children's Strategy 2000

The National Children's Strategy adopted in 2000, aims to create:

An Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential. (Department of Health and Children, 2000: 92)

The commitment in the Strategy to enabling children and young people realise their potential is relevant to participation in third-level education. It also has implications for increased participation of young people in decision-making and planning of initiatives which affect them. The undertakings in the strategy to thoroughly research, monitor and evaluate such initiatives are also notable in the context of widening access.

Retention to Leaving Certificate and Access

The Report of the Steering Committee on the Future of Higher Education (Department of Education and Science, 1995b) identified three key aspects of socio-economic inequality in relation to entry to higher education:

- Students from lower socio-economic groups are significantly less likely to complete second-level education
- Those who do complete tend to achieve significantly lower grades in the Leaving Certificate
- Among students with modest levels of performance in the Leaving Certificate, those from higher socio-economic groups have a higher rate of transfer to third level

The implication of this analysis is that measures to increase retention to Leaving Certificate and to raise achievement levels are pre-requisites for widening access to third level.

Figures from Clancy and Wall confirm the correlation of Leaving Certificate results and social class. More than 50 percent of students from Higher Professional and Lower Professional groups achieved honours in five subjects or more, while only 12-14 percent from the Unskilled and Semi-Skilled Manual groups achieved this level (2000: 13).

Patterns of inequality are the result of a "cumulative process of disadvantage which first manifests itself much earlier in the educational cycle...[It] is rooted in differential economic, social and cultural capital of families" (Clancy, 2001: 73).

Access to third-level education is thus only one element of this overall network of educational disadvantage, beginning at the earliest stages of childhood education. Recognising this complex interlinkage, Skilbeck and Connell (2000) formulate an 'Educational Equity Chain' as a framework of objectives for action on equity through all levels of the education system. Since the issue of equity is social, cultural and economic as well as educational, further progress also requires coordinated interventions across several sectors of public policy, such as education, welfare, housing, health, and employment.

"For tertiary education to be equitable, early childhood, primary and secondary education too must be equitable – otherwise, the pool of students is not available" (Skilbeck and Connell, 2000: 54).

The problem of lost potential among young people is perhaps most acutely seen in the levels of early school-leaving. The target of a 90 percent school retention rate in Senior Cycle by 2000, set in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (1997), was not met. Nationally the retention rate is 81-82 percent but this masks a variation of between 50 and 100 percent depending on geographic area. A total of €22.5m was allocated in 2002 to the new School

Completion Programme which replaced the Stay in School Retention Initiative (SSRI) and the Early School Leavers Initiative (ESLI).

Funding Comparisons within the Education Sector

However, as Table 1.1 below illustrates, primary and post-primary education is under-funded in comparison with the third-level sector. On a per capita basis, spending on third level is over twice that at primary level. In the light of its pivotal role in tackling disadvantage and in developing aspirations and student potential throughout the educational cycle, such relative neglect of the primary sector and imbalance of funding is counter-productive and inequitable.

Table 1.1 Government per capita spending on education 1995-1999

Level of Education	Primary	Post Primary	Third level
1995	1,809	2,825	4,762
1999	2,413 (1,093m) ¹	3,682 (1,015m)	5,079 (840m)

¹ Figures in brackets represent total allocations

Source: *National Economic and Social Forum (2002)*.

3.3.5 Policy and Funding in Ireland

1995 White Paper on Education

The 1995 White Paper on Education, *Charting our Education Future*, (Department of Education and Science, 1995a: 92-97) included a major policy statement on Access. Each third-level institution was to develop explicit policies to promote participation among students from lower-income backgrounds by increasing school-higher education links, by student supports, financial provision and the training of access personnel. The White Paper:

- Set a target for increased participation of students from lower socio-economic groups in third-level education of 500 annually over five years
- Recommended that undergraduate fees in HEIs be abolished from 1996/97
- Contained commitments to increasing the value of student grants and reviewing the criteria for their allocation

The Higher Education Authority would be responsible for ensuring that institutions:

- Develop formal links with second-level schools designated as disadvantaged and promote an awareness of the opportunities for and the benefits of third-level education
- Devise appropriate programmes to ease student transition to full-time third-level education
- Provide mentors for regular advice and support to students during their first year

The White Paper also envisaged joint training for the staff of access programmes, as well as staff from second-level schools, “to promote mutually supportive approaches” (DES, 1995a, p. 105).

National Development Plan 2000 - 2006

The Department also has responsibility for promoting access and participation. The social inclusion measures of the National Development Plan (NDP) include a Third-level Access Fund totalling €120m from 2000 to 2006, aimed at tackling under-representation among three target groups: students from disadvantaged backgrounds; mature students; and students with disabilities.

In September 2000, the Minister for Education and Science, Dr Michael Woods, announced the creation of an Action Group on Access to Third-level Education to advise on how the Third-level Access Fund should be allocated. The Action Group proposed a co-ordinated framework of measures to increase participation in higher education from the three target groups. Its central recommendation was the establishment of a National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education which would develop policy proposals and oversee

the implementation of a National Programme on Access. In addition to the €120m (£95m) in the NDP, the Group recommended additional funding of at least €32m (£25m) per annum for the new Targeted Funding for Access.

The following investment occurred as a result of the Action Group report:

- The Special Fund for Students with Disabilities increased from €277,000 in 1997 to €2.6m in 2001
- The Student Assistance/Access Fund increased from €231,000 in 1997 to €2.49m (£1.96m) in the 2000/01 academic year to €7.49m (£5.9m) in the 2001/02 academic year. This fund is devolved to third-level institutions and often tops up funds that the institutions themselves use for financial support to disadvantaged students
- An Access Officer post was provided in each Institute of Technology

Total expenditure by the Department on these access measures increased from €508,000 in 1997 to €15.3m in 2001. The provision for 2002 is €26m.

A *Millennium Partnership Fund for Disadvantage* was announced in September 2000 with a provision of €1.27 million in 2001, to enable Area Partnerships assist students to participate in higher education. The Action Group on Access set out detailed recommendations on the criteria that should apply in the disbursement of the Fund. Area Development Management Ltd., under whose aegis the Partnerships operate, administered the Fund for the 2001/02 academic year. Thirty-five Partnerships and community groups received allocations from the Fund in 2001. The total number of beneficiaries was 1,844 (this figure includes those who received direct financial and other forms of support). In the 2002/2003 round of funding, the fifty applicant groups will receive funding.

These access measures form part of the Department of Education and Science's *Strategy to Tackle Educational Disadvantage*, launched in 2001 with a new, statutory Educational Disadvantage Committee, and a larger Forum to Address Educational Disadvantage. The Educational Disadvantage Committee will advise the Minister on policies and strategies to be adopted towards identifying and correcting educational disadvantage.

Student Supported Access Initiatives

The Department of Education and Science manages a range of student support schemes which provide means-tested financial assistance to further and third-level students. There are four maintenance grant schemes and, under the free fees initiative, the Department meets the tuition fees of eligible students who are attending approved full-time undergraduate courses. Approximately 37 percent of third-level students qualify for maintenance grants.

As an initial step, and pending the findings of the Action Group, the Minister introduced special rates of maintenance grant for disadvantaged grant holders, targeted at those most in need. These top up grants came into operation in July 2002 and were set at:

- €4,000 for students residing over 15 miles from the college attended
- €1,600 for students residing less than 15 miles from the college attended

This was a significant increase on the ordinary level of maintenance grant which was set at

- €2,510 for students residing over 15 miles from the college
- €1,004 for students residing less than 15 miles from the college

The Action Group highlighted the "inadequacy of the third-level grant" as one of the barriers to participation in third-level education and recommended that it be extended to allow students repeat a single year. The criteria for receipt of these grants are being reviewed for the 2002/2003 academic year, with a view to extending eligibility. The Action Group also recommended that responsibility for the means testing and payments functions relating to the grant schemes should be transferred to the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. This would result in easier identification for enhanced levels of grant provision.

Access initiatives at second level have also received funding from the Department of Education & Science, with increased levels of funding for 2002.

3.3.6 Guidance

The National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) supports and develops guidance practice in education and informs the policy of the Department of Education and Science. In 1999-2000 the NCGE carried out an audit of guidance provision in second-level schools. Its findings highlight the concentration of guidance provision on the Senior Cycle of secondary school and the relative neglect of guidance to younger students. In schools with disadvantaged status, an average of only 20 percent of guidance time is spent with Junior Cycle students, and in 23 percent of disadvantaged schools no time at all is spent with Junior Cycle students. The role of guidance counsellors in relation to the issues of student achievement, retention and aspirations is of central importance, but the levels of provision are far below those required to bring about change. Some improvements are taking place however. The NCGE has been involved in a School Guidance Review pilot project with the aim of assisting schools to develop a school plan for improving guidance provision in the context of School Development Planning.

The National Economic and Social Forum, in its report on Early School Leavers (NESF, 2002) also recommends changes in guidance provision, specifically to Junior Cycle, and a lowering of the ex quota ratio from 500:1 to 250:1. The Institute of Guidance Counsellors is also active in advocating improved guidance.

In February 2001 a nine percent increase in Guidance Counsellors for second-level was announced by the Minister for Education and Science. Under this new initiative, fifty new Guidance Counsellor posts were allocated to schools. All second-level schools were invited to propose innovative actions to enhance guidance for students and to promote links between schools, business, voluntary and State agencies. Priority was given to schools: in areas of structural unemployment and also to those who promote the take-up of science subjects at Senior Cycle. One hundred and three schools benefited. New provision is being monitored and evaluated by the Guidance Inspectorate of the DES and may be replicated if successful.

3.3.7 Students and part-time work

The pioneering study by Morgan (2000) examined the extent and pattern of part-time work among 1,097 students of second-level schools in Dublin, especially those schools designated as disadvantaged. In general, he found that levels of part-time work were higher in such schools. Some of his findings were:

- More than three-quarters of all students were working during the school term; one-sixth for more than 20 hours per week
- In the disadvantaged schools almost one-fifth of students were working for 20 hours or more and 10.3 percent for 24 hours or more
- Whereas only 27 percent of students in the disadvantaged schools did not work at all during the school week, 47 percent in other schools did not work
- In Leaving Certificate year, 18.9 percent of students in disadvantaged schools worked more than 20 hours per week, compared to only 12 percent in other schools

Morgan recommends increased resources to Access Programmes to counteract the negative impact of excessive part-time work on these programmes. The impact of part-time work on students who progress to third-level was studied by Ryan and O'Kelly (2001). They found that an increase in student part-time work to over 15 hours per week was linked to decreased satisfaction with the university experience.

3.4 Access and the Higher Education Institutions

3.4.1 Background

The Conference of Heads of Irish Universities (CHIU, 2000) states clearly that:

The universities accept the need, given adequate resources, to see access for disadvantaged students as part of their core mission, and to mainstream access activities into their core teaching and administrative functions. (CHIU, 2000)

They identify the need for an agreed definition of a disadvantaged student that reflects chronic educational as well as financial disadvantage and which would allow more effective targeting of resources. Significantly, they also recommend the extension of access initiatives to all post-primary and primary schools.

The subject of entry criteria to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is a focus of concern and debate in relation to widening access. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment has been among those who call on the seven universities and the DIT to increase the entry points awarded to students with the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and to end what has been termed 'discrimination' towards these students. The universities and the DIT give fewer points than the Institutes of Technology for grades in the LCVP. Such a change would result in the recognition of skills outside the traditional academic subjects and contribute to enhanced status for the LCVP in schools (Oliver, 2002). It might also have an impact on retention rates to Leaving Certificate, and would attract a more diverse student body to the HEIs.

In Scotland, Murphy, Morgan-Klein, Osborne and Gallacher (2002) emphasise that without flexible entry criteria, access initiatives will be marginalised within HEI administrative structures.

Since 1996, the DES has provided funding to the universities, through the Higher Education Authority (HEA), for the Targeted Funding Initiatives aimed at developing special schemes to improve participation of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. This funding increased from £260,000 in 1996 to £785,000 in 1999.

Osborne and Leith (2000) in their evaluation of these initiatives, found that, judged solely on a numbers basis, they have not matched expectations nationally or those set by the universities themselves. They identify two main reasons for this: firstly, the extent to which the objective of increasing entrants is a long-term one; secondly, the availability of employment for young people, both part-time while in school and full-time post-school leaving.

While the universities have made good progress in developing initiatives, the authors believe that the period of innovation is over and that a national approach is needed to ensure the effective delivery of policy and, importantly, to ensure that students' interests are not subordinated to those of individual institutions (Osborne and Leith, 2000: 33). As recommended also by the Action Group on Access, Osborne and Leith maintain that a National Strategy would provide a broad policy framework, incorporate national targets with institutional targets, and devise appropriate indicators to monitor progress.

According to Skilbeck and Connell (2000) higher education needs to move outside its boundaries and link with schools, community group and employers, and participate in "equity partnerships" (p. 55). They advocate multiple routes into higher education and cite the vocational pathways available in countries such as France, Sweden and Norway (Skilbeck and Connell, 2000: 58).

3.4.2 Retention

Widening access in terms of numbers entering third-level education is only one aspect of the access issue; increasing retention and student performance are as important for a truly equitable third-level education sector. Research abroad into retention and performance identifies a wide range of interacting personal, cultural, social and institutional factors which impact on both. In particular, "it is the interaction between individual, social and institutional variables which appears to be most crucial" (Tinto, 1987). Student success is strongly influenced by attitude, pre-university experience, and accuracy of expectation (Ozga and Sukhmandan, 1998). Smith and Naylor (2001) found that prior educational preparedness and success, length of course, economic conditions, and perceived teaching quality, significantly influenced retention. The importance of suitable course choice has been highlighted by Aldridge and Rowley (2001) and Yorke et al., (1997). Tinto and Goodsell (1994) suggest that while social integration into college is crucial in the earliest stages of student life in third level, academic integration is a more important determinant of persistence later in the first year. However, the reluctance of first year students to seek help when in difficulty has been noted by Johnston (1997) and Rickinson (1998). The perceived quality of both the institution and the interaction between students and staff have also been found to influence students' levels of satisfaction and commitment to course completion (Bates, 2002; Healy et al., 1999).

The research points to the range of student needs for maximum retention, thus identifying the areas for action on retention. Concern with retention rates can result in institutions being wary of recruiting students who are regarded as high risk (Murphy, et al., 2002: ix). However, Woodrow et al., (2002) acknowledging the comparative scarcity of data on retention, conclude from their research that students on access initiatives in HEIs have retention rates of “roughly the same levels as their peers from more advantaged backgrounds” (2002: 5).

3.4.3 Barriers to change

Aspects of ‘the academic tradition’ embedded in customary practices and institutional structures have been proposed by many researchers as a continuing barrier to achieving equity objectives (Tokarczyk and Fay, 1993; Brooks, 1997; Burton, 1997; Woodrow, 1996). Academia, as perceived by critics, is characterised as traditionally elitist, male and patriarchal in its culture, values and structures (Caplan, 1994). Men, it is claimed, are encouraged by their professors, women less so (Hawkins and Schulz, 1998). The valued tradition of collegial decision-making, it has been claimed, can actually inhibit equity, causing senior administrators to hold back from enforcement (Burton, 1997).

The barriers to change within the HEIs are compounded by other factors:

Academia, too, has a class structure: its hierarchy of professors, assistant professors, and part-timers is not solely a ladder based on merit, but a track based on a number of gender, racial/ethnic, and socio-economic factors. The degradation many working-class women experience in academia replicates that of the larger classed society. (Tokarczyk and Fay, 1993: 5)

Such critiques may explain why a group of institutions in which hierarchy is embedded might have difficulties in acting to dismantle class-based inequalities in the wider society.

3.4.4 Access structures

In Scotland, Murphy, Morgan-Klein, Osborne and Gallacher (2002) develop a three-way classification of such programmes, namely: inreach, outreach and flexible provision. These are various means of responding to levels of demand for third-level education.

- Inreach refers to programmes such as summer schools and adult access programmes which focus on people coming into the institution. In-reach addresses *already existing but unmet demand* for third level by providing skills development and confidence building.
- Outreach involves the institution going into communities, addressing a *not yet existing demand*. Community-based approaches, work-based initiatives and school-HEI links are designed to show that third-level education may actually be a feasible option for those who thought it was not for them.
- Flexible provision addresses a *latent demand* whereby a person might consider going to third level if the opportunity is created and structures altered to make this a realistic option. Such access initiatives respond by re-shaping admission requirements, entry mechanisms, and delivery, for example with part-time courses, and open and distance learning.

A concern was expressed in the Scottish study that the competition involved in recruiting students may cause difficulty in distinguishing what are termed ‘access initiatives’ from marketing strategies (Murphy et al., 2002: ix).

3.5 Access at Second Level

Since the access agenda is still relatively new, there is not as yet a major body of research into initiatives at the pre-entry level. Research is currently under way in the UK into specific elements of Access Programmes at second level, such as student mentoring, and a longitudinal study of the ‘Children into University Scheme’ of the Eastern Region. ²

‘The compact’ is an interesting initiative in schools-higher education links in the UK. This is an agreement between the HEI and a student whereby the institution agrees, if the student reaches pre-agreed goals, to provide an extensive programme of support, visits and guidance to increase the student’s expectation of going to HE (Murphy et al., 2002; Slusarchuk, 1997).

However, the selection of participants for access initiatives is a recurring concern in the literature. Thomas (2001) and Murphy, et al. (2001) write of the tendency for programmes to select those already motivated. Similar issues emerged in Murphy et al., (2002). In relation to the selection mechanisms in school-HEI link programmes the authors advocate “more careful and thoughtful addressing of the needs of pupils, alongside those of the school and the University” (Murphy, et al., 2002: 68).

Thomas (2001) and McGivney (1993) classify some of the barriers to participation: those within the education system; those created by the labour market; those related to social and cultural background; those of personal attributes or disposition. Thomas (2002) emphasises the potential differences in perception of barriers and ‘underlying assumptions’ within the design of access policies in the UK. The first of these assumptions is that targeting and selection of students will be effective; the second, that all will benefit equally from participating in the same activity.

Hamovitch (1996) found in a US after-school programme that, while the goal of the programme was fuller integration of the students within schools and increased academic success, the programme in fact failed to achieve its purpose because of what he calls an “ideology of hope.” In a society which subscribes to equality of opportunity, the assumption is that if one follows a particular path (goes to school, learns the curriculum, does the examinations, etc.) one will be successful and will be rewarded with access to further education and a career. Hamovitch maintains that this operates as an ideology or a set of ideas which assumes that opportunity exists for anyone in society.

This underlying set of ideas encourages the staff to define the students as deficient, to publicly ignore barriers that their students face every day, and silence student critique of social institutions. (Hamovitch, 1996: 286)

Staff frequently accept that if one works hard one will succeed. Counselling and other interventions may assume that problems encountered by students can be overcome on an individual basis (Hamovitch, 1996: 297). A wall of silence can greet students who identify institutional or social barriers to their progress. It may be in the best interests of the students to “minimize the significance or importance of any real or perceived class barriers that exist in society” (Hamovitch, 1996: 298).

Hamovitch suggests that programmes should encourage critique and:

“encourage the recognition of collective interests and the development of more useful explanations for some students’ precarious educational, economic and social position. Venting anger with social institutions might encourage constructive action rather than self-doubt and self-blame. Collective identities might develop, leading to effective organizing and pressuring of the political system for changes that at-risk students and their parents see as being in their best interest.... This means that institutions must be pressured by struggles from within and without to legitimate the cultural capital of disenfranchised groups.” (Hamovitch, 1996: 304)

3.6 Parents and Access

The importance of parental influence on children’s education is widely accepted: “parental engagement and the educational histories of parents play a crucial role in the aspirations of school students” (Bird and Yee, 1996). In relation to access, this theme is underlined at European level by the Council of Europe: “The key indicator of under-representation is...not occupational group or income level, but lack of parental involvement in HE” (Council of Europe, 1996: 54).

Best practice in addressing social exclusion emphasises the importance of involving parents in processes and programmes (Fleming and Kenny, 1998; Fleming and Murphy, 2000; Fleming and Gallagher, 2002). Other studies (Lankshear and Lawler 1987; Brighthouse and Tomlinson 1991; Merz and Furman 1997) have also shown the value of parental involvement in increasing school effectiveness.

However, the relationship between parents and the educational attainment of their children is complex. Parkin (1979: 47-48) argued that the middle class both reproduces and maintains itself by handing on professional qualifications and credentials as well as property. These advantages interact to reinforce social exclusion, as parents use property and wealth to finance education and thus solidify their class position in terms of social capital (Conley, 2001: 68).

Referring to such inequalities, deeply embedded in the educational system, Collins (2000: 70) comments: "It is unlikely that the access officers employed by the Institutes of Technology and Universities, notwithstanding the desirability of such initiatives, herald a fundamental interrogation of the institutional and cultural constructs of higher education institutions which underpin their overriding tendency to reproduction of the social order."

On a more positive note, Murphy et al., (2002) have noted the impact of access initiatives on student self-esteem and on parents, who may become more involved in their children's education. The "multiplier and ripple" effect across communities and the enhanced status of schools are other important consequences of successful Access Programmes.

Tett (2001) also emphasises the importance of parental involvement but is aware of the complexities. Parents who lack confidence may be reluctant to help their children at home without guidance (Cuckle, 1996: 27). If parents are to be genuine partners in their children's education then they must be able to share power, responsibility and ownership in ways which show a high degree of mutuality (Bastiani, 1993). Teachers' views of parents may prevent the school from seeing them as real partners in the educational process (Tett, 2001: 194). Combined with stereotypical understandings of students as 'problems' (Tomlinson, 1993: 144), such attitudes mean that parents' ability to influence school practices is not high. Those who do not share the prevailing culture of the school are likely to be excluded from having any 'voice'.

Crozier (1998: 132) confirms a lack of partnership between schools and parents. She found that: Although teachers talked about partnership as working together with parents, it was in fact based on the teachers' concerns and definition of the situation, a commitment to bringing about parents' agreement with their view or indeed ensuring consonance. Frequently, teachers spoke of the fact that where parents were happy there were no problems; [teachers considered] parents were happy when their view matched that of the teachers. Where this was not the case, criticisms of parents, or indeed a deficit model of parents, [was] developed.

Bastiani (1989: 183) points out that parent-school partnership usually takes place on the terms and conditions laid down by the professional. This creates barriers for parents, many of whom experience such 'partnership' in terms of "inequality, social distance and powerlessness" (Bastiani 1989: 183). Where there is a real partnership, with joint decision-making between parents, teachers and schools, and where the assumption is that the school programme is open to negotiation, there is likely to be more opportunity to involve parents.

3.7 Summary

Access to higher education is a topic of much current interest and recently the role of fee-paying schools in perpetuating advantage has captured headlines and generated public debate. The social class and economic resources of a young person are accepted key indicators as to whether or not they will access higher education. It is crucial, therefore, that the supports developed in recent years to assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds are continued.

The European Union and OECD regard access as a guiding principle of educational policy in the context of 'lifelong learning', and various reports have identified twin goals of access as aiding economic growth and promoting social inclusion. By international comparison, Dublin occupies a unique place in the access league as its rates of access run counter to those of other capital cities. This is borne out within Ireland where Dublin has the second lowest participation rate in higher education of any area outside Donegal.

Almost all public policy documents emphasise the importance of access: White Papers on Education and Adult Education, the National Development Plan (NDP), the Report of the Action Group on Access to Third-level Education, National Children's Strategy, the Report of the Steering Committee on the Future of Higher Education articulate the central role of access.

It is clear that access is a reflection of patterns of inequality that are the accumulated result of a disadvantage manifesting itself very early in the educational cycle. A number of reports emphasise that for third level

education to be equitable other parts of the schooling system must also be equitable.

While various funding mechanisms are in place, including the Third-level Access Fund and the Millennium Partnership Fund for Disadvantage, widening access in terms of numbers entering third-level education is only one aspect of the access issue. Increasing retention and student performance are just as important for a truly equitable third-level education sector, as is the elimination of barriers, including institutional rigidities such as the traditional social class structure of the academy.

The importance of parental influence on children's education is widely accepted: the Council of Europe emphasises this and says it is a more important indicator than occupational level or income. The "multiplier and ripple" effect across communities and the enhanced status of schools are other important consequences of successful access programmes.

This chapter has outlined some of the elements of the broad picture of access, at global and local levels. In the Irish context the overall picture of inequality of access is particularly stark in Dublin. Policy developments and funding mechanisms provide a base from which to act on this context, but action on access will also have to tackle issues such as guidance provision and low retention rates to Leaving Certificate. In addition, the Higher Education Institutions have particular internal barriers. Studies of access interventions have identified selection of participants, parental involvement, levels of part-time work, and the problems posed by sets of assumptions and ideologies as areas in need of urgent attention.

4. Access Programmes in Dublin

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an outline of some existing Access Programmes in the Dublin Region. We look first at Area Based Partnerships, then school-based programmes, and finally, those in Higher Education Institutions.

The general picture of access provision is of a variety of programmes, many of which are interlinked. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish programme elements which ‘belong’ to a particular programme, as, for example the community and school initiatives are becoming more and more linked to the HEI programmes. Management structures at the community and school level sometimes include representatives of all three sectors. This is evidence of the very positive developments and progress in collaboration and partnership between programmes and practitioners.

Behind the encouraging figures for participation in programmes and progression to third-level lies the problem of retention rates to Leaving Certificate, as noted in Chapter One. In some cases the high percentages of the Leaving Certificate cohort progressing to college may mask the extent of early school-leaving among the original cohort starting second level.

4.2 Key role of Local Area Partnerships

4.2.1 Partnership strategies

The impetus for change and innovative work to support students to access places in colleges was strengthened by the establishment of Area-Based Partnerships. Area Development Management (ADM) programmes aim to raise individual, family and community expectations, remove barriers to participation in education and create a climate in which progression to further and third-level education becomes a realistic goal.

Partnerships have been involved in developing and supporting access programmes over many years. Many Partnerships established Education Working Groups, supported by the Education coordinator, which brought together key stakeholders within education.

This collaborative approach has been crucial in identifying key issues, planning initiatives, and securing funding.

Partnership support for access typically includes:

- Guidance and support to students when selecting a course of study, and during and after study
- Assistance with participation costs, e.g. travel expenses, books, course fees, accommodation
- Provision of local study facilities – sometimes including reference materials and IT resources
- At second level, supports include supervised study, Easter revision, summer schools tuition, assistance to toral examination, language modules, and scholarships to the Gaeltacht
- Participation in Area and Programme Committees

The Northside Partnership Higher Education Support Scheme (HESS), established in 1994, has served as a model for other Partnership Programmes, giving direct third level support and guidance at local level to third level students from the area. The HESS was specifically highlighted at the time as a model which could be emulated (DES, 10 October, 2000). The Millennium Partnership Fund of the DES, which was established in 2001, is administered by Partnerships and community groups under the aegis of ADM. It is a third level support scheme very much within the framework developed by the Northside and other Partnerships.

Other Partnerships have since developed a range of innovative programmes. For example:

The CHOICES programme of the Finglas/Cabra Partnership (FCP) sponsors students from schools in the area and provides transport to the Discovering University³ week and the RDS Youth Science and Arts Week. The Blanchardstown Partnership has supported an access programmes at primary and second level and third level

support programmes since 1998. The Clondalkin Partnership also supported an innovative programme of supports at second level, the CHEAP programme, which included bursaries, supervised study and tuition.

A series of Good Practice Guides on Access and Achievement Supports produced by ADM (2001) aims to assist the planning and implementation of initiatives to respond to educational disadvantage. The guidelines stress the need for an integrated and a flexible approach by all providers of services so that students may access suitable programmes and achieve certification. Some Partnerships have been engaged in this work for longer than others, for example the Northside Partnership programme has operated since 1994. In their 1995-1999 plans, however, all Partnerships placed Access Support on the agenda.

The Report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education (DES, 2001) recommended that specific strategies be put in place to promote access within Area Partnerships. It identified the potential for Partnerships and community groups to support linkage and co-operation, to develop capacity building in schools and the community, and to provide co-ordination to a local-area approach to maximise resources at community level (p. 107). A number of access programmes supported by partnerships have received significant funding from the DES over the past few years, which has allowed for the continuation and development of access programmes in school and the community.

4.2.2 The Northside Partnership Higher Education Support Scheme (HESS)

The Northside Partnership through the EU Global Funding Programme, initiated the Higher Education Support Scheme (HESS), which ran from 1994 to 1999. In 1999 the Department of Education and Science (DES) allocated funding for the continuation of the scheme. Table 2.1 outlines funding allocations for the three years up to the end of the academic year 2002.

Table 2.1 DES Funding for Northside Partnership Higher Education Support Scheme

Academic Year	
1999/2000	76,184
2000/2001	95,230
2001/2002	101,579

In its first year the project was staffed by a part-time co-ordinator, but co-ordination of the project is now the responsibility of the Partnership's Adult Guidance Counsellor.

Programme elements

The initiative was originally a financial intervention, but guidance and mentoring to participating students proved crucial in many cases. Accepted applicants meet the Guidance Counsellor and an individual support package is negotiated. The Counsellor maintains regular contact with the student group to offer encouragement and disseminate information, and the system can respond to changing circumstances as they arise.

HESS students are assisted in contacting other Northside students in their colleges in order to build peer networks. Where necessary, they are introduced to the college Access Officers, Student Advisers, Counsellors and other student support services. The Partnership's employment networks are used to source suitable summer work and work experience.

Supports include:

- Registration/Examination fees
- Books
- Materials for courses such as Art, Interior Design etc.
- Travel allowances
- Rental subsidies for students on courses away from home
- Creche subsidies for lone parents
- Grinds where necessary

Selection criteria

Students apply for HESS on an annual basis by application form. The criteria for selection are:

- Family home in the Partnership Area
- Place secured on a PLC or third-level course
- Family/Applicant in receipt of Social Welfare Payments; applicants aged 23 or over must themselves be in receipt of the Back to Education, VTOS or Third-Level Allowance
- In addition, applicants are expected to have a Local Authority or CDVEC Maintenance Grant.

Student numbers

Table 2.2 indicates the total number of students supported by this scheme, together with a gender breakdown for the academic years 1999–2002. The figures show an increase in numbers from 99 to 216.

One student supported by the project has now qualified as a Primary Teacher and has taken up a post in a local school; the first teacher from the area to teach there.

The number of reapplications for support (over 45 percent of total applications) indicates that retention is strong within the HESS. If the reapplications are calculated as a percentage of the previous year's applications, the figure for students reapplying is almost 60 percent of the total.

Table 2.2 Number of students on HESS 1999-2002

Academic Year	Female	Male	Total no. of students
1999/2000	50	49	99
2000/2001	76	82	158
2001/2002	117	99	216
Totals	243	230	473

Evaluation

The project was independently evaluated in 1996 (Murphy, 1996).

4.2.3 Blanchardstown Area Programme

In Blanchardstown, schools within the disadvantaged areas scheme of the Department of Education and Science have been involved in an access programme since April 1998. The origins and development of the scheme provide an insight into the interlinked aspects of the development of such schemes.

In 1997, the two second-level schools, Blakestown Community School and Riversdale Community College, submitted a proposal to the Blanchardstown Area Partnership. This proposal was formulated following visits to the BITE project and other discussions with schools in the Dublin region. The proposal involved a number of actions including bursaries/scholarships to sixth year students, supervised study, tuition for small groups, and Easter revision.

In January 1998 an Education Working Group met for the first time, under the auspices of the Area Partnership. This included all major interest groups: schools, Barnardos, Youth Service, Youthreach, CDVEC, Young Offenders Project, Youth Projects, and Community Representatives. An intensive analysis over four meetings identified early school-leaving and third level access as key priority issues for the local area in relation to educational disadvantage. An integrated strategy to address these issues was developed.

The subsequent access programme was complemented by a third-level support scheme for students already attending third level. Parallel activities took place with the two-second level schools and their four feeder primary schools. Eventually six schools in total were co-operating and running similar programmes. Actions designed to prevent early school-leaving also took place across schools.

Due to funding constraints, the earliest phase of the access programme involved only the two second-level schools referred to above. The strategy however recognised the importance of intervention as early as

primary level. An Easter Revision Course was held in April 1998, with one school as the study centre. There was concern as to whether students from the other area would 'travel,' and whether this new idea would sell to the students.

Over 95 students from the two schools participated. An initial questionnaire had identified popular subject choices for the Revision Course. There was an emphasis on delivering a more adult programme than the usual school classes, with a lecture format and no school uniform required. Academic performance improved in both schools in the subsequent Leaving Certificate examination. In one of the schools the sixth year cohort was the first group to complete a Transition Year programme. Both the Easter Revision Course and the Transition Year were identified as key contributing factors to the improved results.

Other aspects of the access programme including supervised study, mentoring and bursary/scholarships, commenced the following academic year. The scholarship was both controversial and difficult to organise. Students were beginning to have more opportunities to work part-time. The amount of scholarship on offer was increased but there was a slow take-up. This aspect of the programme was discontinued at the end of the 1998-1999 school year. It was expensive, limited and seen as somewhat elitist. It was considered that funding could be better allocated so that greater numbers of students would benefit, especially when funding was so limited.

The programme expanded to include after-school language programmes for sixth class at primary level across four primary schools. This involved a short session with snack, two afternoons per week for 10-12 weeks, with the emphasis on spoken French. This programme reached large numbers. Since German is also offered in the second-level schools it is now available in the after-school programme in two primary schools, and subject to teacher availability, will be soon offered to four.

The establishment of the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (ITB) has allowed for a greatly expanded access programme. The Robotics Summer School for primary schools, developed in the ITB, linked to the existing access programme. This weeklong course attracted large numbers from local primary schools (132 in 2002) and is now an established and popular feature of the ITB and co-funded by the Blanchardstown Area Partnership.

The Blanchardstown scheme has been notable for the numbers participating in aspects of the programme. Part-time work is, however, impacting on it, though increased funding from the DES presents an opportunity to plan new elements for the programme. Ideas emerging include the provision of a maths programme for sixth class and first year, language and computer/sports summer school for first years, workshops throughout the year on specific subjects, arts and crafts, and further links with the ITB.

4.3 School-based Programmes

4.3.1 Introduction

There is a similarity of provision across the various school-based Access Programmes in place across Dublin, but within them, considerable variation reflects the need for flexibility. The needs and abilities of the student cohort in any given year influence the implementation and nature of the programmes.

The school-based programmes typically include a combination of supervised study, Easter revision, scholarships, college links, parent awareness-raising and financial incentives. The programmes aim to improve academic performance, increase retention rates and increase participation at third level. Funding comes from a variety of sources including the DES, Area Partnerships, third-level colleges and the private sector. Each school programme is linked with at least one HEI. Thus, in addition to the school-based provision, students participate in the activities of that HEI's Access Programme.

Selection procedures vary, as do the demand and take-up of places; in some schools there are not enough places on the Access Programme to satisfy demand, in others fewer students are participating than could be provided for.

Some programmes pay a 'scholarship' to second-level students chosen to participate, but opinions, policies and practices vary in relation to this. For example, one programme has ceased to pay an allowance at second level; another pays a proportion of the allowance at regular intervals and reserves the balance as a payment on

completion of the programme. Others contend that the allowance should be raised; in one programme the amount has been increased but is paid to fewer students.

Programme management committees usually comprise school principals, the programme co-ordinator, school co-ordinators, representatives of at least one HEI and of the local Area Partnership, and also sometimes parents and community education workers.

BITE, ACE, and CHEAP are programmes based around school clusters in Ballymun, Tallaght and Clondalkin, respectively. The following is a brief outline of each.

4.3.2 Ballymun Initiative for Third-Level Education (BITE)

The Ballymun Initiative for Third-level Education was established in 1990 as an Access Programme for the students of the Ballymun Junior and Senior Comprehensive Schools.

The Management Committee comprises representatives from the community, Ballymun Partnership, the Comprehensive Schools, Dublin City University, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, business and industry. The Programme Director is responsible for the overall development and organisation of the programme.

The programme is funded by the Department of Education and Science (€50,900 in 2001), the Ballymun Drugs Task Force and private funds. Some activities have been funded from the Stay in School Retention Initiative fund.

Programme elements at Primary level

Since 1997, eight local primary schools have been linked to BITE and have participated in:

- BITE/Hodges Figgis Book Awards
- Homework/Activity clubs

Programme elements at Second level

At second level, the students of the Ballymun Junior Boys, Junior Girls and Senior Comprehensive schools take part in:

- Discovering University (at National College of Ireland) for Junior Cycle pupils
- Homework/Activity Clubs for Junior Cycle pupils
- Mentoring Programme for Junior Cycle pupils
- European Computer Driving Licence Scholarships for Junior Cycle pupils
- BITE Scholars Programme for Junior and Senior Cycle pupils
- Language Development Scholarships for Junior and Senior Cycle pupils
- RDS Youth, Science and Arts Week for Junior and Senior Cycle pupils
- Tuition for Junior and Senior Cycle pupils
- Supervised Study for Junior and Senior Cycle pupils
- College Trips for Junior and Senior Cycle pupils
- Parent and Pupil Information/Support Meetings for Junior and Senior Cycle pupils
- Award Ceremony
- RDS PHYS/CHEM Scholarship Awards for Senior Cycle pupils (to students of Maths and Physics/ Chemistry at Honours level)

The payment of a scholarship at second-level was discontinued in 2000.

Programme elements at Third level

- Scholarships throughout the course of study
- Merit Awards and ceremony
- Undergraduate Society
- Parent and Student Support Meetings
- RDS Science and Technology Scholarships

Programme elements at Further Education level

- PLC Scholarships

Selection

At second level, all students in the target class groups are informed of activities such as the homework club and are invited to apply for the programme. Selection for special awards is on the basis of consultation with teachers and Principals. Students attending third level are awarded scholarships, based on an assessment of motivation at interview and on financial circumstances. Those who receive financial support from the Ballymun Partnership are not eligible for funding under the BITE programme.

Student numbers and progression

The tables below (2.3 to 2.6) illustrate the progression of BITE students to Third-Level and PLCs, and the levels of courses pursued. Though the numbers are small this serves to indicate the vulnerability of these interventions and the high levels of support required to sustain this level of progress.

Table 2.3 BITE Students: Progression to Third-level													
Year of study	90/91	91/92	92/93	93/94	94/95	95/96	96/97	97/98	98/99	99/00	00/01	01/02	Total Students
First Years	5	9	11	15	14	20	15	6	13	14	11	13	46
Numbers Graduating	0	0	4	6	7	6	18	16	16	16	8	8	146

Table 2.4 BITE Students: Progression to PLC							
	96/97	97/98	98/99	99/00	00/01	01/02	Total Students
First years	3	7	3	17	11	10	51
Graduates	3	4	3	7	14	16	47

Of the 47 PLC graduates, 15 continued to third level.

Table 2.5 Number of BITE students in third-level institutions 2000-2001			
Year of Course	Male	Female	Total
1st	4	6	10
2nd	7	5	12
3rd	2	3	5
Post-Grad (PhD)		1	1
Repeat students	3	2	5
Deferrals		2	2
Non-completion	2	1	3

Table 2.6 Level of Courses pursued by BITE Scholarship recipients 2000-2001

Year of course	Degree	Diploma	Certificate
1st	5	4	1
2nd	6	4	2
3rd	5		

Source: *BITE Annual Report 2000-2001*

Two BITE graduates have been working locally within the formal and non-formal education sectors thus providing role models in the community.

Evaluation

External evaluations of the BITE programme have been carried out (Morgan, 1992; Boldt, 2000; Boldt, 2001). The programme also involves internal evaluations based on surveys of parents, students, pupils and teachers.

4.3.3 Accessing College Education (ACE)

Accessing College Education (ACE) was established in 1999 in three Tallaght schools: Killinarden Community School, Jobstown Community College and St Aidan's Community School.

The Management Committee comprises the Principals of the schools involved, the programme co-ordinator, the three school co-ordinators, parents, representatives of Tallaght Partnership, the Institute of Technology Tallaght and UCD. The programme plans to extend partnership with other school personnel such as Home School Community Liaison, Career Guidance, and local business representatives. The Programme Co-ordinator is a part-time appointment (a counsellor/support teacher from one of the schools) and is responsible for the overall organisation of the programme, working in liaison with a co-ordinator in each of the three schools. The school co-ordinators are teachers and a guidance counsellor.

ACE has been funded by the DES (€50,900 in 2001), the Dublin Employment Pact, the Ireland Fund and corporate donors.

The ACE programme hopes to expand into primary schools and the junior cycle at second level.

Programme elements - Second level

- Supervised study
- Weekends away to prepare for oral Irish and French in the Leaving Certificate examination
- Study skills workshop
- 5th year students attend pre-university week in University of Limerick
- €50 month paid to students
- Easter revision course at ITT attended by 6th year students
- Mentoring
- 3-day mid-term Mathematics lectures for 6th years from UCD lecturer
- Parent programme: information sessions, parents' handbook

Programme elements Third level

- Scholarships (this year ACE has received funding from the Millennium Fund and will be able to provide support to all ACE students in third level, not just those in 1st Year)
- Ongoing support to students

ACE has introduced 'Access Home Visitors' on the model of the existing School Home Visitor Service. Two parents began working in this role in September 2002 following training by Home School Community Liaison teachers.

Selection

All eligible students are invited to apply by application form. The selection procedure consists of an interview by the Programme Co-ordinator and the Access Officer of either ITT or UCD. Consultation also takes place with the Year Head and teachers to determine the student's suitability for the programme. Each successful applicant signs a contract regarding attendance and abstention from employment during school days.

Student numbers and progression

From 1999 to 2001, one hundred students took part in the ACE programme either as full members or as 'followers' (ACE 'followers' are students who follow the ACE programme but do not receive a scholarship). Table 2.7 below shows the destinations of these students after completing the Leaving Certificate. In 2002, a total of 33 ACE students sat the Leaving Certificate.

Table 2.7 Destination of ACE school-leavers 1999-2001

Number of ACE Students 1999-2001	Destination post-Leaving Certificate
59	Third-level institution
19	PLC
7	Repeated Leaving Cert
3	Non-PLC courses
3	Apprenticeships
4	Employment
Total Students	100

Table 2.8 Number of ACE students progressing to third-level and PLC courses

Year	Third level	PLC	Students progressing to third level as % of total ACE participants
1999	16	5	72 per cent
2000	27	5	65 per cent
2001	16	9	38 per cent

The figures for 2001 point to an increased uptake of PLC courses and a decline in third-level progression.

Table 2.9 Progression of ACE Leaving Certificate students 2001

Destination	Number of ACE students
IT Tallaght	12
TCD	1
DCU	1
DIT	1
UCD	1
PLC	9
Other courses	4
Repeated Leaving Certificate	6
Trinity Access Course	1 (deferred)
Apprenticeship	1 (turned down ITT)
Unknown	5
Total number of students	42

Evaluation

The programme was evaluated in 2000 by independent consultants (Unique Perspectives, 2000). Internal evaluations are carried out annually.

4.3.4 Clondalkin Higher Education Access Project (CHEAP)

The Clondalkin Higher Education Access Project started in January 1997 with initial funding from Clondalkin Partnership. Later that year it also secured funding from the DES (this amounted to €63,500 in 2001). The programme runs in three Community Colleges in the Clondalkin area.

The management committee is similar in structure to that of ACE. The programme co-ordinator is the Principal of one of the schools and is responsible for the overall organisation of the programme, in liaison with a co-ordinator in each of the three schools. The school co-ordinators are guidance counsellors and a teacher.

Programme elements

The programme is active at second level; in 2001–2002 elements included:

- Fourteen hours supervised tuition per week
- Thirty scholarships of €80 each
- Easter Revision Course
- Mentoring Programme involving current undergraduates who were past CHEAP participants
- Mid-term Revision Course
- Language tuition, trips to the Gaeltacht etc. in preparation for the oral examinations
- Study Skills Programme
- Direct entry arrangements with a number of colleges in the Dublin area.

Student numbers and progression

Baseline figures for the three schools in relation to pupil participation in third-level education are presented in Table 2.10.

**Table 2.10 Students entering third-level education prior to CHEAP
(figures represent the percentage of those who took the Leaving Certificate examination)**

Year	Total numbers going to third level	This figure as a percentage of those who took the Leaving Certificate examination
1994	9	6.2 per cent
1995	10	6.7 per cent
1996	8	10.0 per cent

Table 2.11 presents the changing trend in numbers entering third level before and since the CHEAP Programme. Since 1997, numbers have increased significantly.

Table 2.11 Total numbers entering third-level education from the CHEAP schools

Year	Total numbers going to third level	This figure as a percentage of those who took the Leaving Certificate examination
1997	23	17.7 per cent
1998	26	17.2 per cent
1999	38	28.4 per cent
2000	16	16.0 per cent
2001	34	28.6 per cent

The progression pattern for Leaving Certificate students from 1994 to 2001 is presented in Table 2.12.

Table 2.12 Further and third-level education destinations of CHEAP Leaving Certificate candidates 1994-2001

Year	3 rd Level	PLC
1994	9	27
1995	10	14
1996 ¹	8	9
1997 ²	25	30
1998	26	44
1999	38	31
2000	16	25
2001	34	30

¹ One of the participating schools had no Leaving Certificate class in 1996 because of the introduction of Transition Year in 1994.

² The project started mid-way through the 1996/97 academic year in two schools and was extended to a third in 1997/98.

4.4 Programmes in third-level institutions

4.4.1 Background

All of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) considered here allocate a number of places to direct entry provision for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The application process is separate from the CAO system and provides an alternative entry route to degree programmes. The number of such places varies across the institutions.

The introduction of the Higher Education Direct Application Scheme (HEDAS) in 2000/01 marked a new phase in the development of Direct Application mechanisms. The scheme allows students from schools linked to any of the Access Programmes in participating HEIs to apply for reserved places in these institutions by completing a Common Application Form (CAF). The participating colleges are:

Dublin City University (DCU)

Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT)

National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIM)

Trinity College Dublin (TCD)

University College Cork (UCC)

University College Dublin (UCD)

University of Limerick (UL)

This scheme has introduced a measure of streamlining into application procedures. The previous system limited students' choices and often required the submission of duplicate applications. One common application form is now submitted to the link institution, specifying course choices in any of the participating colleges. However, the entry requirements and procedures vary among HEIs in terms of interview and academic achievement levels, with colleges maintaining their individual criteria. Financial documentation in relation to family income is required to support the application. Students who accept a direct entry place must attend a full-time orientation programme (one or two weeks) in the HEI in which they accept a place.

It is envisaged that the HEDAS will also provide an opportunity for centralised data-gathering and tracking of access students.

Since 2001, in order to avoid duplication and to maximise the use of resources, schools can now be linked formally to only one of the universities.

The HEIs in the Dublin area participate in a number of joint programmes for second-level students:

- 'Discover IT' is a collaboration between the DIT and the Institutes of Technology at Blanchardstown, Tallaght and Dun Laoghaire. Fifth Year/Transition Year students spend one day in each of the participating Institutes and then complete a class project in relation to their experiences.
- 'TAKE 5' is a week-long Summer School for Transition Year students hosted jointly by UCD, NUIM, DCU, TCD and DIT.

All Access Officers are members of the Access made Accessible (AMA) Network. The university Access Officers also participate in the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities (CHIU) Access Network and the Access Officers in the IT sector have their own grouping.

4.4.2 Trinity College Dublin

The Access Programme in Trinity College began in 1993. The Centre for Educational Access and Community Development was established in 1998 to co-ordinate and extend the access initiatives. Since 1993, the Second-level Programme has established links with twelve schools.

Entry mechanisms

Since 1999, seventy places have been reserved for direct entry. Prospective students must:

Complete the HE Direct Application Scheme (HEDAS) Common Application Form and achieve 80-90 percent of that year's course points for CAO or Successfully complete the Foundation Course for Higher Education – Young Adults and gain a grade of at least 2.2 (2.1 for Law School)

Student retention and progression

Each student entering Trinity via the Trinity Access Programmes (TAP) establishes links with one of the three programme co-ordinators who monitor student progress. Pastoral support, workshops, tutorials and social outings are organised to maintain the relationship with students. Each College department has a TAP representative who assists in tracking and monitoring student progress.

Funding

- HEA Targeted Initiatives
- Student Assistance/Access Fund
- Trinity Foundation Office private fundraising
- DES funding

Programme Elements - Pre-entry (Primary)

- A week-long Maths/ Science programme for fifty-five sixth class students, their parents, Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) staff and subject teachers
- Art Competition for 5th class pupils
- Programme Elements - Pre-entry (Second level)
- Trinity Summer Programme
- 'Take-5' Summer Programme and follow-on training session with participants
- Oral Language workshops conducted by native French, German, Spanish and Irish speakers
- Study skills workshops conducted by qualified Guidance Counsellors
- Bi-monthly Honours Maths workshops for the duration of the academic year
- Drama and Debating Visit to TCD for 2nd Year students
- Educational Achievement Awards
- Shadowing Day for 5th Year students
- Exploring Options Days for 6th Year students to learn about access opportunities at TCD; the sessions included Guidance Workshops
- Establishment of weekly Parallel Programme (Circle Work) with 20 students from Westland Row; includes training of student volunteers and teaching staff
- Visits to each of the twelve TAP schools and to other designated disadvantaged schools as requested

Post-entry

- Introduction to University Programme
- Introduction to Computers session
- Review sessions at the end of each term with the direct entry students and parents
- Individual pastoral care sessions in 1st year
- Extra tuition
- Access to computers, additional books and publications in the Learning Centre
- Financial support
- Links with Departmental TAP Representatives and College Tutors

Staffing

The programme staff report to the Director of the Centre, or an individual with designated responsibility (the Access Officer). The co-ordinators are advised and informed by a Steering Committee which comprises senior administrative and academic staff within the college and student representatives.

Future plans

- A Writing Resource Centre to assist students with academic work
- A multi-media exploratory training programme
- A Primary Schools programme with 15 primary schools linked to the TAP secondary schools
- Expansion of the Diploma in Curriculum Studies: Educational Access, in collaboration with the teacher in-service staff of the Department of Education in Trinity

Research

The Centre undertakes collaborative research projects including:

- A study of the education and support needs of minority ethnic children
- Peer-mentoring research in collaboration with the Student Counselling Office

The Foundation Course for Higher Education – Young Adults

This course is designed for young adults with significant academic potential who require a year-long course to prepare them for third level. The course is open to students from designated schools affiliated to Trinity, UCD, NUI Maynooth and DCU. Twenty-five students are selected each year. The objectives of the course are to:

- Provide students with the opportunity to experience learning in an academic environment
- Build students' confidence in their academic abilities
- Equip students with the skills to benefit from and participate in a third-level course
- Assist students in finding the third-level course that best suits their abilities and interests

4.4.3 University College Dublin

In November 1997 the Access Programme of University College Dublin (UCD) was launched under the name 'New ERA Programme'.

Entry mechanisms

UCD has operated a Direct Application Scheme since 1997. Eligible students from target schools can apply for a total of 70 reserved places. A total of 158 students have entered UCD through this scheme. A further 50, who entered through the CAO, also receive all access supports. Access students have taken places in all ten faculties of the university.

Retention and progression

Analysis of progression rates of New ERA students indicates that they perform as well as (and in some cases better than) the UCD student population as a whole. On average 85 percent of New ERA students progress from Year 1 to Year 2 and the trend beyond that has been virtually 100 percent progression. Twenty-one New ERA students have graduated with degrees from UCD. Of this group, two have also successfully completed post-graduate studies in the Michael Smurfit School of Business in UCD.

Funding

- Operational Budget: HEA Targeted Initiatives Fund
- Financial Assistance Programme: Private donors, UCD Foundation, Student Assistance/Access Fund

Programme elements (Pre-entry)

Thirty second-level schools in counties Dublin, Wicklow, Wexford and Laois are offered pre-entry activities including:

- Career Guidance Workshops for students, parents and teachers
- Shadowing Day for Senior Cycle students across all faculties in UCD
- Voluntary Student Tutoring Scheme whereby undergraduate role models assist and support individual school students with homework and exam preparation
- Achievement Award Scheme for non-exam classes which aims to reward and acknowledge effort and excellence in school work
- Uni4U Summer School for pre-Junior Certificate students
- 5th Year Residential Summer School incorporating a range of intensive study modules with social and personal development
- Primary Schools Workshop

Programme elements (Post-entry)

- Orientation Programme
- Annual New ERA Grant
- Financial support/advice
- Personal support and advice

- Academic mentoring and extra tuition in challenging/new subjects
- Facilitated workshops for First Year students on a range of study-related topics
- Occasional social events
- Annual seminar for faculty-based 'Liaison People' who act as the main contacts for New ERA students and staff within each faculty

Staffing

The programme is staffed by a co-ordinator, two project officers, and two administrative staff (one for school liaison, the other for tracking and publications); all are full-time positions.

Future plans

- Design and implementation of a tracking system for all aspects of the New ERA programme
- International student exchange programme with an access initiative abroad
- Development of policy and strategy for working effectively with minority ethnic groups
- Further expansion of the Outreach Programme
- Research project on factors affecting retention and progression of New ERA students

4.4.4 NUI Maynooth

NUI Maynooth established its Access Programme with the appointment of an Access Officer in September 1998, and developed links with the Clondalkin Higher Education Access Programme (CHEAP) and with designated disadvantaged schools in Blanchardstown. The University also created a direct entry route for these students in the form of 10 ex-quota places per annum.

The number of linked access schools is now 44 and the number of reserved places will increase to 75 over the next five years, with a quota of 25 per year. With the increase in applications resulting from the HEDAS collaborative initiative, NUI Maynooth was the only University that offered over its quota of places in 2001.

Entry mechanisms

Applicants are required to matriculate and meet course entry requirements. Applicants will have attended the link school for three years prior to the Leaving Certificate. Selection is on the basis of academic criteria, an interview, school references and the financial circumstances of the family.

Student numbers, progression and retention

There are currently (June 2002) 54 access students in NUI Maynooth, 28 in 1st year and 26 continuing students. Three students graduated with an Arts Degree in September 2001. One of these progressed to the Higher Diploma in Education course in NUI Maynooth, the remaining two are in employment. Two of these graduates now act as tutors on the Access Programme. Student retention has been high to date, with only 1 student out of 30 over the three years of the Access Programme leaving college without completion.

Programme elements (Pre-entry)

- 3rd year Special Awards
- Sponsorship for students on the NUI Maynooth Science Summer Camp
- Science activities initiated in all link schools
- Campus visits
- School visits
- Science School Programme
- Mentoring
- Shadowing Day
- Special Award
- Parents visits
- Take 5

Programme elements (Post-entry)

- All access students maintain close contact with the Access Officer on both an individual and group level
- Orientation course involving one week on campus in September to help integrate new students and build relationships with the continuing students

- First Year Mentoring Programme
- Academic support: individual tuition is available when required
- Financial support
- Seminars and workshops on study skills
- The Access Office, in conjunction with the Careers Office, offers individual and group advice on future options

Staffing

- Access Officer: full-time, reporting to the Registrar
- Mature Student Support Officer: contract full-time position for one year, reporting to the Access Officer
- Administrative support: half-time

Funding

- HEA Targeted Initiatives
- Core University Funding
- Student Assistance/Access Fund

Future plans

- Appointment of a Project Worker to assist in the expansion of community links and initiatives
- Campus visits for parents and presentations/seminars on Third Level Access in partnership with community initiatives in Clondalkin
- A series of study skills workshops in Blanchardstown in collaboration with the Area Partnership
- Explore alternate entry route for early school-leavers
- Establish a tracking system for Access students in NUIM
- Establish an Easter Revision Course in partnership with Carlow IT
- Develop an Honours Maths programme with the Kildare schools

4.4.5 Dublin City University

Dublin City University (DCU) appointed its first Access Officer in 1995 and the North Dublin Access (NDA) Programme was launched the following year. The NDA programme works with 16 secondary schools in three Area Partnerships: Ballymun, Finglas/Cabra and Northside. DCU has had a long and continuing association with the BITE programme in Ballymun. Many elements of the North Dublin Access Programme such as the Direct Entry and the Student Tuition programme are expansions of successful initiatives piloted through BITE. The success of BITE students who entered DCU under the pilot Direct Entry scheme was particularly influential as a model for the North Dublin Access Programme itself.

Entry mechanisms

The Direct Entry scheme makes up to 5 percent of First Year CAO places available each year to school-leavers, amounting to approximately 80 places, with up to 10 in any one Programme. Students must meet the minimum entry requirements of the University i.e. Leaving Certificate with Grade C in two Higher Level subjects, and Grade D in Four Ordinary or Higher Level Subjects (which must include Mathematics and either English or Irish). In certain circumstances the university will consider students who achieve three Grade Cs at Higher Level if the subjects match closely the programme chosen. Students must also show a high level of motivation and be socio-economically disadvantaged.

Student numbers, retention and progression

Table 2.16 Student intake to DCU under direct entry programme

Year	Number of students
1997	19
1998	22
1999	40
2000	30
2001	55

Table 2.17 Retention and Performance of North Dublin Access students

	General student body	NDA students
Non-completion rate ¹⁴ – 17 per cent	6.6 per cent	
Performance: per cent Achieving Grade H: 1	13 per cent	7 per cent
Performance: per cent Achieving Grade H2: 1	32 per cent	35 per cent
Performance: per cent Achieving Grade H2:2	27 per cent	37 per cent
Performance: per cent Achieving Grade Pass	21 per cent	21 per cent

Table 2.18 Number of students participating in North Dublin Access Programme 2000-2001

Programme element	2000	2001
Direct entry applications	100	198
Direct Entry		
Scheme places accepted	30	55
Direct Entry Scheme applications nationwide	Scheme not in existence	13
Direct Entry Scheme applications nationwide places accepted	Scheme not in existence	4
Student Shadowing	143	140
Secondary students availing of tuition	Due to ASTI Industrial Action Tuition was not possible.	Approx.: 30 in Semester 1 Approx.: 30 in Semester 2
Achievement Awards Second level	275	224
Achievement Awards Primary	Scheme not in existence	11
Summer Camp Places	55	50
Planet Discovery	Scheme not in existence	46
Primary Chemistry Camps	Scheme not in existence	16

Table 2.18 continued

Programme element	2000	2001
Primary School Tours	Scheme not in existence	1,800
Discover DCU	24	72
'Take 5'	50	52
Easter Revision Course	103	154
Science Bus Primary Visits	Scheme not in existence	720
Group Visits to Campus	70	100 approx.
Total participants	850	3,715

Programme elements (pre-entry)

- Achievement Award Scheme for Primary Feeder Schools
- Planet Discovery for Primary Feeder Schools
- Primary Chemistry Camps
- Primary School Tours
- Science Bus Visits
- Summer Camp Places
- Achievement Award Scheme for second-level schools
- Student Shadowing
- Student Tuition
- Discover DCU
- Easter Revision
- Science and Maths Camps
- Visits to University and involvement in special events and courses (organised on an ad hoc basis).
- Parents Council

Programme Elements (Post-entry)

- Orientation Programme
- Scholarship
- Peer Mentoring
- Extra tuition if necessary
- Personal support and referral
- Social events and reunions

Staffing

- Access Officer: based in the Student Affairs Department of DCU and reporting to the Director of Student Affairs
- Two Project Officers: one with responsibility for pre-entry programme and one for post-entry programme
- Administrative support person, full-time

Funding

- HEA Targeted Initiatives
- Private Funding raised in co-operation with DCU Educational Trust
- University Core Funding
- Student Assistance/Access Fund

Future Plans

- Expansion of Access Programme to students without current academic criteria
- Expansion of Direct Entry provision

4.4.6 Institute of Technology Tallaght (ITT)

The Regional Technical College in Tallaght opened in 1992, and became the Institute of Technology Tallaght (ITT) in 1998. The Access Programme for the Institute is in its early stages.

Entry Mechanisms

Entry for the general student body is by CAO. Two places on each course are reserved for students who have followed the ACE programme in Tallaght or the CHEAP programme in Clondalkin but who do not reach the required minimum points for entry.

Programme elements (Pre-entry)

- Active participation in the ACE and CHEAP programmes; students and parents are given a tour of the Institute and talks on life at third level, applying for grants, the CAO form etc.
- Links with Home/School Liaison teachers and Career Guidance teachers in schools
- Summer School: From 1994 to 2000 a Summer School for 300 second year students from local schools ran over three weeks. Another has been planned for 2002.
- Parents of primary school 5th and 6th class visit and discussion at the Institute
- Language Awareness Day for second-level students dealing with German, Spanish and Italian
- 'Discover IT' programme

Programme elements (Post-entry)

- Free books and materials are provided to students from ACE and CHEAP schools, and to other disadvantaged students on request
- Laptop computers are provided for use during one semester
- A weekly childcare subsidy is available on request
- Students experiencing financial hardship can apply for assistance
- Extra tuition for students experiencing difficulties with particular subjects
- Student Counsellor and Career Guidance available

The ITT is collaborating with DCU and ITB in the M50 Enterprise Platform Programme and has links with the South Dublin Schools Business Partnership.

Retention and Progression

Attendance is monitored and students in difficulty are given extra supports. Student progress is tracked.

Staffing

One Access Officer, reporting to Student Services Officer

Funding

- Department of Education and Science
- Contribution from Student Services Charge
- Tallaght Dominican Community
- Local business

Future Plans

- Mentoring system
- Expansion of extra tuition
- Laptop computers for all access students
- Familiarisation days
- On-site crèche
- Expansion of pre-entry school links to additional schools ('Luas line' schools); this would then include city centre schools

4.4.7 The Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (ITB)

The Institute of Technology in Blanchardstown (ITB) opened in September 1999 and the Access Programme began in 2000/2001. The programme has four linked second-level schools in the Blanchardstown area.

Entry mechanisms

Eligibility for participation in the programme was extended on a pilot basis for the academic year 2001/2002 to include thirty-nine second-level schools in the catchment area of the Institute, thirty-seven of which are designated as disadvantaged. Students who wish to be considered for the Access Programme must apply to the CAO in the normal way and in addition must apply to the Institute for admission.

Programme elements (Pre-entry):

Discover IT & Robotics Summer School

Each year over 100 5th and 6th class pupils from the four Primary schools closest to the Institute, as well as young people from the Blanchardstown Youth service, spend up to one week in the Institute as the goal of the Summer School is to introduce pupils to information technology. The 2001 programme was expanded to allow the participants work together on building robots, creating a Web Page and devising Multi-Media Games. The Summer School culminates in a 'Robot Show' and 'Graduation' on the final day attended by parents and friends.

Robotics Programme within the school

The Robotics project was expanded in 2001 to allow ITB students to spend time in one of the participating primary schools on a weekly basis, to support a similar project with third and fourth class students.

Language Support: a three-part programme

A languages initiative which began in 2001 allows sixth class primary school pupils to attend the Institute for French language tuition. The programme was devised to link with, and support, existing programmes in the schools. Oral and aural French and German language support is provided to Leaving Certificate classes. The Institute is proposing to establish a Languages Summer School targeted at 5th year/Transition year students from the four core link schools. The objective of the programme will be to stimulate interest in Languages and Business as possible career options.

Teacher Days

The first Teachers' Seminar was held in May 2001. This programme allows teachers to spend a day in the Institute participating in modules on the use of teaching aids at ITB, national and international trends in Computing, the use of Assistive Technology and the use of the Robotics Programme as an educational tool. The aim is to give teachers access to the technology and teaching facilities available at the Institute so that they can take this knowledge back to their schools.

Websites Project

A Websites project began in 2001 and allows ITB students to provide Websites for schools and voluntary/community groups. This programme was expanded in 2002 to offer the programme to community and voluntary groups as well as to provide a support service to the original participants.

IT Module for Transition/fifth year Students

The Institute offered an advanced IT module in January 2002 to Fifth Year/Transition Year students from four local second-level schools. The programme has been designed to stimulate interest in Computing and Electronics. Students learn the basics of computer hardware, operating systems, networking, programming, the Internet, and building circuit boards, and it is hoped that this module can be run several times during the school year.

'Exploring Electronics'

A Transition Year Workshop in 'Exploring Electronics' is a collaboration between ITB, the Transition Year Curriculum Support Service and Cork IT. The purpose of the module is to make engineering and electronics available to students in an exciting and innovative way.

Soccer 4 Success

The Institute runs this programme in collaboration with the Early School Leaving Initiative in Navan and Warrenstown Horticultural College. Twelve primary school pupils at risk of leaving school early spend one evening per week in Warrenstown Horticultural College where they do assisted homework as well as a special curriculum designed to support their schoolwork, using sports-related material to stimulate interest, and improve self-esteem and team building.

Programme Elements: Post-entry

- Mentoring: 2nd and 3rd year students provide a mentoring service for first year students
- Financial support
- Academic support
- Study clinics and workshops
- Lifeskills programmes
- Regular meetings with the Access Officer

Student numbers, progression and retention

The Access Programme in ITB is only recently established. The progress of students through the programme is very closely monitored through regular meetings with the Access Officer as well as through academic collaboration.

Staffing

The Access Office comprises the Access Officer and some clerical support. The Access Officer reports to the Registrar through the Academic Administration and Student Affairs Manager.

Funding

- Department of Education and Science
- Student capitation subvention
- Blanchardstown Area Partnership
- Private funding

Future plans

- Taster Days to be developed and targeted in a progressive way at various age groups
- Development and expansion of the Schools Programme
- Establishment of Parents' Support Group in the Institute and other measures to extend the inclusion of parents as a valuable resource to the Institute
- Development of further collaborative projects with other third-level colleges

4.4.8 Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (DLIADT)

The Access Service in Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (DLIADT) is very recently established. DLIADT is developing its alternative entry routes for non-traditional applicants.

Programme elements (Pre-entry)

- Participation in summer schools (Art Portfolio Course) by students from local designated schools
- Taster days/shadowing days / peer student talks for second-level students
- Educational workshops for pupils linked to local Neighbourhood Youth Project
- Art Network involving local disadvantaged schools
- Assisted places for second-level students on Art Portfolio Preparation Course (20-week evening course)
- Four-day taster programme for transition year students
- One-day taster programme for local schools
- Visits by parents, teachers and students

Programme elements (Post-entry)

- Week-long induction programme involving all members of Student Support Services i.e. Counsellor, Careers Advisor, Nurse, Access Officer and Writing and Research Tutor
- Writing and Research skills service provides weekly seminars and ongoing specialised support for 'at risk' students

- Discretionary Fund
- Focus groups of first year students

Student Retention and Progression

The retention strategy within the Institute is an integral part of its access policy. The initiative includes:

- Staff seminars to disseminate information on student retention research
- Development of tracking system

Staffing

The Access Service is located within the Office of Student and Academic Affairs; the Access Officer reports to Head of Student and Academic Affairs.

Funding

- The Access Service is funded by the Institute
- A start-up funding from Department of Education and Science enabled the Institute to develop its

Foundation Certificate

- A research subsidy from Southside Partnership

Future Plans

Expansion of the Service to include:

- Enhancement of home/school/community links
- Promotion of parent visits
- Development of data-collection methods on non-standard applicants and their participation
- Exploration of ways to enhance access strategy in collaboration with academic staff
- Future provision of ex-quota places to facilitate disadvantaged students

4.4.9 Dublin Institute Of Technology (DIT)

In 1996, the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) appointed a Community Links Programme Co-ordinator and in 1999 an Access Officer was appointed to take responsibility for the third-level elements of the Programme. The DIT has close links with primary and second-level schools (including parents and staff), other third-level institutions, the corporate sector, Partnership Companies and community groups.

Entry Mechanisms

DIT operates a direct application scheme for school-leavers from disadvantaged backgrounds. The number of reserved places in 2001 was 30, increasing to 50 in 2002. Students must meet minimum entry qualifications for the programmes they wish to pursue. A number of target group students also gain entry each year to DIT through the CAO and, funding allowing, receive the full range of access supports.

Retention and Progression

Retention and progression are closely monitored within the Access Programme. The programme and its tracking mechanisms are still in the early stages but indications suggest that the attrition rate will be in the region of 20 per cent, which is lower than the attrition rate across the Institute generally. Core subject weakness in areas such as Mathematics and course choice are cited as key factors in attrition.

Programme elements (Pre-entry - Primary)

- Dublin Inner City Schools Computerisation (D.I.S.C). This programme involves continual development of top-class multi-media/IT capacity within participating schools.
- Homework Clubs
- Youth Band (in conjunction with DIT Conservatory of Music)

Programme elements (Pre-entry - Second Level)

- D.I.S.C - as above
- Pathways through Education – a self-esteem and motivation-building programme with first year students in two inner city schools.
- Study/Tuition Mentor Programme

- Educational Awareness Programme (visits by DIT students to schools)
- Campus Visits
- Take 5
- 'Discover IT' Programme

Programme elements (Post-entry)

In addition to the support services for all DIT students, the following range of supports are provided for target group students:

- Orientation Programme
- Student Mentor
- Financial Support
- Personal (Staff) Tutor
- 12 week Study- and Life- Skills Development Module
- Group and one-to-one support sessions with access staff
- Additional tuition, if required
- Summer tuition, if required
- Social events

Staffing

- Community Education Links Co-ordinator: Responsible for overall co-ordination of Community Links Programme. Reports to Director of Academic Affairs / President.
- Access Officer: Responsible for overall co-ordination of Access Programme (LEAP). Reports to Community Education Links Co-ordinator / Director of Academic Affairs.
- Project Officer (x 2): Responsible for day-to-day co-ordination of pre- and post-entry initiatives. Reports to Access Officer.
- LEAP Administration Staff: One full-time and one part-time, reporting to Access Officer
- DISC Co-ordinator: Responsible for day-to-day co-ordination of the DISC Project. Reports to Community Education Links Co-ordinator.
- Educational Psychologists (x 2): Responsible for delivery of the Pathways through Education Programme. Reports to Community Education Links Co-ordinator.
- Administration Staff: Pathways through Education (one full-time) reporting to C.E. Links Co-ordinator. D.I.S.C: one part-time reporting to D.I.S.C Co-ordinator.
- Ballymun Youth Band Co-ordinator: reporting to Community Education Links Co-ordinator.

Funding

- Internal
- Department of Education
- Dublin Inner City Partnership
- Corporate Sector
- National Centre for Technology in Education

Future Plans

- Expansion of Outreach activities to include Achievement Awards, Shadowing and Revision Weeks
- Development of closer links with second-level schools outside Dublin
- Equality Research on all first year CAO Entrants

4.5 Summary

Area Based Partnerships in Dublin operate in the unique urban context of areas defined by multiple social disadvantage and low levels of social capital across the community, not least in the area of educational capital or an 'education culture'. In the area of third level access programmes they have made an important contribution to opening routes to third level education for children not traditionally availing of higher education. Each partnership has developed its own unique set of initiatives and supports. Local partnerships also represent a new way of looking at the relationships between schools and higher education colleges, as this relationship is now mediated to some degree by Partnerships.

Partnership support for access typically includes: Guidance and support to students when selecting a course of study, during and after study; assistance with participation costs, e.g. travel expenses, books, course fees, accommodation; provision of local study facilities – sometimes including reference materials and IT resources; at second level, sponsorship for participation in summer programmes such as language camps, Gaeltacht courses and Discovering University, and participation in Area and Programme Committees

This section identified the key programme elements of the Partnership Programmes, especially around selection criteria and student numbers.

Schools are also proactive in this process, with support not originally but now being provided from mainstream funding sources for programmes such as BITE, ACE and CHEAP in Blanchardstown, Tallaght and Clondalkin. Though there are differences between these programmes, there is also an increasing degree of similarity across the region in what they do, offering interventions at all levels of the school system from primary, through post-primary and on to third level.

The school-based programmes typically include a combination of supervised study, Easter revision, scholarships, college links, parent awareness-raising and financial incentives. The programmes aim to improve academic performance, increase retention rates and increase participation at third level. Funding comes from a variety of sources including the Department of Education and Science, Area Partnerships, third-level colleges and the private sector. Each school programme is linked with at least one HEI. Thus, in addition to the school-based provision, students now also participate in the activities of that HEI's Access Programme.

This section identified the key elements of the programme at primary school, second level and at third and FE levels looking at student numbers and progression.

Universities and Institutes of Technology have appointed Access Officers and offer an exciting range of programmes reflecting their interest in encouraging access. We looked at entry mechanisms, programme elements at both pre-entry and post-entry and progression and retention, staffing, funding and future plans. The growth of mentoring, financial and academic supports, orientation programmes for new students are normal in these programmes.

In summarising the above, table 2.19 (on page 41) summarises the range of supports for third level access at the pre-entry stage, categorised by the primary agent of delivery.

Increasingly, the provision for school-leavers in areas of socio-economic disadvantage in terms of third level access, including programmes offered by Area Partnerships, schools, and Higher Education Institutions, is becoming area-based and collaborative, to the extent that many programme elements are cross-cutting, with input from schools, Partnerships and HEIs.

In the last three or four years there have been many success stories and the number of young people progressing to third level is impressive. Though final confirmation is still awaited, they appear to match the traditional student cohort in both examination results and retention rates.

The fact that the overall numbers on such programmes are still relatively small serves to emphasise their vulnerability. The following chapter considers the opinions and experiences of those who participate in such programmes and other key stakeholders.

Table 2.19 Range of pre-entry supports for second-level students

School/community programme delivered by programme staff including teachers	In HEIs, delivered by college personnel by college personnel and third-level students	HEI outreach to schools and community, delivered to school and community programmes	Area Partnership support to individuals, and
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervised study • Extra tuition • Easter revision • Mentoring • Parent programme • Financial incentives • Primary school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer schools • Shadowing days • Visits • Language and other special workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring • Awards • Parent programme • Primary school programme • HEI staff on committees of local programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student financial support • Guidance • Study facilities • Programme funding • Committee membership, facilitation and collaboration

5. Outcomes of Primary Research

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the main findings of the primary research with a range of participants in Access Programmes and other stakeholders. Those consulted include:

- Second-level students on Access Programmes
- Current third-level students from Access Programmes
- Graduates of third-level who were on Access Programmes
- Parents of students on Access Programmes
- Access Programme staff and other key personnel

Respondents were asked their views on aspects of the programmes and their hopes and experiences of higher education, in semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

5.2 Second-level students on Access Programmes

Students spoke very highly of these initiatives. When asked to identify the most valued element of the programmes, Easter revision, extra tuition and the visits to the HEIs were mentioned, especially at Senior Cycle, and at Junior Cycle level the after-school homework clubs were well thought of.

When the senior students were asked about changes they would like to see in the programmes, extra tuition, stricter procedures and a larger allowance were mentioned. They would also like to see the programmes made available to more students. It was suggested that the HEIs might host more opportunities for students in Senior Cycle to experience life at college, including attendance at some lectures.

Speaking of the impact of college visits, some who had visited during primary school decided to attend that college even at an early age and are now going on to do so.

Most of the students are doing part-time work, although those in sixth year stopped working after Christmas.

Some have siblings in college and a small number are the first members of their families to enter third level. Of seven spoken to in one group, only two had no siblings in college.

Students spoke of their worries of being on their own in college; Although “I’m not worried about the subjects; I’d be afraid to ask questions with no friends around.”

Some students are unaware of the support services available in the HEIs. They said they would not know where to go if they had a problem in college.

When asked about the attitudes of their peers:

“In this class year there is great support for those wishing to go on, in other years maybe there was some jealousy and slagging.”

5.3 Current third-level students from Access Programmes

Students currently in third level spoke of the second-level programme and staff:

“They care about what’s going on, it’s not just a job... It needs the right people otherwise it might turn sour. You can talk to them a lot easier than you could in secondary school and they talk to you not as if you’re students.”

“[name of person] always made it well known they weren’t only there for you...to jump into college and start studying – they were there to let you know the value of the whole, every aspect of college, whether it be social life, studying, if you’re having any sort of trouble... I’m sure if I feel things really heavy, you know examwise, that I can come up.”

“It was great to know that she was there to give you a hand, not just financially, but to give you that little bit of support.”

One student was dejected after failing some subjects and thought of not returning to college:

“I was in bits...came up to talk... that just made me feel a lot better and I ended up going back to the course and got through this year ...the lecturers were great, they helped a lot... I know now what you need to keep on top... Last year I was ‘Ah I wish I could be back in sixth year’, cos I was used to everything, but now I’m glad cos I’ve got it sorted out this year.”

A student whose fees for repeating a year were paid for by the programme is in no doubt that the support was responsible for her returning:

“That was a really big help... the repeat fees were a lot dearer... that really really helped me through, I just got back into it. That money pays for my bus fares and lunch, like, you know you’re going to have that for the whole year...for the crucial stuff.”

When asked when and why they decided to go to third level:

“If you want the good things in life, this is one way of getting them.”

“I don’t know where it came from but it was always in my mind that I’d go to college.”

“My view of it changed as I got older but when I was in Junior Cert it was always ah yeh I was definitely going to college, I think it was the idea...but when I started getting onto the senior side, it was more I actually want to go on and do something.”

“I wanted a career, not just a job.”

“There was never any pressure to go on to third level from my parents – from day one in sixth year it was if you’d like to go to college, well we’re here to support you.”

One student identified the turning point in his decision as:

“The interaction, not just letters...[they] actually came to you, face to face and let you know what was going on, and that definitely had an effect on me.”

The most valuable element of the programme was:

“The support and the enthusiasm that they had for us to go on to third level. They were so enthusiastic that they made us feel that bit more persuaded, not that we had to be persuaded, but it made us more comfortable about going to third level... They made you more confident about saying you wanted to go to college...[and] forget the stigma of [area name].”

“They weren’t always there in your face throughout the years but they still had a presence in the schools.”

“There are a lot of people who’d love to go on to college but can’t because of family, whatever, their finances; because I wouldn’t have been able, there’s six kids in my house, I wouldn’t actually ask my parents for the money.”

“Even if you didn’t get the scholarship...they said, come over, talk to me...nobody’s excluded.”

“The enthusiasm that they give out costs nothing and that’s what a lot of people might be missing, cos like in my house, there wasn’t much enthusiasm about study. It was like ‘you did well, fair play to you, you did well’, but the enthusiasm that...gave you was tremendous.”

They all spoke of the need for more information and guidance to those not in the target schools and those who have left school:

“You can see the envy in their faces, I get paid for going to college.”

“The impact on the younger students and family members.”

“The students in second and third year now are already thinking of going to college. My sister is in first year and she wants to go.”

Two students spoke of their anger and distress, in the first few days of college, when, in one case, a member of the non-academic staff commented in disparaging terms on the local area, and in the second case, a lecturer

spoke insensitively about issues of social background. Both staff members, in different colleges, were oblivious to the presence of members of the local community within the student body and their immediate audience.

5.4 Graduates of third-level who were on Access Programmes

Graduates spoke of the programmes in terms such as:

“A safety line...a familiar face...who could even help you to see things from a different view.”

“The link that was there...[was] like a family link.”

“You do develop a great relationship.”

“Everybody comes together; [it’s] so important getting to know students from other classes that you wouldn’t have known...a group that you know...when things are not so good in college.”

“The scholarships [in second level] are an incentive to keep up your standards, maybe subconsciously.”

But the programmes are currently unable to reach all who could benefit:

“There’s many bright kids who are kind of lost, lost in the sense that they don’t get to their full potential.”

These young graduates are questioning whether, in some cases, the low expectations of teachers are compounding the problem:

“We get our aspirations from the people around us... Have teachers got lower, or not high enough, expectations of the kids they’re working with?”

“They’re not getting enough homework.”

“The peer pressure can be hard to resist.”

“A kid in the homework club said ‘my mates are knocking for me and they make a laugh of me if I’m doing my homework’.”

Some of the graduates spoke of their siblings not understanding their decision to go to college, and having to justify it to them more than to their parents.

5.5 Parents of students on Access Programmes

Parents of students from second-level programmes currently at third level, of those about to start college, and of a recent graduate gave their views. Two of these parents are on the management committee of a second-level/community Access Programme and are active in efforts to involve more parents.

Parents would like to see more children availing of the programmes; they talked of the waiting lists and felt that students need to start as early as possible in order to maximise the benefits and increase their chances of going to college. They know many children in their areas with great potential who are not included. They speak of the need to involve parents in their children’s education at the earliest possible stage, ideally in the primary years, when they are “most involved with their children”, and crucially before the communication difficulties of the teenage years.

At a meeting of parents of prospective students, they needed reassurance that they could support their children in this strange and new endeavour. Their pride in their children was obvious, but also a bewilderment and lack of confidence in their own ability as parents in this new situation, not knowing what was involved. Those who have visited universities as part of the Access Parent Programme spoke of the effect of these visits, seeing the size of the institutions “like another town” and sitting in the lecture theatres thinking “my little girl will be sitting here.” The problems of transport to colleges, with some bus services no longer running, concerned them.

The most striking impression from speaking with these parents is their anxiety to do the best for their children in a situation with which they themselves are utterly unfamiliar. They frequently voiced concern about their ability to give the students the support and guidance they needed. They are unsure what exactly

the needs are, but feel they are probably beyond their own capacity to deliver. The needs they spoke of are not financial, although the assistance of the extra grant from the Access Programme was frequently mentioned.

Questionnaire data

The parents of thirteen second-level students were asked to complete a short questionnaire. Five responses were received. These included data for four fathers and five mothers; therefore nine individuals in total. Tables 3.1 and 3.2 present some of this data.

Table 3. 1 School-leaving age of parents			
Age left school	Fathers	Mothers	Total
13	2		2
14		2	2
15	1	1	2
16	1	1	2
17		1	1

Table 3. 2 Final school examinations taken by parents			
Examinations taken	Fathers	Mothers	Total
Group Certificate	1		1
Junior Certificate	1	1	2
Primary Certificate	1	1	2
None	1	3	4

In only one case neither of the parents had participated in education courses after leaving school; the father left school at 13 having taken no exams, the mother left at 17 with a Junior Certificate. All three of their children are involved in the second-level Access Programme.

The mothers had taken part in a range of community and adult education courses, including computer training, child care and personal development, whereas the fathers had participated in more work-related courses such as trades certificates, driving and catering.

When asked ‘Have your attitudes to third-level education changed in recent years?’ three responded ‘yes’, one ‘no’ and one left the question unanswered.

The written responses to the question ‘In what ways have your attitudes to third-level education changed?’ included the following comments:

“When I left school third-level education was only available, or seemed to be, to rich middle-class kids, now it is more accessible to many kids with more third-level colleges than ever before...I would like to think that one of them would be accessible to my kids.”

“I can now see the benefits available to children and young adults through education and the opportunities now open to them.”

“I feel the further you go in education the better chance you have of achieving your goals.”

Explaining the reason for a change in attitude, one mother wrote:

“Having to live a life of very few choices, and seeing these choices being available to my children.”

The parent whose attitude had not changed, explained why:
“I have always believed in all the education you can get.”

5.6 Access Programme staff and other key personnel

At second-level

Many people spoke of how changes in funding arrangements in 2000 had resulted in programmes being curtailed. The time taken in raising funds meant that some support activities took second place, especially those acknowledged to be “important social supports.” Some activities, such as homework clubs for 1st and 2nd years, were paid for by schools from their Stay in School Retention Initiative (SSRI) fund.

While programme personnel acknowledge the importance of attracting parental involvement, they all cite the difficulties they experience. In some cases, lack of funding resulted in a curtailment of the parents programme.

The extension of programmes to younger students is recognised as essential. Staff echo the graduates: “the younger 1st years are asking about college now.” 6th class in primary school is “a good point to get them... before the hormones... [and this is] also a good time for parental involvement.”

The high levels of part-time work among school students are a cause for concern; teachers talk of students falling asleep in class, homework is not done, and in general there is a negative impact on performance and achievement in school. According to programme staff, in many cases efforts to inform parents of the impact of this have been disappointing, with parents attending meetings in smaller numbers because they themselves are in employment, and a general attitude that the work will do the young people no harm.

Staff acknowledge that “many of these will go [to third level] anyway.” In selecting students, those who are shy are also encouraged to apply, to offset the danger of the confident and assertive being the only ones who make it onto the programme. In one programme, a system of school merit awards will result in four students in every class in second level getting recognition for a range of achievements, including “getting on well with their peers and teachers, and trying their best.” The awards will not be confined to the academically bright classes.

An example of the impact of lack of confidence was a student who changed from her first choice course in order to be with her friends, and opted for a lower level course than her ability indicated. This reflects the “hidden element of disadvantage and its impact.” The importance of students meeting with Access Officers was stressed, ensuring they know them before entering the college.

Some programme staff speak of a lack of networks: “we feel a bit isolated here.” They recommend inter-project events for students and staff, with the potential for joint personal development courses for students. This would also help build the confidence of students who are often reluctant to mix even with students from another local school.

One programme co-ordinator said that providing for academic needs is not the issue; “*the personal development needs are more difficult*”. Students need increased support; even “model students” in a disadvantaged school often still have issues to be addressed. While these are successful students within the set of expectations and norms of their school, in other situations they feel vulnerable. The programmes need to “*bring in another element, and it needs to be fun also*.” Links between schools, perhaps inter-schools debating, might help to address confidence issues, so that students might then be more active in college student life. The students “*need practice in developing relationships and interacting outside their own familiar territory*.” They need firstly to join with students from other schools in the area and then perhaps to link with and meet students from other programmes.

Programme staff sought more training. They need to call on a wide range of skills and those with a teaching background could benefit from additional training, especially in personal development skills. They also need validation of the skills they use.

Other concerns included insufficient time for tracking and for talking to the students, the large quantity of administrative work, and the fact that follow-up of parents for meetings is very time-consuming. Many staff

work more hours than they are paid for. *“We need to expand work with parents without burdening the Home School Community Liaison Service with ever more work.”*

A programme co-ordinator described the student scholarship as insufficient to offset the need to work. She also referred to the duties commonly faced by a non middle-class child when s/he gets home from school, such as babysitting, shopping etc. In the case of some ethnic minority children, *“they have to act like the adults in the family because they have English.”* In relation to parental support for their children, she said: *“parents need to be able see that support means freedom from these responsibilities.”* Some parents do not understand the need for several hours homework and, in some cases, have told their children to stop studying at weekends.

Staff also remarked on the positive impact on students of visiting the colleges; in one case on a student with poor attendance and disruptive behaviour, who now intends to go to third level and has settled into schoolwork.

Some respondents have highlighted the need to ensure the most effective use of resources, for example, homework study sessions can be an opportunity for providing extra help with particular subjects. Teachers employed for these sessions are encouraged to facilitate questions from the students, although at times the students may feel questioning to be unwelcome.

Respondents spoke of the need for clear decision-making mechanisms and a reflective space within the local-area approach.

“The Education Working Group [was]...this clear mechanism for discussing things...there were fluid debates..., issues raised and feedback... There was development and acknowledgement..., this reflective aspect.”

At third level

Access Officers spoke of the need to be realistic about the needs of students, an example being the provision of childcare. In ITT 14 students receive a childcare subsidy, and a purpose-built creche is supported by the Department of Justice, the Tallaght Partnership, and South Dublin County Council.

The lack of adequate funding means that in some cases the Access Service has to spend time “finding money for extra tuition.” In some cases, for example, the ITB and ITT, staff work on a voluntary basis in the summer school.

Millennium Fund applications have revealed a high number of children of lone parents, and will be *“an aid to formulating policy.”*

The sensitivity around terminology was alluded to: “parents react differently to the words ‘college’ and ‘university’.” The Access Programme needs to be “sold as a scholarship programme rather than for disadvantage.”

Selection is acknowledged to be a problem, in the sense that all are aware – even in the case of HEI visits and programmes for large numbers of students at primary level – that the numbers who can avail of further inputs will decrease as the students progress in school. This is because the resources are not available for similar numbers to participate in later stages.

5.7 Summary

In our primary research we consulted second-level students on access programmes, current third-level students, graduates of third-level who had been on access programmes, parents of students on access programmes, and access programme staff and other key personnel.

Students spoke very highly of these initiatives and told how in many cases the college that they visited, even when at primary school, was the one they subsequently attended, if the visit had gone well.

These students are the first generation of college students from their families. Some had always wanted to attend and others were prompted to do so by teachers or others they met on the access initiative. But the pull from friends who were not interested in college and from the opportunities to work and earn money were difficult to resist. Part-time work was a factor in their lives.

Parents had high hopes for their children and their pride in their children was obvious, but also a bewilderment and lack of confidence in their own ability as parents to guide their children toward college. They knew how important it was to involve parents in education, as early as possible, ideally in the primary years, before the communication difficulties of the teenage years. Remarkably, the primary constraint articulated by parents was not financial (while of course representing an essential starting point) but rather the need to know how best to support and encourage their children to continue to college. Practical access issues, especially transport services to college, were a surprisingly prominent concern.

Programme personnel also expressed clear needs. While acknowledging the importance of attracting parental involvement, they all cited the difficulties they experience in this regard. There was also some reference to problems with lack of funding. But the extension of access initiatives to younger students is recognised as a key issue, as children are talking about college at a younger age. Some staff spoke of a need to network as an antidote to isolation and recommended inter-project events for students and staff. Programme staff sought more training. The importance of visiting college and university was emphasised. The sensitivity about language was mentioned and it was recommended that 'scholarship programme' was a more acceptable term than diasadvantage programme.

This chapter has presented the views and experiences of participants in Access Programmes. The very positive impact of such programmes has been described by students in ways which highlight the strengths of this approach. The enthusiasm and support of access programme staff have been crucial for many in progressing to and remaining in third-level education. They have been helped to deal with peer pressure, academic demands, financial worries and loss of confidence. Parents, programme staff and the students themselves have also raised issues which are of crucial importance in building on the success of programmes so far and in working towards a model of best practice. These centre on:

- Expectations
- Selection of participants
- Levels of student part-time work
- Parents and their needs
- Personnel needs: networking, funding, and structures

In many cases, the responses of the research participants echo the concerns emerging in the policy and research outlined in Chapter Three. Their comments and opinions, together with issues raised in the literature and current policy on access, form the basis for the discussion and analysis in Chapter Six.

6. Findings: Towards a Model of Best Practice

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the themes and issues to emerge from the foregoing consideration of the literature, current policy, and the actual experiences of those involved in Access Programmes. Central to this discussion is the belief, borne out by the research, that access needs to be approached from both a conceptual, developmental and a practical, implementation stance. Each must inform the other in realising a model of best practice for effective action in extending access. Accordingly, this chapter first deals with some of the issues that emerge in terms of the conceptual, developmental aspects of access (see Figure 4.1), moves on to consider some issues at the level of programme implementation (see Figure 4.2), and concludes with a model of best practice based on these two levels of analysis.

The issues are grouped thematically as follows:

Conceptual, developmental:

- Access meanings and agendas
- Expectations
- Policy formulation

Programme implementation:

- Resources
- Structures
- Delivery
- Participation

Figure 4.1 The Access Framework: Developmental level

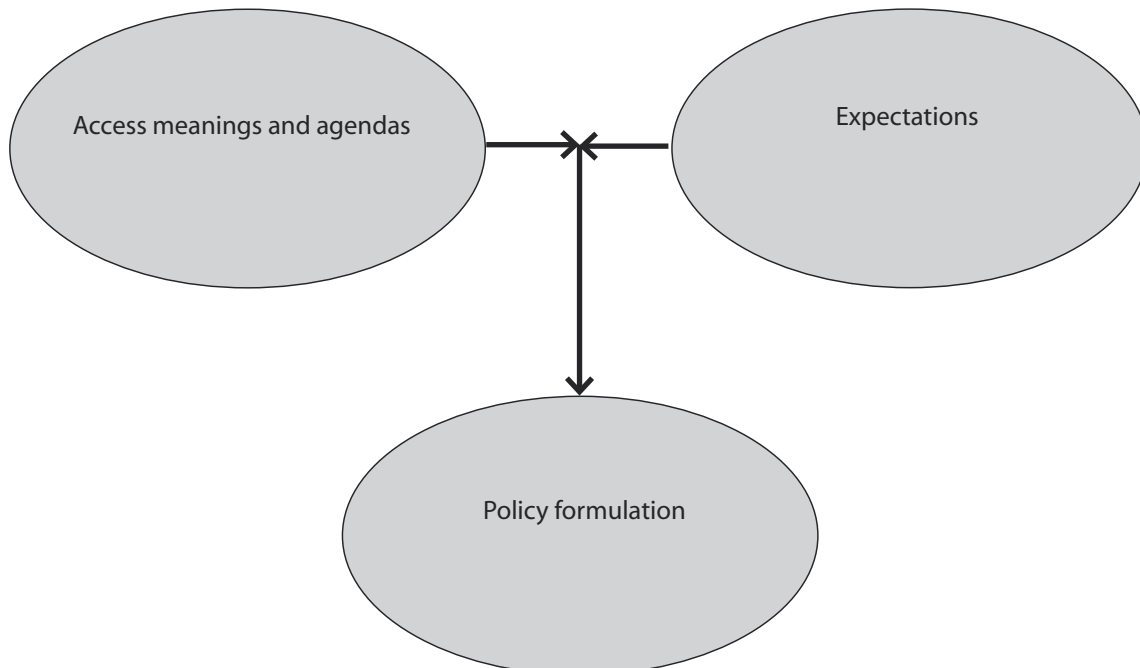
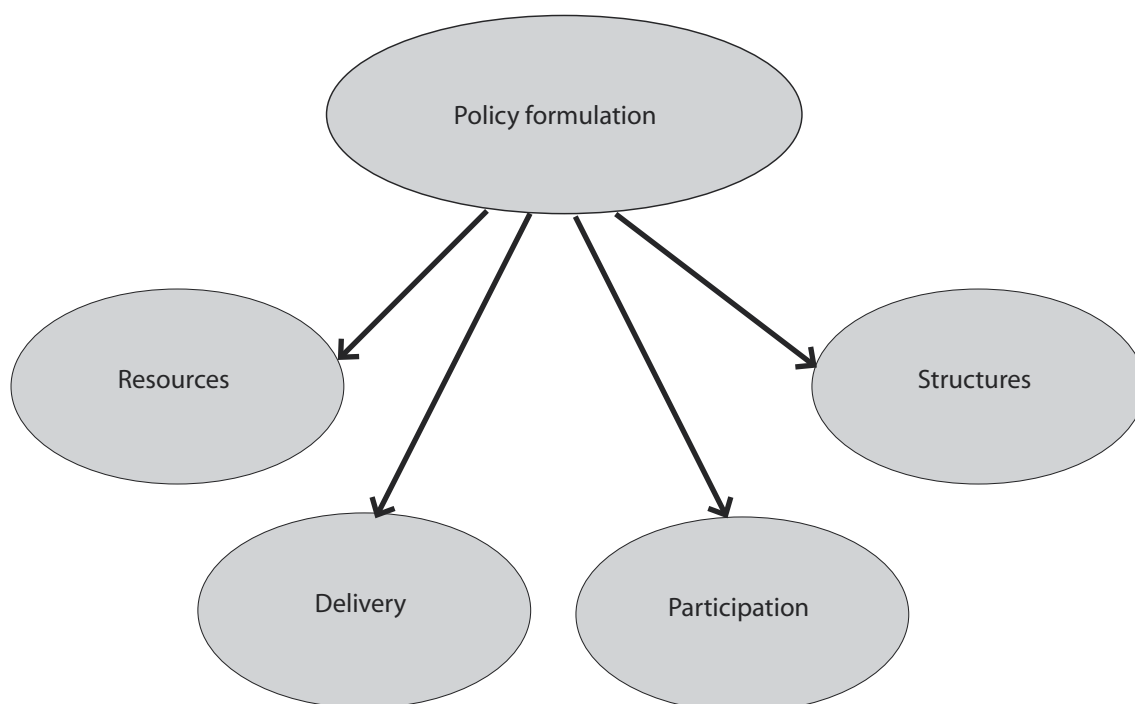


Figure 4.2 The Access Framework: Implementation level



6.2 Access meanings and agendas

Central to the meaning of access is the distinction between widening participation and increasing access noted in Chapter One. This distinction is central to processes of thinking about access. Widening participation means expanding diversity, not extending third-level education to more members of the same constituency. The latter is what is known as increasing access. Widening participation is a long-term goal and strategies must be devised accordingly. Inter-generational changes are implicit in this goal.

Related to understandings of access is the question of ownership of the access agenda. In fact, several different agendas may be at work and are fuelled by:

- Higher Education Institutions competing for students in an era of demographic and financial change
- Academics' interest in job security
- Employers' needs for skilled workers
- The state drive for a 'competitive' and trained workforce
- Deficits in subject areas such as science
- Those seeking a more inclusive and equitable Higher Education system

Some of these agendas essentially concern the economy while others are focused on social inclusion and social justice. Caution is advisable, as these potentially conflicting agendas are at play both at the level of national policy and in HEI and local-area implementation. Some are possibly incompatible, especially when they occur within the same programme.

The Higher Education Institutions provide a good example of the dynamic between understanding and agendas. The meaning of 'access' relates directly to the nature of the agenda being addressed, whether this is primarily an economic or a social justice one. The understanding of access in this context will relate directly to the type of provision being planned. The position of universities, and of the third-level sector in general, is currently quite uncertain given recent demographic changes. To some extent they are engaged

in a 'hunt' for students, and in that situation creating demand and a 'client base' is part of the agenda. For example, in some HEIs access policies focus on particular 'deficit' subject areas, especially science, business and technology. Is there a danger in this? Such policies, and business links to Access Programmes, have implications and potential for streaming students towards particular subjects and career choices. This may be discouraging and discriminatory for those with interests and aptitudes in other areas. Is it possible for the market-driven stimulus to access to sit comfortably with a social inclusion agenda?

In addition to the demographic factor, the level of understanding about access within the academic community may be less than ideal. The objective of social inclusion requires a commitment within the HEI to access in its broadest sense and throughout all levels of the institution. This whole-institution approach is essential to achieving "the embedding of institutional practice regarding the widening of participation" (Woodrow et al., 2002: 4). In practical terms this means ensuring that all members of college staff are aware of, understand and support the widening of access. Links must be created throughout the institution by a person being appointed in each department with responsibility for liaising with the access service.

Skilbeck and Connell (2000) recognise the deficits in understanding within the HEIs and recommend that they: foster a consciousness of discrimination and inequitable practice and develop understanding and competence to deal with them, through: academic fields of study, professional development opportunities for academics and university administrators, and research programmes. (p. 55)

Academics need to learn about access. Their involvement needs to expand to include outreach, innovation and teaching styles. Already there is an increased awareness in some sectors of the HEIs of the need for specific skills, with, for example, programmes aimed at enhancing teaching skills for lecturers. In contrast perhaps to the older universities, there is in the newer ITs an enthusiasm among the academic staff for attracting a diverse student body and reaching out in new and innovative ways.

Skilbeck (2001) identifies the challenge for universities to "become more closely and fully engaged with their environments, including the...communities they serve" (p. 147). However, at present the position of outreach programmes within the HEIs and the status of staff associated with them can be problematic. There is at times a reluctance to be involved in such programmes among those academics whose interests centre on the career path of publications, and more high profile and more better-rewarded activities. This needs to change and will involve a new mindset, uncomfortable for some. Outreach must really mean outreach and not simply involve those at the lowest levels of the academic hierarchy.

Although there has been some progress in increasing the flexibility of entry requirements, the HEIs still operate policies which exclude potentially able students. For example, language requirements for entry are barriers for many students for whom a limited school curriculum and/or inadequate guidance resulted in poor subject choice. In order to tackle this barrier, many Access Programmes have to allocate already scarce resources to language tuition. The differences in allocation of entry points (No entry points?) for alternative forms of the Leaving Certificate Applied by Universities and Institutes of Technology also need to be tackled.

6.3 Expectations

Expectations often act as ceilings or barriers which impede the fulfilment of individual potential. Changing them may result in an opening up of the space within which the individual, community and society at large may achieve and thrive, and allow others to do so. Expectations are many and complex; some are overt, others are at the subtle and often unexamined level of assumptions. In many cases, they form part of what is taken for granted as the culture of a group or organisation. Everyone involved in access brings expectations to the issue. Some groups are perhaps more closely identified with the 'system' and its expectations, but all are liable to carry them. As part of the effort to dismantle barriers to access, decision-makers, access practitioners, and all those involved in education need to be encouraged and empowered to greater awareness and ongoing questioning of their expectations and assumptions.

We might thus minimise the contradictory messages which mean, for example, that within the same institution some are committed to lowering barriers to access while others are reinforcing them in their daily practice, the

language they use and the expectations they have of their students.

The interaction of what we understand access to mean together with expectations, may restrict and confine. A more expansive understanding and a more boundary-free approach to expectations can only result from regular questioning of normative assumptions which currently stifle innovation and debate.

6.4 Policy formulation

The range of understandings of access and the agendas involved, combined with sets of expectations and assumptions, find expression in policies which determine the nature of specific programmes. Policy formulation at the national level impacts on local and HEI programme policy. We have outlined the major national policy developments in Chapter One. What is crucial to the further development of access is the development of the long-awaited National Office for Access. It is clear from our research that access policy must now be implemented in a coherent and co-ordinated way, as suggested by Osborne and Leith (2000), the Action Group on Access (2001) and others, and that such implementation contribute in a strategic fashion to a National Plan for Access. As our research suggests, however, attention must be given to the expectations and agendas which necessarily will influence a national plan.

Policy development requires mechanisms and forums which encourage reflection and discussion on programmes and practice. Access practitioners and policymakers also need information. Ongoing research is essential in the areas of innovation, effectiveness and best practice. Some intensively focussed work is needed to evaluate practice and understand the complex set of issues surrounding access. Much current research is of short duration, whereas monitoring change in patterns of access requires longitudinal study and tracking of students and interventions.

Such tracking is also essential if programmes are to move from the pilot phase to mainstream provision. The energy which drives pilot programmes can be dissipated over time and the task of monitoring and evaluation may seem less exciting and even dreary. It is in fact a crucial strand of the creativity that feeds into new, energising and effective practice, but it requires a commitment of time and resources. Much is being achieved already, and programmes are making changes which should be carefully monitored to assess their value for an overall policy approach.

A database of research and publications on access issues is another essential component of a long-term, coherent strategy for increasing knowledge about, and encouraging innovation in access. The expanding knowledge base of access issues and strategies must be made as public and accessible as possible.

A central policy issue to emerge in the research is the tension between the conflicting demands of standardised, consistent approaches and policies, of flexibility, and the need for equality of provision. The need for flexibility, even within a co-ordinated approach, has implications for the development of a national programme. Consistency at programme delivery level must not impede the flexibility necessary within schools, programmes and communities to meet the needs of the student cohort in any particular year.

This might be termed 'the equity issue' within Access Programmes themselves. Put simply, programmes to address inequality need to guard against the potential for some of their own policies and practices to compound the problem. Young people in different Access Programmes receive varying levels of input and support although all are identified as 'disadvantaged'. This is apparent in elements such as differential access to funding and a range of policies on financial support at second-level, on college links, and on gaps and overlaps in provision.

The universities' policy (introduced in 2001) whereby schools can be linked formally to only one college, is a source of potential misunderstanding and apparent anomalies. Students in some schools are availing of Access Programmes in a number of HEIs while those in others are restricted to participation in one programme only.

One of the over-riding aims of policy integration at national or local level must be to minimise any inequalities embedded in access provision as it now stands. Resource allocation, programme structures and delivery, levels and extent of participation need to be congruent with the aims and objectives of policy.

Moving from the conceptual, developmental level of analysis to the implementation level, the research has provided a number of insights into current and potential practice. For the purposes of this study, the impact of policy on programmes can be considered in terms of resources, structures, delivery and participation.

6.5 Resources

Access is still a relatively new area within education. It can go little further without a much greater allocation of resources. The committed efforts of those involved must be acknowledged and rewarded appropriately and programmes must be facilitated in expanding to meet the needs identified. Without consistent, multi-annual, reliable funding, programme planning, continuity and expansion will be severely curtailed.

Committed staff is central to programme success; teachers, principals, and others are already delivering on a range of demands with complex skills. Some of the work they do for Access Programmes is unpaid, for example the availability of teacher-mentors outside allocated time, and the demands made on school co-ordinators. Variations in payment and position for staff in different schools within a single area programme and between programmes is an issue that needs to be addressed.

The crucial role of the Access Programme co-ordinators and the skills they need to draw on, emerge clearly from the student accounts in Chapter Three. Training for access personnel was a recommendation of the 1995 White Paper on Education, which envisaged it as an essential component of an access strategy. In the course of the research many access personnel spoke of their desire for additional training. The development of training modules for second-level and primary teachers on access issues, and on educational disadvantage generally, would raise expectations and understanding and enhance skills.

The physical resources available to Access Programmes are important. The student and graduate accounts in Chapter Three highlight the impact of a designated, accessible and visible space where students can 'drop in' for information, chat and encouragement.

6.6 Structures

Effective structures are central to programme delivery. Access Programmes have many stakeholders, reflecting the complexity embedded in the issue. At the local area level the potential stakeholders include:

- Partnership Company
- Schools
- Students
- Parents
- Higher Education Institution(s)
- Youth groups
- Community education initiatives
- Community groups
- Business

In any new configuration of Access Programmes into a national framework, attention must be paid to power/ownership/agenda issues within local area structures such as Access Committees, and the danger of domination by one or a number of groupings among the stakeholders. The definitions, perspectives and objectives of the HEIs and large partner agencies must take their place alongside those of community initiatives and representatives, parents and students. It is essential that local-area structures such as Access Committees be constructed as partnerships, with representatives of all the local stakeholders truly collaborating in planning and implementing initiatives. This would avoid the potential for members of what was initially a community structure to feel "taken over" by the perceived agenda of a powerful group. Students should be involved as far as possible in planning programmes, perhaps via student councils.

The partnership model provides the basis for a co-ordinated approach which can achieve improvements in:

- Identification
- Targetting
- Non-duplication

- Inter-generational awareness
- Community support
- Dissemination of new ideas and best practice
- Advocacy
- Funding allocations

An area-based approach with division of responsibility for the various elements of access support is suggested in the Report of the Action Group on Access (Department of Education and Science, 2001). Local consortia of schools, the community sector and the Higher Education Institutions would be responsible for identifying target students at the pre-entry stage. It further suggested that Access Officers in the HEIs are those best placed to provide post-entry support to students. However, as our research shows, school and Area Partnership programmes have a successful input into post-entry support for students. This issue of dividing responsibility needs to be considered carefully in the light of the positive comments from current students and graduates about the availability and understanding of the second-level programme staff.

The present system potentially produces two layers of post-entry support for some students, while others have only the college support. In addition, those who have entered a HEI independent of a college or local Access Programme may not be availing of the full range of supports for which they are eligible. This links to issues of identification and also highlights some of the complexities at the heart of Access Programmes.

Similar overlaps of input may occur at Primary level, with perhaps some schools excluded and others over-resourced.

In relation to internal programme structures, the research points to the effectiveness of a full-time Programme Co-ordinator, reporting to the Board of Management and working closely with a team of school co-ordinators. In those cases where former students and access graduates hold these positions, they have been extremely successful as role models to whom students can easily relate.

At present Access Officers have their own network which functions as a forum for discussion, policy development and advocacy. The lack of a similar network for the staff of second-level programmes can result in feelings of isolation, as expressed in the primary data. Among the benefits of such a network is the potential for inter-project events for students and staff, suggested in the primary research as a way of dealing with some of the personal development needs of the students.

6.7 Delivery

In relation to programme delivery, the research alerts us to issues which include:

- Payment of scholarship at second level
- Guidance

Payment of scholarship at second level

The impact of the labour market in Ireland – with the availability of part-time work for students and the prospect of employment on graduation – currently is having a negative impact on access. Firstly, in the effect of part-time work on achievement levels at second level; secondly, in course selection for those continuing to third level. Students are opting for PLC and Certificate and Diploma courses rather than longer-duration degree courses. This is often due to the attraction of the labour market. Some students are not aiming as high as programme staff and teachers think is appropriate to their level of ability and previously-stated aspirations. The overall effect of this is to maintain the vertical inequality of access noted in Chapter One, leaving the most prestigious courses and institutions relatively untouched by students from more diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Care must be taken with the discourses used to encourage young people to go to third level. In some second-level programmes a ‘scholarship’ or allowance is paid to students in order to avoid pressure to work part-time and thus increase study time. The evidence that this is achieving its objective is scant. Perhaps the payment is insufficient to really influence part-time working, although the primary data suggest that most access students in sixth year are not working after Christmas. The differing viewpoints on this issue among participants and

programme staff are reflected in different policies. Some programmes have decided not to pay a scholarship and some have terminated the payment; they cite a diminished need for financial assistance and increasing need for social supports. In others there are plans to increase the payment. The need for monitoring is recognised as a matter of fairness and equity, but the record-keeping involved is yet another task for already busy co-ordinators. The financial incentives consume a large proportion of the funding available to programmes, which might be more strategically used. Research on the actual impact and use of the money is warranted and would shed light on this issue.

Morgan's (2000) findings are that most second level students' spending is on alcohol, cigarettes and clothes. We need to ask if it is appropriate for Access Programmes to subsidise this kind of spending and reinforce certain cultural norms. On the other hand, it may well be that payment of the financial incentive is helping students fit in and have the same spending power and lifestyle as their peers, thus minimising the potentially negative effects of peer pressure on their aspirations and their work towards college entry.

This is a difficult issue to resolve, but the research has alerted us to potential problems. Regular assessment of the actual needs of students and patterns of part-time work would help to channel resources in the most productive manner. Conditions must be set on the award of scholarships and, though time-consuming, monitoring is essential. It is important that the student body does not perceive the scholarship as an undeserved or unfair advantage.

Guidance

The role of guidance counsellors in relation to Access Programmes is a crucial one. However, the guidance role is yet another area of inconsistency between programmes. In some cases it is an integral part of the programme strategy, in others the relationship is less well developed. We concur with the recommendations of the Action Group on Access (Department of Education and Science, 2001) and others such as the CHIU (2002) and NESF (2002) regarding the importance of skilled and committed guidance counsellors. They need to be properly resourced and well trained. Current examples of networking of guidance counsellors and others in local area initiatives need to be built on. This requires systems, increased allocation of guidance hours, and a greater clarity around the role of the counsellor among students, school staff, principals and Access Programme personnel at all levels. Recommendations on increased guidance provision need to be acted on as a matter of urgency, particularly in relation to provision at the early stages of second level when subject choices are being made which impact on later third-level options. Another concern is the absence of advice and support to students when they receive offers of college places during the school holidays and important decisions have to be made.

6.8 Participation

The distinction between increasing and widening participation as a core concept of access has already been noted. In order to achieve their goals, access practitioners have to consider the ways in which they seek participation within their programmes. Foremost among the issues involved are:

- Identification
- Selection
- Parent and community involvement

Identification

The Action Group on Access (Department of Education and Science, 2001) considered the issue of identifying appropriate target groups. As noted also in the primary research, there is an awareness that some students who would benefit from Access Programmes are not participating. Examples include students experiencing disadvantage but living in a community which is not designated as such, and students from a disadvantaged community attending schools outside the local area. The latter group may gain some of the social capital needed for success in college, but they still face many barriers to access.

The Action Group recommends that identification at the community level is most effective, particularly in dealing with the latter example. It is interesting to note from the primary research that the implementation of the Millennium Fund for Disadvantage has resulted in additional students coming forward and being identified both at community and HEI level. It has also stimulated a process of networking to identify beneficiaries. This

supports the concerns about hitherto incomplete identification of beneficiaries. The difficulties also highlight the need to broaden the involvement of those with knowledge of young people in varying contexts, such as youth workers. There is obviously a need for mechanisms to reach families and students who may be in need of, or entitled to, access support but who do not have the community networks which provide information on entitlements.

Selection

Throughout the research, the issue of selection is recognised as a problem area. Questions such as ‘Who gets to benefit from these programmes? Are they reinforcing exclusion?’ are pertinent and challenging. The students say they know who will be selected, and some teachers and access staff say many of those chosen will go to third level anyway. Given the severe resource limitations of the programmes, there may well be a tendency in practice to ‘cherry pick’ the participants, though this is not the intention of those involved. Targeting and selection are essential; the challenge is to identify and implement policies which can minimise the gaps between groups of students and the risk of offering an opportunity that fails some, further entrenching them as non-participants.

The balance to be achieved is a difficult one; progress on widening participation perhaps cannot be achieved without the risk of reinforcing exclusion. But we need to ask if the current selection processes just increase access rather than widen participation. Selection of those who would access third-level anyway is not widening access, though it is making third-level more comfortable for participants who might otherwise experience difficulties. The student response is clear and eloquent on the very positive impact of the programmes. They themselves suggest that others be included also. The successful and confident are more inclined to put themselves forward for activities, so programmes must seek to involve more widely; to include the quiet and more marginalised, those who do not shine and are often excluded from special initiatives. Many programme personnel are aware of this and plans are being made to broaden the participant group. The development of student award schemes for achievement and consistent effort in areas other than the academic is a step towards this.

‘Raising aspirations’ is a term often used in the context of access. It is perhaps more appropriate to refer to ‘alternative aspirations’ to those which have become the norm. This has to be an incremental and long-term endeavour. It requires that a careful balance be struck between the goal of presenting alternative aspirations to those who are ready to avail of them and the danger of raising the barrier even higher for those not yet ready to reach that high.

Parent and community involvement

It is generally acknowledged that the involvement and support of parents is crucial to achieving long-term change in patterns of third-level access and participation.

Activities to involve parents need to move across a continuum, ranging from providing information, to organising visits to HEIs, to encouraging parent involvement in learning, to using Adult Education principles and methodologies to surface deeply-held and perhaps never articulated beliefs and feelings around learning and formal education. Providing information on going to college and related requirements is, in itself, not sufficient to engender the support and understanding which is so necessary for young people and for bringing about change at the level of cultural aspirations and expectations.

Parent participation in decision-making, policy development and planning is essential, if access initiatives are not to result in attempts to mould parents to fit the institution or the local model. In some areas, parents are on the committees of the second-level Access Programme and the Local Education Committee. However, the challenge is to reach more than “the usual suspects” and involve those in a community who do not regularly attend meetings.

There is considerable evidence that education is highly regarded in the families of the young people spoken to for this research. The data from the questionnaire to parents, though limited, point to the value they place on education. Of interest is the involvement of many of these parents in education courses, largely within their own community; they themselves are availing of new educational opportunities. What Access Programmes

in a local area can and should do is increase the profile of education as an attainable resource and establish it as a social and educational norm.

The theme of accessing third-level education needs to be present in all forums where parents meet and wherever existing cultural patterns are being examined and questioned. In community education initiatives such as women's and men's groups, support groups, skills and leisure education etc., the message of access and alternative aspirations can be overt but sensitive. Those who facilitate such initiatives need to be linked in to the Access Programmes in their area and the local access practitioners. They can embed an awareness of third-level education opportunities wherever possible within the programmes pursued by adults, to consciously address issues of educational access at all levels and to surface attitudes and aspirations regarding education for their families.

This is a potential strength of the local approach and the research indicates that new ideas are being tried out. For example, one HEI plans to compile a list of adult education providers in the broader area as a step towards collaborating with them in the access endeavour.

The model of home visiting currently being prepared by the ACE programme in Tallaght started operation in September 2002. Other programmes such as the Parent Council of the DCU and the Parents Support Group in the ITB are innovative approaches to communicating with parents. However, caution is needed with regard to expectations and assumptions, as well as to the discourses from which they emerge. As highlighted in the work of Tett (2001) and others (Bastiani 1989; 1993) we must be alert to the potential for seeing parents as the problem, and expecting them to fit the school/HEI/Access Programme agenda.

Creating a supportive local environment for progression to third-level means dealing with attitudes to those in college. Local role models may have an impact, but retaining third-level students in the community beyond graduation may be difficult. While the provision of mixed housing is sometimes recommended as a means of combating low expectations and lack of role models, in some areas visited for the research the building of new houses has resulted in children going to schools outside the area. This has a negative impact on the local school and its students. However, as Murphy et al (2002) noted, successful Access Programmes can help raise the profile of the local schools, thereby encouraging more students with aspirations towards third level to stay in the area for their schooling.

6.9 Towards a model of best practice for access

Figure 4.3 represents an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and limitations in current access provision to illustrate the context in which action on access takes place.

Figure 4.3 SWOT Analysis of Access Provision			
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats/Limitations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment • Successes • Role models • Experience • Networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anomalies and inconsistencies in provision • Insufficient: Co-ordination, Resources, Training, Parent and community involvement • Intervention too late in student cycle • Heavy demands on school personnel • Shortage of reliable long-term data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing HEI environment • Policy statements in place • Networks • Programmes now established • More research on access • Demographic change • Increased public and media attention to access issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic downturn • Labour market: Part-time work Ready availability • Non-degree courses • Consumer culture • Teen and youth social scene • Negative expectations • Assumptions

Achieving best practice is only possible in the context of an assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and limitations. The research indicates that it is time to transform the weaknesses and harness the opportunities; perhaps also to engage with some of the limitations.

Best practice in access provision will be effective in dismantling some of the barriers to participation in third level. As noted in Chapter Three, the barriers occur on many levels: at the individual, family, community levels and in the wider social and system context. For any particular student, the interaction between them may at times be difficult to disentangle.

A force-field analysis of situations in which change is desired typically identifies motivating and impeding forces in order to point the way towards change. Action on this analysis involves three strands: decreasing the impact of the impeding factors, increasing that of the motivators, and creating new motivators. Figure 4.4 (below) presents such an analysis of the potential experience of a student in relation to access.

Rubenson (1977) presents a theory of motivation in adult learning which might usefully be applied to access issues. Those motivated to engage in study:

- Believe they are capable of learning
- Value the outcomes of learning
- See these outcomes as relevant to their personal needs

If motivation to learn results from expectations of success in learning and its positive consequences, then widening participation means, in part, increasing the numbers of young people who see themselves as successful learners, who expect to succeed. It also means facilitating a cultural and community environment which encourages positive expectations, and values, of education. The student's experience and environment must provide expectations of success and a positive self-image as a learner. The onus is on all those involved in access to create such conditions; to replace an 'ideology of hope' with one of expectation.

Some access initiatives operate at a tangent to the prime objective but are no less important. e.g. music in primary schools and participation in sport, art and drama help to build confidence, broaden 'cultural' horizons and increase social capital.

It is in this context that we note the importance of programmes at the primary school stage, visits, stimulating interest in subjects, and – also important – familiarising primary school teachers with the reality of access for students in their area. In the primary research we noted the number of students who had continued their involvement in Access Programmes from primary level onwards. The impact of the visits to HEIs is part of the process of students seeing themselves as successful learners attending college; they can imagine themselves in the physical space.

Figure 4.4 Barriers and motivators to accessing third-level education

Actions to increase impact of existing motivators and create new ones	Motivators	Barriers	Actions to decrease impact of barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social events and student support • Awards • Visits • Stimulating teaching • Extra tuition • Parental involvement • Community involvement • Financial incentive • Career guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social life • Recognition • Achievement • Interest in subject area • More choices • Family support • Relationships • Money • Jobs and opportunities • Status 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel difficulties • Fear of isolation/no friends • Lack of confidence • Low self-image as learner • Images of the academic world • Inadequate finances • Family and community attitudes • Lack of role models • Lack of study space • Subject choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved transport • Social supports and personal development • Links to combat isolation • Experiences of success • Visits • welcoming environment in HEIs • Grants and scholarships • Parent days and information booklets

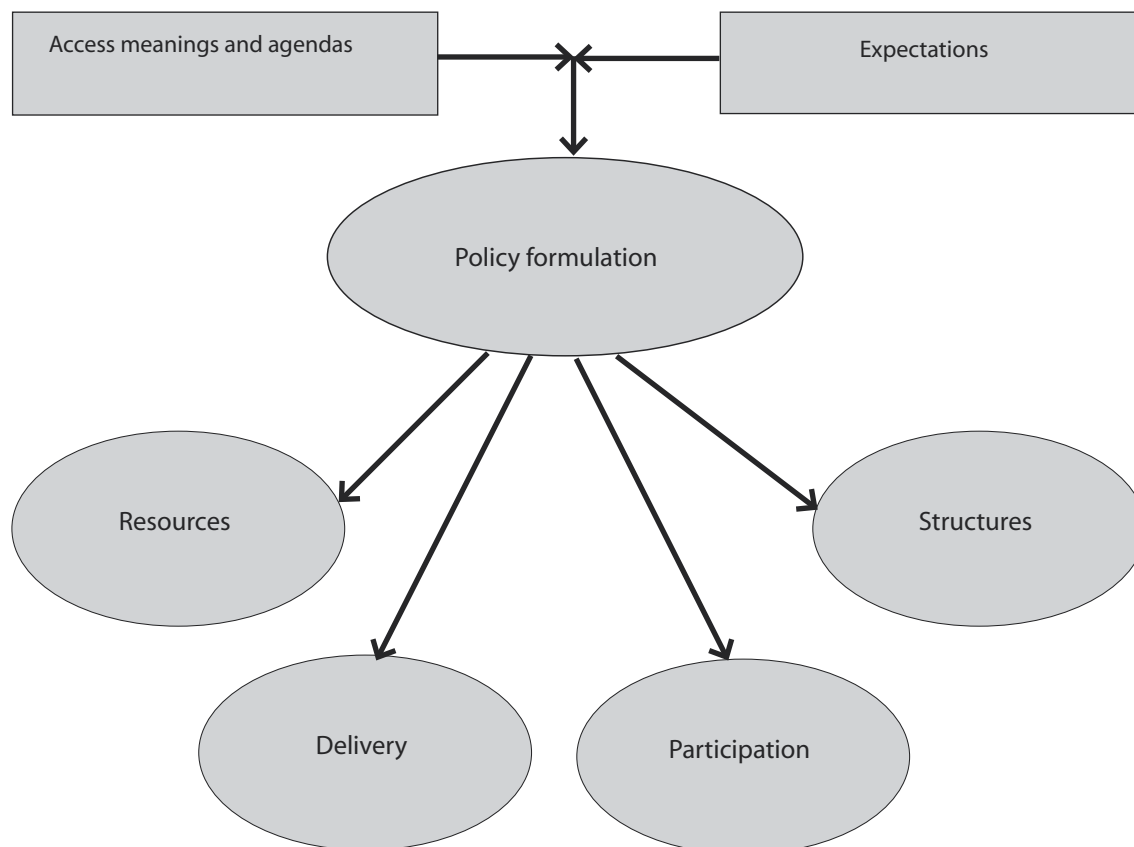
Figure 4.4 continued

Actions to increase impact of existing motivators and create new ones	Motivators	Barriers	Actions to decrease impact of barriers
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unstimulating teaching • Curriculum deficits in school • Language requirements • Academic pressures • Low expectations held by others • Academic attitudes in HEIs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community awareness of third-level • Guidance • Action on teaching skills • Tuition • Study supports • Awareness-raising • resenting alternatives • Access awareness and outreach for HEI staff

Those involved in access need to be thorough and clear-sighted in identifying barriers, even within their own practice. Access policy requires a commitment to increasing motivators as well as removing barriers, and good practice involves addressing all the barriers in a consistent, co-ordinated fashion. There is a need to think and act laterally on access issues and to see the picture from as broad a perspective as possible.

This chapter has presented a framework with which to understand the issues involved in widening access. The integration of the developmental and implementation levels of analysis provide the model presented in Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5 Access Framework: An Integrated Model



As discussed in this chapter, the elements of the model are interlinked. The various understandings of what exactly is meant by 'access' to Higher Education, together with the expectations brought to all aspects of the access issue, impact on policy formulation, with results in the form of resource allocation, programme structures, delivery, and participation.

In addition to serving as a model of analysis, the framework maps out the challenges and forms for a model of best practice, presented as Figure 4.6 below. Action on the elements of the framework outlined in the research will result in the extension of the very positive impact of the Access Programmes to date.

6.10 Summary

This chapter has sought to establish the basis for identifying a model of best practice and identified two critical components in this: developmental and implementation.

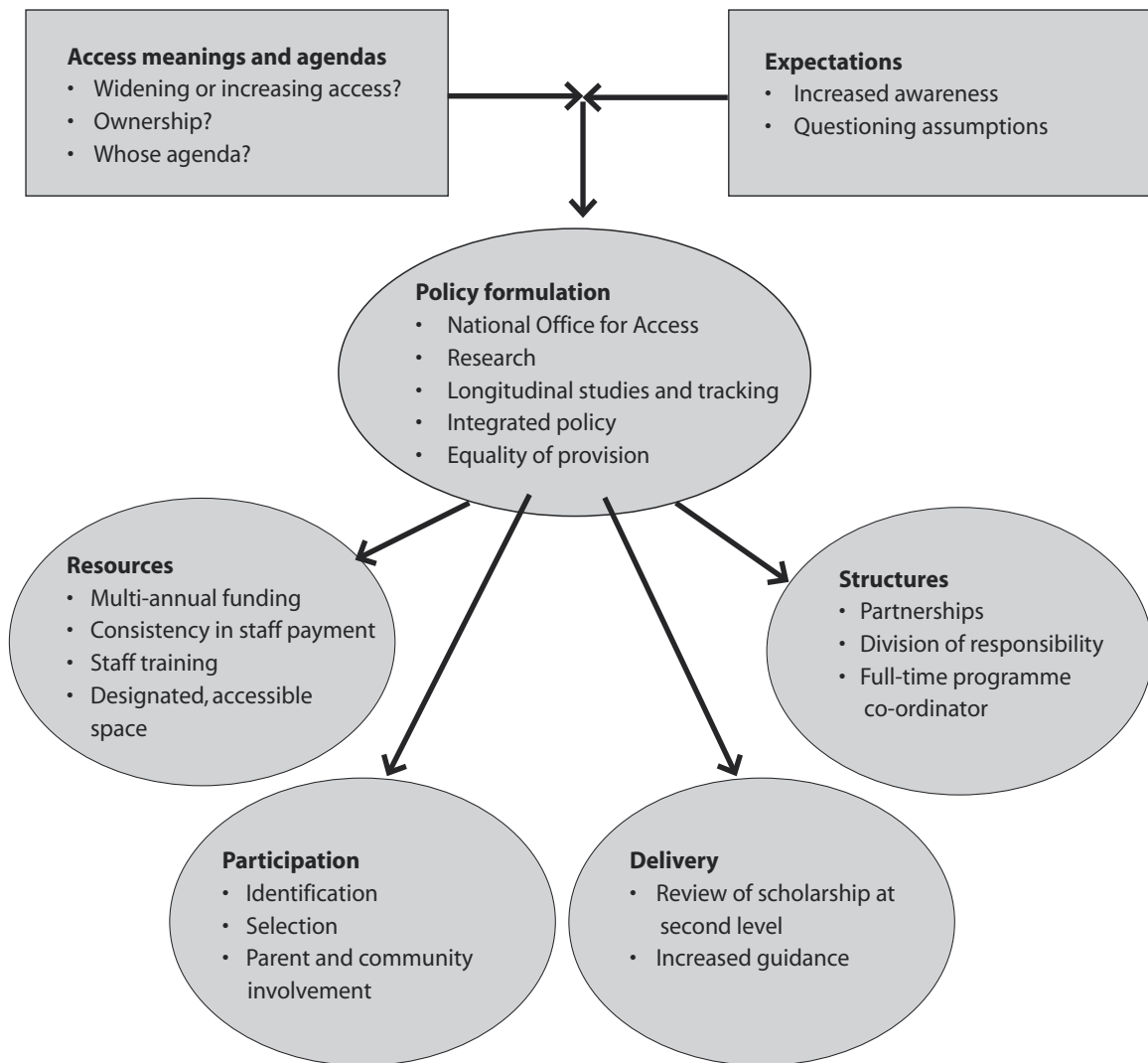
In the developmental stages of a model of best practice we identified three elements: the meanings and agendas of access; the expectations which together contribute to policy formulation. Access is not a simple concept and refers to a range of sometimes competing meanings. The institutions sometimes need an access agenda to maintain student numbers and funding. Academics within the institution may have other priorities and may not all be committed to seeing that a university has a role to play in addressing social exclusion.

We also looked at a range of expectations which can form barriers to and impede the progress of students. These may reside in the individual, in families in communities or in schools and colleges.

These meanings and agendas and expectations surface in policies which then determine how this policy is implemented on the ground. This chapter maps this process and clearly states how important it is to understand these moments as they influence implementation.

The impact of policy on programmes and their implementation were discussed here under the headings resources, structures, delivery and participation. The outcomes of this discourse are reflected in the practical recommendations in Chapter Seven.

Figure 4.6 A Model of Best Practice for Access



7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter presents recommendations for action on several of the issues raised in our research. Best practice, as outlined in our model in the previous chapter, requires that the issues raised in this research be addressed in such a way as to build on the strengths of existing provision and tackle the challenges of widening access to third-level education.

7.1 At the level of government policy we recommend that the Department of Education and Science:

- Provide reliable, consistent, multi-year and greatly increased funding for measures to widen access to third-level education, even at a time when state resources appear to be diminishing.
- Adequately resource a National Office for Access with responsibility for the integration of access initiatives and policy development.
- Further increase the allocation of career guidance counsellors so that students have access to skilled and committed guidance throughout the school cycle.
- Provide adequate grant support to third-level students.
- Support the continuing development of courses on access issues and related skills as part of initial and in-service training for second-level and primary-level teachers, guidance counsellors and access practitioners.

7.2 Among the tasks of the National Office for Access we recommend that it:

- Monitor and implement practices to ensure consistent application of policy so as to minimise inequalities of provision for students in Access Programmes.
- Create and resource mechanisms and forums for innovation, reflection and policy development through establishing and supporting networks such as AMA, maintaining a database of information (including relevant websites) and ensuring that practitioners establish links with the European Access Network, Action on Access in the UK and all related journals, publications and seminars.
- Collate up-to-date and reliable data on access so as to inform effective policy-making.
- Initiate a longitudinal study of school students to explore long-term change in patterns of access.
- Facilitate physical access to third-level education by encouraging public and private transport providers to serve the routes to third-level colleges.

7.3 We recommend that Higher Education Institutions:

- Access-proof and inclusion-proof admissions policies and practices.
- Address anomalies in points allocation to students with the Leaving Certificate Applied qualification.
- Change the language requirement for entry to NUI colleges.
- Adopt a whole-institution approach to access by designating a staff member in each department with responsibility for liaising with the Access Service and ensure that access provision extends across all subject areas.
- Establish inter-departmental groupings to explore innovative methods of outreach, for example, participation in community learning festivals.

7.4 We recommend that Access Programmes in local areas:

- Maximise partnership and joint ownership within local-area structures such as Access Committees, involving representatives of all local stakeholders, including students, youth workers, community educators etc., and supported by a Programme Co-ordinator.
- Develop and implement monitoring and evaluation systems which can track the impact of the programme in terms of academic and other achievements, personal development, retention in school, progression to third-level, impact on family and community, and impact on school systems.

- Seek to identify and involve different sectors of the target groups, i.e. not only pupils who are bright and determined, but also those who are quieter and sometimes marginalised, those who may have learning or behavioural difficulties, and those who are constantly excluded from programmes.
- Set conditions prior to receipt of a financial incentive and monitor accordingly.
- Ensure consistency across access provision programmes with the active promotion of buddying/mentoring systems and develop forms of support other than monetary payments.

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Glossary

ACE Accessing College Education	HSCL Home School Community Liaison
AMA Access Made Accessible	IT Institute of Technology
BITE Ballymun into Third-Level Education	ITB Institute of Technology Blanchardstown
CHEAP Clondalkin Higher Education Access Project	ITT Institute of Technology Tallaght
CHIU Conference of Heads of Irish Universities	NCCA National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
DES Department of Education and Science	NCGE National Council for Guidance in Education
DIT Dublin Institute of Technology	NCI National College of Ireland
DLIADT Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology	NESF National Economic and Social Forum
DSCFA Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs	NUIM National University of Ireland, Maynooth
ESLI Early School Leavers Initiative	OECD Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
HE Higher Education	PLC Post Leaving Certificate
HEA Higher Education Authority	SSRI Stay in School Retention Initiative
HEDAS Higher Education Direct Application Scheme	TCD Trinity College Dublin
HEI Higher Education Institution	UCD University College Dublin

Appendix

List of those consulted for the research

The students and parents of the ACE, BITE and CHEAP programmes consulted were the following:

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