



**HEA**

Higher Education Authority  
An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas

# **Report of the High Level Group on University Equality Policies**

---

April, 2004



**HEA**

Higher Education Authority  
An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas

The Higher Education Authority  
An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas  
Marine House, Clanwilliam Court, Dublin 2

# **Report of the High Level Group on University Equality Policies**

---

Author: Equality Review Team To the Higher Education Authority

ISBN 0-904556-89-1


Dublin

Published by the Higher Education Authority

To be purchased from the  
Government Publications Sales Office,  
Molesworth Street, Dublin 2.

or through any Bookseller

Price €10  
April 2004





# contents

Foreword	5
HEA Members	9
HEA Executive	10-11
Introduction	13
Terms of Reference	14
Sources	17
Legislative Background to Equality in Irish Higher Education	17
Requirement on Universities	19
Visits to Universities	19
Statement of Policies	19
Reporting by and within universities	20
Data	20
Equality in Universities	22
1. Access to Education	23
Funding	27
HEA Targeted Initiatives	27
Access for Students from Socio-economically Disadvantaged Background	31
Initiatives	33
Assessment of Initiatives	34
Coordination	36
Mature Students	37
Outreach	40
Access for Students with Disabilities	40
Access for Students from Ethnic Minorities and Travellers	43
Ethnic Minorities	43
Travellers	43
International Students	43

	Refugees and Asylum seekers . . . . .	44
	Sexual orientation . . . . .	44
	<b>National Strategy</b> . . . . .	<b>44</b>
	National Office . . . . .	46
	Ombudsmen . . . . .	47
	Anonymous Marking . . . . .	47
<b>2.</b>	<b>Equality of Opportunity in Employment within Universities</b> . . . . .	<b>49</b>
	Promotion Issues . . . . .	51
	Interview Boards . . . . .	52
	Role of an Equality Officer . . . . .	53
	Queen's Gender Initiative . . . . .	54
	Employing People with Disabilities . . . . .	54
	Employing Ethnic Minorities . . . . .	54
<b>3.</b>	<b>Conclusions and Recommendations</b> . . . . .	<b>55</b>
	Recommendations . . . . .	57
	<b>Appendix 1</b>	
	Bibliography . . . . .	61
	<b>Appendix 2</b>	
	Details of Members of the Review Group . . . . .	63

# foreword



## Foreword

The HEA's commitment to enhancing equality of access to higher education dates to its establishment, and the identification of equality of access to higher education as a core objective for the Authority in the Higher Education Authority Act, 1971. The HEA has through its funding and policy advice roles, provided support and assistance to the Minister for Education and Science and the higher education institutions to support broadening of access to higher education.

In 1997, the Universities Act provided for significant new functions for both the Universities and the HEA in the area of equality. Each university is required to prepare and implement a policy in respect of access to the university by people from sections of society significantly under-represented in the university and in respect of equality, including gender equality in all activities of the university. The HEA was also given a role to review and report on those policies and their implementation. Each university has now prepared and implements such policies, and the HEA has carried out its first review.

The review has taken place at a time of very significant economic, social and cultural changes in Ireland. Over a very short period Ireland has been transformed from a relatively homogeneous population to one that is highly diverse. In a reversal of historical experiences, Irish emigrants are returning to Ireland and there has been a substantial rise in immigration from European, Asian and African countries. This growing diversity is a positive and energising force and presents new challenges for universities in respect of their equality policies. At the same time, there are ongoing challenges to continue to provide for increasing representation of under-represented groups in higher education, such as those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and students with special needs.

In this context, the HEA has had a number of objectives in this review.

- to analyse and comment on the statements of policy
- to monitor progress
- to advise and assist the institutions on ways of strengthening their equality of opportunity policies and procedures
- to indicate how the HEA can be of assistance in the future
- to identify issues in the wider policy domain outside of higher education, and indeed outside of education, which are relevant to enhancing equality in higher education.



The review was carried out for the HEA by a distinguished external review team, chaired by Mr. Maurice O'Connell and including both Irish and international representation. The report reflects a high level overview of equality policies across the university sector and, as such, every finding may not be relevant to each individual institution.

The team made a number of key findings.

- Universities have sought to respond in a positive manner to equality requirements both in relation to students and employees. The policy statements, without exception, present an acceptable commitment to good standards and the Team was of the view that they meet best practice norms and could usefully be a guide in other countries.
- The National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education has a key role to play in developing and supporting a national strategy on access to third level institutions.
- There is a need for action by the universities to enhance equality of opportunity in employment.
- There is a critical need for the improvement of statistical information on access to higher education.

The HEA accepts the findings of the review team. It is particularly encouraging to note the team's findings that the policies set out by the universities are not only appropriate, but meet best practice norms and might usefully serve as a guide for other countries.

The team also makes clear that there is still further work to be done. The team makes a range of recommendations in areas such as the collection of data, the measurement of performance of individual programmes, the training of institutional staff, and the promotion of greater equality in employment, both for academic and administrative staff. The connection between second and third level education must be enhanced to provide students with the opportunities to develop to their full potential. Underpinning individual initiatives is the need for the National Office for Equity of Access in Higher Education to develop and support a national strategy, supported by appropriate resources, to enhance access. The new National Framework of Qualifications will also have a critical role to play in assisting students in making decisions about their education, through enhanced knowledge of progression and transfer pathways into and within higher education. The team also recommends that the HEA should conduct a further review of equality policies in five years time, to review the progress that has been made.

The HEA also accepts these recommendations and will work to address them. In so doing, the HEA recognises the other key stakeholders involved in this area. Of prime importance are the universities themselves, working to promote enhanced equality in their institutions in line with their statutory functions. The research funding agencies are also key players



through their role in reviewing and supporting equality of opportunity between male and female researchers. Other key stakeholders include the Department of Education and Science, second level schools, the Educational Disadvantage Committee, the Educational Welfare Board, the proposed new National Council for Special Educational Needs, AHEAD, local partnership and community groups and indeed others.

In accepting these recommendations, the HEA also recognises that new challenges can also emerge in seeking to provide for equity of access to higher education. For example, one area of growing concern not just within Ireland, but within the OECD, is equity of access in gender terms. In Ireland today, some 57% of new entrants are female. Within the OECD as a whole, in all but three countries, girls tend to outnumber boys in accessing higher education. Given the critical role of higher education in supporting individual development and maximising life chances, it is important that both male and female students have equal opportunities to access higher education.

A key actor into the future area will be the new National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education. The Office, which has been established as part of the HEA, is charged with developing a national strategy to support enhanced access to higher education, including not just the universities and HEA designated institutions, but all publicly funded third level colleges. The implementation of the recommendations of the review team report will be a key area for action for the office in the coming months and years. In addition, the HEA intends, that this, the first statutory review of equality policies should serve as the basis for further reviews of equality policies of the universities into the future. While the review team has recommended that a further review be carried out in five years time, the HEA plans, in view of the importance of securing equity of access to higher education, to carry out the next review in three years time.

The Authority wishes to thank Mr. O'Connell and the members of the team, for the work they carried out in the preparation of their report. Ms. Katherine Meenan assisted the team as Secretary, and her work is also greatly appreciated.

Don Thornhill  
CHAIRMAN, HEA  
March 2004



## HEA Members

**Chairman:**

Dr. Don Thornhill,  
*Higher Education Authority.*

Professor Tom Boylan  
*Department of Economics,  
National University of Ireland, Galway*

Dr. Maurice Bric,  
*Department of Modern History, University College Dublin.*

Mr. William James Caves,  
*Former Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Schools Examinations  
and Assessment Council (CCEA)*

Cllr. Maria Corrigan,  
*Member Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council*

Mr. Martin Cronin,  
*Chief Executive Forfás*

Dr. Honor Fagan,  
*Department of Sociology NUI Maynooth*

Ms Maura Grant  
*Director of Programmes relating to Educational Disadvantage,  
Department of Education and Science*

Professor Gary Granville  
*Faculty of Education, National College and Art and Design*

Ms Carol Marie Herron,  
*Education Co-ordinator, Co. Cavan VEC and Cavan Partnership*

Mr. Paul Hannigan  
*Director, Letterkenny Institute of Technology*

Mr. Patrick J. Kirby  
*Group Commercial Director, Alphyra*

Ms Monica Leech  
*Communications Consultant*

Professor Tom McCarthy  
*Professor of Economics and Dean of Business School,  
Dublin City University*

Ms Antoinette Nic Gearailt  
*Principal, The Donahies Community School, Dublin 13*

Mr. Barry O'Brien,  
*Director (Estate and Support Services),  
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland*

Professor Sarah Moore,  
*Dean of Teaching and Learning, University of Limerick*

Professor Ciaran Murphy,  
*Department of Accounting , Finance & Information Systems,  
University College Cork*

Mr. Will Priestley,  
*President, Union of Students in Ireland*

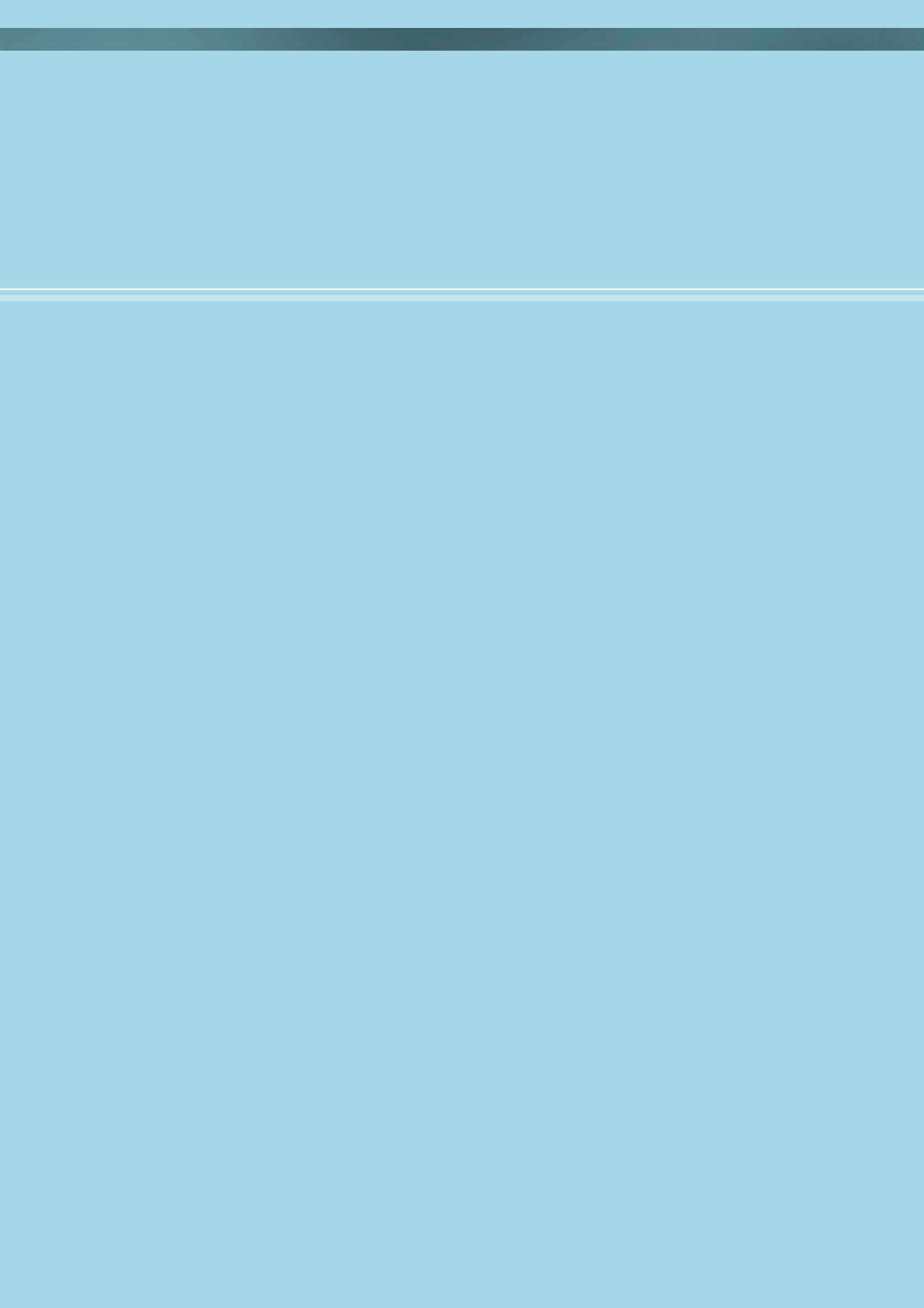
## HEA Executive

<b>Secretary/Chief Executive</b>	Tom Boland	<b>Assistant Secretary</b>	George Ryan <i>Physical Development</i>
<b>Deputy Chief Executive</b>	Mary Kerr	<b>Senior Policy Analyst</b>	Orla Christle <i>National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education</i>
<b>Head of Policy and Planning</b>	Fergal Costello	<b>Programme Manager</b>	Peter Brown <i>National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education</i>
<b>Head of Research Programmes</b>	Dr. Eucharía Meehan	<b>Senior Policy Analyst</b>	Caitriona Ryan <i>Policy and Planning</i>
<b>Head of National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education</b>	Dr. Mary-Liz Trant	<b>Recurrent Grants</b>	Jane Sweetman Mary May Valerie Harvey
<b>Head of Administration</b>	Padraic Mellett	<b>Industrial Relations Unit</b>	Maura O'Shea Justin Sinnott
<b>Head of Information And Public Affairs</b>	Gerry O'Sullivan	<b>Physical Development</b>	Ciaran Dolan Patricia Carroll Brendan Ferron
<b>Head of ICT Skills Programme</b>	Pat O'Connor	<b>European Programmes</b>	Louise Sherry Adrian O'Donoghue
<b>Management Accountant</b>	Stewart Roche	<b>Policy And Planning</b>	Leonora Harty Rowena Dwyer
<b>Assistant Secretary</b>	Mary Armstrong <i>Recurrent Grants</i>		
<b>Assistant Secretary</b>	Sheena Duffy <i>Research, Socrates/Erasmus</i>		
<b>Assistant Secretary</b>	Jennifer Gyax <i>Recurrent Grants</i>		



## HEA Executive

<b>Statistics Section</b>	Barbara Carr Oliver Mooney Frank Condon	<b>Secretarial Services</b>	Jacintha Healy <i>(Secretary to Chairman)</i>  Mary Dunne <i>(Secretary to Chief Executive)</i>  Mary Meade Kate Philbin-Dargan
<b>Research Programmes</b>	Dr. Lisa Higgins Fiona Davis Dr. Emer Cunningham Eileen O'Connell Adrian O'Donoghue	<b>Reception</b>	Shauna Brennan <i>(Marine House)</i>  Graham Barry <i>(Brooklawn House)</i>
<b>National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education</b>	Olive Walsh Alan McGrath Brian Johnston Justin Synnott Modesta Mawarire	<b>Services</b>	Bridget Kelly Caroline Curtis
<b>Information and Public Affairs</b>	Cliona Buckley		
<b>Personnel and Accounts</b>	Niall O'Connell Emer McMullin Sharon O'Rourke		
<b>Information Technology</b>	John Muldoon <i>(IT Manager)</i>  Marie O'Sullivan <i>(Network Administrator)</i>		



# introduction



The Equality Review Team was established in February 2003 by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) pursuant to the statutory functions of the Authority in regard to the promotion of equality in the universities.

The Terms of Reference given to the Team are as follows:

#### Terms of Reference

##### External Review Team HEA Review of University Equality Policies

The Review shall be based upon:

The obligations placed upon universities in the Universities Act 1997 to prepare and implement equality policies;

Other relevant statutory obligations on the universities in respect of equality policy;

Statements of policies submitted by each university to the HEA and any other relevant documentation requested by the review team;

Visits to each University including discussion on both the submission made by the University, and the general statement of and operation of equality policies in the University.

It is expected that in the course of such visits the Review Team will meet with:

- Members of the Governing Body.
- Senior officers of the university.
- Those officers with responsibility for the management of university equality policies, both for staff and students.
- Such other groups as may be considered appropriate by the Team.

The Review Team may also consult with other organisations as it sees fit.

The Review Team is also asked to report to the HEA on its conclusions and specifically to:

- Report on the preparation and implementation of equality policies in the universities with regard to best national and international practice.
- Make such recommendations as to how, in the view of the Team, universities might enhance their equality policies and their implementation
- Make such recommendations as to how, in the view of the Team, the HEA, and other appropriate State or non-State bodies might better assist the universities in enhancing equality.

The Review Team will report to the HEA by June of 2003.



In interpreting these terms of reference, the Team noted in particular the extensive work already undertaken in the evaluation of individual strands of the HEA Targeted Initiatives programme which supports the Universities in promoting access, i.e.

- An international survey of equality policies;
- A review of the targeted initiative programme supporting access by students suffering socio-economic disadvantage, and
- Forthcoming review of participation of mature students in higher education.

These reviews have involved critical examinations of the details of the operation of these initiatives, their use by the institutions, their value in enhancing access, and directions for the future. The Team did not consider it appropriate to repeat such exercises, but instead sought to build on the findings of these earlier evaluations.

The Team also noted the report by the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education, and that group's analysis of the target groups at risk of under-representation in third level, and the policy framework and recommendations set out for future action.

The Team noted that the Minister for Education and Science has recently (November 2002) approved a critical recommendation of that report, the establishment of the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education. Arrangements for the establishment of that office within the HEA are being finalised at present. The office will then be charged with the implementation of the recommendations of the Action Group report.

It was clear therefore to the Team that much work has been done, or is to be commenced, to address issues of equality in third level. In this context the Team had regard to a number of overarching objectives in meeting its terms of reference:

- to assess, in the context of previous reports and evaluations, the current state of university equality policies and their implementation;
- to highlight key areas for change and improvement, and, in so doing, to set out an agenda for the future for the institutions, the HEA and the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education;
- to provide, in completing the first statutory review of university equality policies, a basis for further reviews, and, in particular, to create a basis against which improvements can be measured.



The universities subject to review in this report are

- Dublin City University
- University College Cork
- University College Dublin
- National University of Ireland, Galway
- National University of Ireland, Maynooth
- Trinity College Dublin
- University of Limerick

The members of the Equality Review Team are:

Mr Maurice O'Connell, Former Governor of the Central Bank of Ireland, Chair

Dr Tony Crooks, Chief Executive, Area Development Management Ltd

Dr Maureen Gaffney, Chairperson of the National Economic and Social Forum

Professor Ossi V. Lindqvist, Director of the Institute of Applied Technology, Kuopio, Finland

Ms Laura Lundy, School of Law, Queen's University Belfast

The members would like to acknowledge in particular the assistance received from the Secretary, Ms Katherine Meenan and from the staff of the Higher Education Authority. They also wish to acknowledge the excellent co-operation received from university personnel in the preparation of this report.

The Team met with:

Professor Patrick Clancy, Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Sociology, Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology, University College Dublin;

Ms Maura Grant, Director of Programmes relating to Educational Disadvantage, Department of Education and Science;

Professor Kathleen Lynch, Co-ordinator of the Equality Studies Centre; Senior Lecturer, University College Dublin;

Professor Bob Osborne, Professor of Applied Policy Studies, School of Policy Studies, University of Ulster, Jordanstown.

The Chair and Secretary met with Mr Niall Crowley, Chief Executive and Mr Cathal Kelly, Development Officer of the Equality Authority.

The Team is grateful to all of these for their generosity with time and expertise.



## Sources

In addition to the comprehensive information supplied by the universities themselves, both to the Team on the occasion of its visit and in preliminary submissions to the HEA, the Team obtained valuable information and insights from a number of recent studies and publications on this subject. It would like to highlight in this context the following publications:

Access and Equity in Higher Education prepared for HEA by Professor Malcolm Skilbeck – May 2000

Evaluation of the Targeted Initiative on Widening Access for Young People from Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Backgrounds – report to HEA by Professor Robert Osborne and Ms Helen Leith – September 2000

Report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education – May 2001

(See Appendix I for Bibliography).

## Legislative Background to Equality in Irish Higher Education

### Higher Education Authority Act 1971

Section 3 of the Higher Education Authority Act 1971 states

An tÚdarás shall, in addition to the specific functions given to it by this Act, have the general function of.....

(d) Promoting the attainment of equality of opportunity in higher education,

### Universities Act 1997

Under Section 12 of the Universities Act, 1997, universities are required

“to promote gender balance and equality of opportunity among students and employees of the university” as well as “to facilitate lifelong learning through the provision of adult and continuing education”.

Section 14 sets out that

“A university, in performing its functions shall:

have the right and responsibility to preserve and promote the traditional principles of academic freedom in the conduct of its internal and external affairs, and be entitled to regulate its affairs in accordance with its independent ethos and traditions and the traditional principles of academic freedom, and in doing so it shall have regard to

- (i) the promotion and preservation of equality of opportunity and access,
- (ii) the effective and efficient use of resources, and

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

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

Section 36 sets out that a governing authority shall

“prepare a statement of the policies of the university in respect of access to the university and to university education by economically or socially disadvantaged people, by people who have a disability and by people from sections of society significantly under-represented in the student body, and equality, including gender equality, in all activities of the university,” and shall implement the policies set out in the statement.

Under section 49, the HEA has an advisory and review role in relation to statements of equality and their implementation.

#### Equal Status Act, 2000

Discrimination is addressed in detail in the Equal Status Act, 2000.

As between any two persons, discriminatory grounds are gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race, and traveller community (section 3 (2) (a – i)).

Section 7 of the Act, dealing with educational establishments, relates directly to

‘a university or any other third-level or higher-level institution, whether or not supported by public funds.’

Section 7 (2) states

‘An educational establishment shall not discriminate in relation to:

- The admission or the terms or conditions of admission of a person as a student to the establishment;
- The access of a student to any course, facility or benefit provided by the establishment;
- Any other term or condition of participation in the establishment by a student, or
- The expulsion of a student from the establishment or any other sanction against the student.’

The evidence suggests that, by general standards across Europe, Irish equality legislation is very progressive.



## Requirement on Universities

The requirement on the universities to achieve equality comes mainly under the following headings

- 1) Access to Education, defined as
  - i) Access for students who are disadvantaged in socio-economic terms
  - ii) Access for students who are disabled
  - iii) Access for mature students
  - iv) Access for students from ethnic minorities
  
- 2) Equality of opportunity in employment

## Visits to Universities

As required by the terms of reference, members of the Review Team visited each university. On each visit the Team met senior officers, persons engaged in the operation of equality policies on the ground and a cross-section of students for whom services are being provided under equality arrangements. In each case there was a comprehensive series of presentations by university personnel on the actions being taken to promote equality. There was also a general discussion on all aspects of the equality arrangements in place. The visits confirmed the perception that universities are conscious of their obligation to promote equality in areas of particular relevance and indeed in all aspects of university life. All express in their policy statements unqualified commitment to the principle that equality of treatment in the educational environment is a fundamental right. All recognise that they must set a good headline in this respect.

## Statement of Policies

Under Section 36 of the Universities Act the universities are required to “prepare a statement of the policies of the university” in respect of their equality obligations.

Based on information gathered during visits, and on information supplied to the Team, or previously to the HEA, the individual universities have:

- Adopted policy statements to reflect the responsibilities imposed on them in relation to disadvantage and employment policies;
- Established high level committees or individuals to oversee implementation of these policies;
- Appointed dedicated personnel to administer arrangements on the ground.

The policies as adopted are well drafted and would compare very well internationally.

## Reporting by and within universities

In the period 2000-2003, all seven universities submitted comprehensive reports to the HEA on the steps taken by them to fulfil their statutory and other obligations on equality, both in relation to student access and employment. On the evidence of these reports, the commitment to equality appears to be good and efforts are being made to establish the conditions for equal treatment and equality of opportunity in various aspects of university life. Some universities have mechanisms in place for annual reporting to the Governing Authority on the equality agenda. This practice, however, is not universal.

It is important that all staff be involved in the development of an equality culture.

## Data

In every aspect of its work the Team was struck by the absence of adequate data about actions taken or possible outcomes of equality measures, or even data gathering systems in place. In earlier reports on this subject, the absence of data was highlighted repeatedly and strong recommendations made for improvement. To date, however, these recommendations have not been implemented.

*Equality data is essential to the analysis and monitoring of progress towards greater equality in Irish society. A comprehensive gender- and equality-sensitive data system can itself contribute to underlining the diversity of Irish society, revealing differences in the roles and situations of women and men and generating understanding and visibility of minority groups. In this sense, the production of relevant and appropriate equality data itself contributes to the development of a more equal society. Policies and programmes of action, unless they are based on a clear recognition of difference, are unlikely to effectively redress inequalities nor to successfully target specific vulnerable population groups.<sup>1</sup>*

Particularly in the area of access initiatives there are substantial investments of time and money – coming directly from the state in the form of the HEA Targeted Initiatives or from the universities' own resources. In the absence of adequate sets of data over time, the precise measurement of outcomes for such investment is simply not possible.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Building the Picture: The Role of Data in Achieving Equality* Ursula Barry. Women's Education Research and Resource Centre, University College Dublin Equality Authority, May 2000



Data on access programmes are poor, both within individual universities and on a more general level. Usually there are no arrangements for compiling data across the board and there is no central unit of responsibility. While figures for schemes and programmes are available on an individual basis, it is essential for proper assessment that these are pooled and available on a uniform basis right across the whole university sector.

The Team is aware that work is now underway among the universities, and in conjunction with the HEA, to establish appropriate procedures for capturing extensive information over time. The HEA has been in discussion for some time with the universities in an effort to agree the parameters and format of data to be submitted by each institution. Some of the issues that arise in this context are quite sensitive and cover a range of problems that must be addressed, such as privacy and data protection legislation. Nonetheless, the Team cannot over emphasise the importance that it attaches to immediate and effective progress on this work.

The same problem arises in relation to equality in employment. Without adequate data, changes cannot be measured and transparency cannot be assured. This may involve a considerable effort on the part of the universities, such as continuing surveys of those applying for vacancies, as well as those who get to interview stage. Best practice in this area is well established elsewhere and the universities should adopt this.

The collection of data across the various statutory areas of equality is fundamental to the success of an equality strategy. Without adequate information there can be no accountability and no real appreciation of results. In developing systems, it could be useful for the universities and the HEA to benefit from experience gained in Northern Ireland. For historical reasons, there is a greater recognition in Northern Ireland society generally of the need to review information about job applicants and the experience which has been gained is valuable. Not only is information collated about each appointment, but it is also available for each applicant. It has provided opportunities for the educational institutions to identify exactly which groups in society are making efforts to access third level education but failing, or even more importantly, those groups which are not making the effort at all.

Given that data collection systems are now being established, it is important that the quality of the data be high. It is not necessary however that each of the universities should have in place a system for collating and analysing data. It should suffice that a standard data collection system be put in place and the information transmitted to a central point for further analysis.

## Equality in Universities

In the opinion of the Team, universities have a crucial role to play in the promotion of equality. Universities have a unique place in social and public life, and the standards they maintain can become headlines for society as a whole. They can bring about real change because they prepare the next generation, including, crucially, the next generation of teachers. Universities also have a responsibility for human capital development. In a knowledge based economy it is unacceptably wasteful that some human capital is not adequately used, whether because of social background, gender, race, or disability.

A serious barrier to increased equality in the universities would appear to be institutional culture. The Team met university staff who are actively committed to equality, but it believes that this commitment is not shared throughout the institution in each case. It is difficult to gauge the extent to which there is adequate appreciation or acceptance among university personnel in general of equality issues. Individual university faculties have considerable freedom. The culture can be influenced strongly by attitudes of senior personnel and it is vitally important that such personnel have a proactive commitment to equality of opportunity.

There are some excellent and proactive policies in place. However, the overall picture is uneven and there is an overriding need to increase transparency on all aspects of equality.

- Promotion criteria are not clear
- Funding criteria for students with disabilities are not clear
- Interview systems are not transparent
- Students are not aware of their rights
- Mature students must meet a number of different access criteria

More research towards formulation of policy into issues of equality is needed. There is already considerable work underway within the universities themselves in researching issues of access. The HEA has also undertaken research through its evaluations of targeted initiatives and the international survey of approaches to access to education. It is important that further work be done to build on this research, and to use its findings to inform further policy.

The Team recognises that a wide variety of policies and schemes under various headings to promote access and equality generally have been put in place. While it is fair to say that universities broadly satisfy legal requirements, the rationale for the promotion of access and equality goes far beyond this and there is an obvious need for greater commitment. In addition, significant resources, in terms of personnel and in terms of time are needed to develop a culture of equality.

# chapter one | Access to Education





All universities have introduced special programmes or initiatives in recent years, to encourage access. These programmes are aimed at the four groups of students who are defined on page 19. Most of the funding is available from the Higher Education Authority, under its Targeted Initiatives schemes, and is supplemented by the universities from their own funds. Funding is also made available to students under the Millennium Partnership Fund, and directed through community groups and local partnerships.

The programmes for access for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds have been comprehensively reviewed by Osborne and Leith, and were not reviewed in detail by the Team. In brief they cover aspects such as financial support either for students, or for the schools; efforts to “open the gates” of the universities so as to make them seem less forbidding places; involvement of university staff and students in the work of the school and mentoring. A full list is provided on page 25. The programmes are generally expensive in terms of the numbers that benefit in relation to cost, and overall they are very intensive in their use of resources, both financial and personnel.

In its approach to all Target Initiatives schemes, including access, the HEA has not sought to prescribe the types of approaches to be used by the universities but has laid down the following criteria:

- Initiatives should be in areas of strategic national or regional importance within higher education
- The overall shape of a framework for the targeted initiatives scheme should be determined by the Authority for the medium term so that there would be clear consistency of policy from the HEA
- There should be greater security as regards the availability of funding for institutions under the scheme for the medium term and institutions could, therefore, seek funding for a number of years, subject to satisfactory reports and progress being made in the initial year's funding
- There should be a commitment to the ‘mainstreaming’ by the institutions of activities funded under the scheme
- There should be a requirement for institutions to use some of their own resources (including funding from the Exchequer) and/or private resources to supplement funding from the HEA under the scheme
- Some initiatives should be carried out on a pilot basis, and could involve funding a maximum of three institutions to undertake similar projects, as well as providing for the dissemination of results
- Each institution should continue to be asked to report annually on actions funded under this scheme
- The effectiveness of funding under each initiative should be independently evaluated on a regular basis by the HEA and the findings of the evaluations be disseminated.



The range of activities that are funded under the HEA Targeted Initiatives are outlined in the Table below:

Activities funded under HEA Targeted Initiatives programme <sup>2</sup>		
Disadvantaged School Leavers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Development of links with disadvantaged schools</li> <li>■ Direct Entry arrangements</li> <li>■ Summer schools and mentoring programmes</li> <li>■ Co-operations with area-based partnership bodies</li> <li>■ Parents' programmes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Supervised study</li> <li>■ Guidance Counselling</li> <li>■ Supplementary tuition</li> <li>■ Orientation programmes</li> <li>■ Input to teacher education</li> <li>■ Foundation/Access Courses</li> </ul>
Mature Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Provision of outreach workers</li> <li>■ Training of adult tutors</li> <li>■ Development of courses and course materials</li> <li>■ Orientation programmes</li> <li>■ Guidance and counselling support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Course in preparatory skills</li> <li>■ Information packs</li> <li>■ Mentoring</li> <li>■ Development of on-line materials</li> <li>■ Promotional materials</li> </ul>
Students with Disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Making existing buildings and facilities universally accessible (Capital Grant)</li> <li>■ Development of flexible assessment mechanisms</li> <li>■ Devising suitable examination arrangements</li> <li>■ Provision of assistive technology and services</li> <li>■ Counselling and Guidance support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Campus transport</li> </ul>
Travellers and Refugees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Anti-racism and intercultural research, awareness raising and training</li> <li>■ Pre-Entry Preparatory and Access Programmes</li> <li>■ Post-Entry Support (language, financial, guidance and counselling)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Extension of existing initiatives to incorporate travellers and refugees</li> </ul>

2 Source HEA

While adequate data for numbers of students are not yet in place, some indicative figures may be identified from submissions made by institutions to the HEA under Targeted Initiative Programmes.

**Table 1: University Student Intake of Disadvantaged School Leavers (Entering on basis of Access Initiatives)**

Institution	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
UCD	10	27	29	41	52
UCC		3	20	39	57
NUIG	13	11	13	13	19
TCD	6	12	14	24	42
NUIM	-	10	10	10	30
UL	3	1	3	12	17
DCU	19	21	40	30	55
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>272</b>

Note:

**UCD:** The numbers in Table 1 refer solely to students entering through the Higher Education Direct Applications Scheme (HEDAS). In addition, post-entry access support is provided to CAO entrants who satisfy the socio-economic criteria of the access programme.

**UCC:** 1998 was a pilot year. No figures in institutional submission but Osborne's data records 3 entrants for that year. 1999 intake refers to 50 offers made through the direct application scheme and 34 acceptances, of which 20 accepted through direct entry and 14 through CAO.

**TCD:** 1997-1998 derived from Osborne

**UL:** 1997-1999 figures derived from Osborne

**DCU:** 1999 intake was 40 (confirmed by Osborne's data).

Note on sources:

These figures are derived from reports made by the institutions to the HEA under the Targeted Initiative Programme, supplemented with some data collected by Professor Bob Osborne in his review of the Targeted Initiative Programme for socio-economic access to higher education, and data from the "Access made Accessible" report prepared by the access officers of the third level institutions in 2002.



These figures must be treated with caution. They are not definitive and they do not necessarily represent the scope of activities being undertaken. They reflect the numbers progressing to university through defined access programmes, they do not constitute a review of the full range of activities in which universities are engaged to support access for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Neither do they reflect the impact of such activities on larger numbers of second-level students, who might themselves not have an interest in university education, but who could become more supportive to their peers who want to take the step to university.

The figures are not broken down by gender, but it is understood that a majority of those benefiting are girls.

## Funding

There is provision within the National Development Plan for a Third Level Access Fund totalling €120m for the period 2000 to 2006, aimed at tackling under-representation by students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, mature students, students with disabilities or from ethnic backgrounds.

In large part, access programmes in the universities are being funded through HEA initiatives. The universities themselves also underwrite programmes either from core funding or support from benefactors. The university authorities confirmed that numbers benefiting from these programmes could be increased substantially if additional and secure funding could be guaranteed. They were hesitant about the prospect of more funding from private sources and pointed out that donors, whether personal or corporate, generally prefer to fund capital projects.

## HEA Targeted Initiatives

Over the period 1996-2002, HEA funding of Targeted Initiatives relating to access has been as follows:

Table 2

INITIATIVE	Total €m
<i>Disadvantaged School Leavers</i>	9.3
<i>Mature Students</i>	9.8
<i>Students with Disabilities</i>	5.6
<i>Travellers and Refugees</i>	1.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>25.9</b>

Funding was allocated by the HEA over each of these years as follows:

Table 3

1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	TOTAL
€1.2m	€2.4m	€2.5m	€3.5m	€4.3m	€5.7m	€6.3m	€25.9m

Note: It should also be noted that between 2000-02 over €1.9m in funding has been allocated under the Targeted Initiative on Retention. Many of the activities being funded would either directly or indirectly aim to support and retain students from the four equity groups.

Funding for the targeted initiative relating to access activities for 2002 was allocated to individual universities by the HEA as follows:

Table 4

UCD	UCC	NUIG	NUIM	TCD	UL	DCU	SUB-TOTAL	SPD*	MIC*	TOTAL
€1.146m	€0.88m	€0.879m	€0.32m	€0.845m	€0.83m	€0.839m	€5.739m	€0.140m	€0.405m	€6.284m

The total of €6.284m, which was allocated to access activities for 2002, represented almost 50% of the total allocation for all targeted initiatives from the HEA.

---

\* St. Patricks Drumcondra and Mary Immaculate College are higher level colleges funded by the HEA



Detailed breakdown of funding allocations for universities 2002 (€000)

Table 5

Institution	Disadvantaged school leavers	Mature	Students with disabilities	Travellers and Refugees	Total 2002	2001 allocation
UCD	406	540	150	50	1,146	1,003
UCC	355	275	180	70	880	926
NUIG	300	370	149	60	879	975
NUIM	125	120	65	10	320	135
TCD	405	200	240	-	845	736
UL	205	210	195	220	830	775
DCU	454	60	285	40	839	672
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,250</b>	<b>1,775</b>	<b>1,264</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>5,739</b>	<b>5,222</b>

Note: Total 2001 allocation (Table 3) also included €0.364m for SPD and €0.102m for MIC. Funding for 2001 was, therefore, €5.688m overall.

In all instances the universities have contributed matching funds in support of the Targeted Initiatives. The level of contribution has varied significantly from one institution to another and there are no hard and fast rules as to the appropriate levels of matching contribution.

2001: Funds Received under Targeted Initiative for access activities  
Matching Funds from Institutions

Table 6

	UCD	UCC	NUIG	NUIM	TCD	UL	DCU	TOTAL
Received	1,003	926	975	135	736	775	672	5,222.000
Matching	759.5	455.187	358.6	112	702	326	294.078	3,007.365
Total	1,762.5	1,381.187	1,333.6	247	1,438	1,101	966.078	8,229.365
Matching/Received	76%	49%	37%	83%	95%	42%	44%	58%

Assessment of outcomes for 2002 will be undertaken as part of the HEA review and allocation of 2003 funding.

A particular difficulty of the Targeted Initiatives is that funding has been awarded on an annual basis and not guaranteed beyond one year. Not only has this mitigated against the proper planning of initiatives, and the development of a longer-term agenda, but it has a noticeable effect on the morale of staff employed to develop these initiatives. As some of the universities employ staff to work on Access on one-year contracts, renewed possibly over a number of years, proper career planning or progression for those involved is difficult. This is an equality issue in its own right, particularly for staff who are very often young and female.<sup>3</sup>

There were complaints also about the timing of information on funding. Too frequently this information is not available until very late in the day and this adds to the insecurity. At a minimum, programmes should be funded on a multiannual (at least three years) basis to give them greater continuity.

The HEA informed the universities in August 2002 that it planned to transfer a proportion of the targeted funding to the core grant in recognition of the fact that the activities being undertaken are 'core business' for the institutions. This transfer took place as part of the allocation of budgets in 2003. This is a welcome step forward, on condition that this funding is ring-fenced for the Access Initiatives. There is merit in preserving targeted programmes separate from the general financing arrangements for the universities. On a stand alone basis, they have a higher profile and probably have a greater impact than if they were just another element of the block grant arrangement. Whatever approach is preferred, the primary consideration is that the continuation, and hopefully, extension of access programmes is assured.

As regards additional funding for access initiatives, it is reasonable to expect further matching contributions from individual universities. These need not be on a 50/50 basis. Matching contributions are an acknowledgement from the universities of their obligations and commitment to access programmes and this commitment should be underpinned by financial contributions.

It is desirable that funding for initiatives should be linked in some manner to performance. Individual universities should be expected to match certain benchmarks, perhaps in terms of numbers which come through the access schemes. The HEA should exercise its discretion to raise or lower its level of funding initiatives in accordance with performance relative to benchmarks. It will be a central function of the National Office to support the development of these benchmarks.

---

3 *This is also a recommendation of the Action Group on Access*



## Access for Students from Socio-economically Disadvantaged Background

Educational disadvantage is defined in the Education Act 1998 as:

“The impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools”.

The White Paper on the Future of Education (1995) identified three key aspects of the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on participation in third-level education:

- The low proportion of students from lower working-class or disadvantaged backgrounds who sit the Leaving Certificate examination and obtain sufficiently high grades to enter third-level education<sup>4</sup>
- Even when they achieve these grades, a substantially lower proportion enter university than would be expected.
- When students secured higher grades in the Leaving Certificate, social or economic class did not significantly influence their chances of proceeding to higher education. However, for students with average or lower attainments in the Leaving Certificate, those from better-off backgrounds were more likely to continue in higher education.

The Higher Education Direct Application Scheme lists socio-economic reasons that qualify for assistance under the access initiatives as follows:

- long term unemployment
- low family income
- little or no family tradition of progression onto higher education
- limited study facilities at home
- family stresses (particularly those related to limited finance).

There is no clear-cut means of identification of disadvantaged students. Given that the main barriers to access are financial and educational, universities usually address the issue of access from these perspectives.

Efforts to address lack of equity in access in the third level sector have had the benefit of four surveys carried out over a 20-year period by Professor Patrick Clancy, of University College Dublin.

These analyses reveal that, over the past ten years, the position of entrants from less well-off backgrounds has improved as the number of places in higher education have expanded over this period, but the rate of increase of those entering from the lower socio-economic groups remains below that of other social groups.

---

4 *Charting our Education Future White Paper on Education 1995*



*In all four surveys, the Higher Professional group has had the highest participation rate. And while our 1998 estimate of ninety-seven hundred per cent is clearly an overestimate it would appear that the higher education participation rate of this group must be close to saturation level, having risen progressively from an estimated fifty-nine per cent in 1980. The group with the second highest participation rate is the Employers and Managers group. The 1998 estimate is an impressive eighty-one per cent, having increased in each successive survey from forty-two per cent in 1980. The participation rate of the Farmers group is the third highest, having reached an estimated seventy-two per cent in 1998. Here, also, the pattern is one of continuing improvement, with the increase between 1992 and 1998 (from 53% to 72%) being especially noteworthy.*

*By comparison with the former eight groups, the performance of three socio-economic groups (Lower Professional, Salaried Employees and Intermediate Non-Manual) reveals a pattern of very modest improvement. Indeed in the case of the Salaried Employee's group the 1998 estimated participation rate is still below the 1980 estimate, although there is evidence of improvement (from 48% to 53%) between 1992 and 1998.*

Successive reports by Professor Clancy demonstrate clearly that participation rates in third level education for those of a disadvantaged socio-economic background fall well below those with higher socio economic status. Although absolute figures for the disadvantaged socio-economically have improved as numbers in higher education have increased, the rate of increase has not kept pace with the rate of increase among the higher socio economic groups (which have now reached what Clancy and Wall call "saturation").<sup>5</sup>

Under-representation of lower socio-economic groups at university level is a problem common to many countries in Europe and beyond. Some countries have been addressing the problem proactively for decades through various policy initiatives, including special programmes. While comparisons are difficult and definitions may vary from one country to another, studies and other evidence confirm that, to date, the results have been somewhat disappointing. The proportion of students from the lower socio-economic groups has not increased to an appreciable extent. However, this is not to say it cannot be done. Experience in Finland has demonstrated, that, with a society-wide impetus, real progress can be made. The poorer literacy skills which are typically associated with a background which is socio-economically disadvantaged have been redressed and there is no noticeable difference in participation at third level.<sup>6</sup>

---

5 *Social Background of Higher Education Entrants.* Patrick Clancy and Joy Wall HEA 2000 P83

6 For a review of the PISA policy see *The Finish success in PISA- and some reasons behind it: PISA 2000* Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä



It is accepted generally that financing alone cannot breach adequately the barriers that exist. The higher socio-economic groups have an expectation of higher education from an early stage and their second-level education is geared in this direction. For the lower groups, on the other hand, there is no such assured expectation and frequently the aspiration to higher education does not have the family and community support that is needed. The message that emerges repeatedly from experience is that early intervention is essential.

#### Initiatives

In 2001 seven higher education institutions\* collaborated to launch the Higher Education Direct Application Scheme (HEDAS). This scheme is operated on a nationwide basis to eligible students in schools designated disadvantaged by the Department of Education and Science. Students, apply through the CAO, but also complete a supplementary application (HEDAS). Students' socio economic status is reviewed and they are assessed when Leaving Certificate results are available and admitted to places at reduced points if they meet published criteria. The Higher Education institutions pool their reserved places, adopt a common application form and co-ordinate the making of offers so as to avoid duplication. There has been a significant increase in access applications and offers since the introduction of HEDAS. Students entering through the scheme are provided with financial, academic, personal/social supports throughout their studies.

The universities work through the schools in their own areas, designated by the Department of Education and Science as disadvantaged, and in some cases have moved on to link with individual schools where potential students can be dealt with on a case by case basis. In rural areas where student backgrounds are usually very mixed, students must be identified individually. The Team was told that many Traveller children do not attend second level schools and so do not have the benefit of the standard access schemes.

Right of access to special university schemes is largely determined by attendance at designated schools. In general, this works reasonably well in urban areas and the students who participate perform above average at university. There is concern that the focus on designated schools may unfairly exclude students in need who attend other schools.

The Commission on the Points System<sup>8</sup> acknowledged the need for the continuation of strategies that focus on designated schools because of the high concentration of disadvantaged students in such schools. But it also noted that, throughout the process of consultation, there was a general view that initiatives to tackle disadvantage at third level should be capable of reaching out to all disadvantaged students. It saw a need to develop a national approach to ensuring that special access

---

\* The participating institutions are UCD, NUIM, UCC, DCU, UL, TCD and DIT

8 *Commission on the Points System. Final Report and Recommendations 1999. See para 10.4.2*

schemes should encompass disadvantaged students who are attending non-designated as well as designated schools. The Review Team supports this position.

#### Assessment of Initiatives

The main barriers to advancing to higher education are issues which reflect problems in the wider society:

- lack of awareness,
- lack of motivation,
- the need to be a bread winner for the family,
- the desire to earn immediately,
- no family history of access to third level.

The overall objective of the access programmes is to provide an effective support system for disadvantaged students which will allow them to participate fully in university life. In the overall picture the scale and impact of these special initiatives is very small. The situation was summarised as follows by one university authority:

*“If every student who was involved in one of our access programmes actually came to the University, they would be 3 percent of the student body.”*

While there are benefits for the individuals involved in the schemes, there can be little prospect in the short term that continuation of initiatives, even on a substantially larger scale, will bring about radical changes in representation and inspire a wholly new institutional approach to issues of equity. However, the initiatives do serve a worthwhile purpose. They keep the issue of representation to the forefront. They demonstrate what can be achieved on the ground when resources are specifically targeted towards addressing equality and, however small, they offer a means of access to students who otherwise would be definitely excluded from university. For these reasons alone, they must be continued.

Apart from the individual benefit, the direct input in disadvantaged areas is limited to date. But there is the aspiration that access schemes have the potential to change attitudes, to promote cultural change and to create in disadvantaged areas over time an awareness and appreciation that their communities can have a legitimate and realistic expectation of university education. The impact of these initiatives can be magnified over time, if the beneficiary and his or her future family continue up the ladder of academic achievement.



Assuming that there are no new financial constraints, the expectation is that the numbers participating in these initiatives should continue on an upward trend. Realistically, however, the overall direct impact will continue to be small for the foreseeable future and initiatives of this kind, on their own, will not provide sufficient answer.

It was put to the Review Team that State support should incorporate a special premium or weighting in favour of severely disadvantaged students in third level education. It was envisaged that such assistance might be provided directly to eligible students as a contribution towards living costs. To some degree, this has been recognised already through the introduction of a special top up scheme to support students with severe disadvantage. Alternatively, individual universities might benefit through special increases in block grants in relation to their intake of disadvantaged students. The case in principle, for direct premium payments to severely disadvantaged students is persuasive as a practical acknowledgment of the additional barriers facing these students. The potential benefits to be gained in terms of prioritising access suggests that the practical implications of such a system are worth exploring. However, the administration of such a scheme could give rise to major problems: for instance, there is an obvious difficulty with categorising students for this purpose.

Special additions to block grants for individual universities could have merit and could be perhaps a useful means of promoting greater opportunity for disadvantaged students within university. To make an adequate impact, however, these supplements would have to be specially identified and would have to be presented and seen as additional to normal block grant payments. In the present difficult economic climate, it is recognised that the scope for immediate additional financing is severely restricted. Nevertheless the HEA, in conjunction with the National Office of Equity for Access to Education, should explore the possibilities for channelling more State assistance directly to the benefit of disadvantaged students.

The recent (May 2003) public debate on third-level fees has highlighted the problem of access for those who are economically disadvantaged. The debate has led to significant increases in grant levels. It is recognised that this will benefit disadvantaged students and hopefully increase numbers. It remains to be seen, however, how significant the impact will be. This development does not diminish the case for initiatives. On the contrary, it should underline the importance of special programmes for those who are disadvantaged and who, otherwise, would have no prospect of university education.

There is universal recognition that access initiatives must not compromise academic standards in any way and this is not an issue of contention. It is accepted that quality and equality must and do co-exist.

The point was made repeatedly to the Review Team that intervention should be made at an earlier stage in second level education. Students and parents in disadvantaged areas may not become alert to the possibilities of university education until the students move beyond the Junior Certificate and frequently this is simply too late. Also, some designated schools do not have the capacity to offer the higher level Leaving Certificate course in some subjects. The point was also made in this context that career guidance officers in designated schools should be encouraged to promote interest in university education at an earlier stage.<sup>9</sup> These issues are not for the universities, but for the Department of Education and Science to undertake in conjunction with the schools. The question of intervention at an earlier stage of education is a national issue that can only be addressed properly at a national level.<sup>10</sup> The role of schools is essential in all of these efforts. And for the schools to succeed, it is important that the “cultural infrastructure” is improved, for instance, public libraries. It could be said that the role of the first and second level system is to “push” students upwards through the system, it is the role of universities to “pull” their potential students. Coordination between schools and universities could make a contribution to this.

There is also the possibility of a negative effect of these initiatives: students may feel that they are branded because of the system they have come through, and not be anxious to avail of it, although the Team saw no evidence of this.

### Coordination

Admission to university is gained by a highly centralised system of Leaving Certificate points and the Central Admissions Office (CAO) procedure. However, within this structure it is notable the extent to which each university’s own understanding of its role within its region or “catchment area” varies from one institution to another.

Universities operate access schemes on an individual basis for the most part and this individuality is highly prized. There are links between the different institutions, particularly among access officers. At the same time there is evidence of duplication in terms of time and effort devoted to matters such as production of materials, research, compilation of statistics and measurement of performance. Greater coordination, with a more organised network, is desirable. Existing networks should be developed and supported. Better coordination should give greater status to current initiatives. It should provide a platform for design of programmes and for evaluation of results on a national or central basis.

---

9 This is also a recommendation of Action Group on Access

10 A crucial aspect of the success of the PISA initiatives in Finland was to ensure equal quality and resources among all schools.



The Team welcomes the approach put forward by the Forum on Educational Disadvantage:<sup>11</sup>

*In setting targets for the educational system as a whole, the emphasis should shift from the concept of participation (e.g. prevention of early leaving from school programmes leading to the Leaving Certificate) to benefit (outcomes for the individual, irrespective of where the learning has taken place). The statement of specific objectives for education can then be made in positive terms, setting targets for the achievement of certain levels of attainment (or of national qualifications) by specified proportions of the age cohort or the total population within the given time frame.*

This expresses an approach which the Team would endorse. The educational system should not have any blind alleys. No student should be left in a position where he or she has no options left to them, there should always be a means of progress up the educational ladder. The work of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland is relevant here. Their development of a framework of qualifications to support progression between qualifications should assist students progressing between different awards.

## Mature Students

Persons over the age of 23 on entering university are classified as mature students.

Given the fall in numbers taking the Leaving Certificate and entering third level education according to the traditional route, it might have been expected that there would be an increase in demand from mature students, and that the universities would have concentrated more on attracting this group. Up to now, the evidence is that the rate of increase has been very modest.

The White Paper on Adult Education<sup>12</sup> has already identified several of the themes which should be dealt with by universities in relation to mature students.

7.3.2 *Such a strategic shift by higher education institutions in Ireland would involve policy changes on many fronts. Amongst the most urgent of these would be:-*

- *Establishing targets at institutional level across faculties and disciplines for full-time and part-time mature student enrolments in line with national targets;*
- *Recognising the need for much greater flexibility by those institutions in:-*

---

11 *Report of Inaugural Meeting Educational Disadvantage Forum. November 2002*

The Educational Disadvantage Forum acts to advise the Educational Disadvantage Committee.

The Committee was launched 2002. The Committee is provided for in Section 32 of the Education Act, 1998.

12 *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education 2001*

### *ACCESS AND DELIVERY*

### *ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION*

### *STUDENT SUPPORTS*

The Commission on the Points System recommended that by the year 2005, each third-level institution should set aside a quota of at least 15% of places for students entering at age 23 or above, a proportion which would bring Ireland closer to the average participation rate for mature students in OECD countries as a whole. This could be done by increasing the intake of mature students on a gradual basis over five years. The Action Group on Access to Third Level Education also recommended in 2001 that each third-level institution should aim to set aside at least 15% of full time undergraduate places in each school/department/faculty for mature students by 2006.

Numbers of mature students in the universities are increasing, however slowly and, on the whole, the mature students the Team met on its visits appear to be positive about their experiences. Nonetheless, overall intake levels fall short of targets set for students.

Usually, the barriers, which a mature student encounters, relate to finance and family obligations. Mature students must often combine study with employment in order to sustain themselves at university. Some have a clear preference for part time, distance learning or modular courses which allow them to hold down employment without undue stress. A major source of complaint is that there are no provisions for remission of fees for part-time students.

Clearly, each university must assure itself that mature students with non-standard qualifications are capable of meeting its academic requirements. However, it was the view of the Team that the access process may be made unnecessarily complicated because each university has its own separate admissions procedures.<sup>13</sup>

A problem arises from the number and nature of “access” and “foundation” courses offered by the universities. In some cases, these do not guarantee access, and the foundation courses are not recognised by any other institution of third level education. There should be a role here for the universities and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland to ensure that these courses become part of the progression of any student. The consultation, which is already taking place in regard to the steps needed to promote and facilitate access, transfer and progression is to be welcomed.<sup>14</sup>

---

13 This is also the view of the Commission on the Points System

14 Discussion Document Towards a National Framework of Qualifications, Response from the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities [C.H.I.U.] to the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland 4th February, 2002



It was said to the Team that there may sometimes be an unfounded suspicion that the quality of degree course content for mature students may not always match the standards set for the undergraduate body in general. This perception may have lingered on from the days when evening students were not allowed to pursue degree courses at honours level. It has no validity. The presence of mature students in university life makes a contribution to the institution as a whole as well as to the overall well being of the nation. An awareness of the possibility of life long learning is valuable in society, and it is important that what is offered is always of the highest possible quality.

In this context, it is worthy of note that some university personnel would challenge the traditional definitions of full-time and part-time students. They would claim that distinctions are breaking down as more and more students take on part-time employment. The definitional issue is significant, not least because of its implications for statistics and also in the context where part-time students must pay full fees.

Mature students may need more support in accessing university than standard students. In some cases, the problems are ongoing and require a substantial input from the university e.g. childcare, financial support. In other cases, early intervention may mean that the mature student can get all the benefits, with little further need for ongoing academic support. Essay writing was mentioned repeatedly as a real problem. Initial help can normally solve the problem without difficulty – although there is some evidence that this is not always forthcoming.

The universities have been able to deal with some of the administratively small issues, which have made a significant difference for individual students. For instance, the Central Admissions Office (CAO) places are not announced until August, which is often too late for someone who wishes to make arrangements for childcare or with an employer. Universities now normally contact potential students in June and this can make a real difference. Students are also critical of library opening hours which are often too restrictive from their viewpoint.

The Team was told that mature students “*want the campus experience.*” For many mature students, it is important that they integrate fully into university life and it can be difficult at times to satisfy differing priorities. On the other hand flexible delivery may be the key for greater access. The issue of modularisation is very live, and also links to the proper accreditation of foundation courses. While there is legitimate concern about the coherence of academic learning and discipline, it should also be possible that the acquisition of a degree be spread out over a longer period than the standard three year degree course. This would take account of the differing financial and personal circumstances of mature students.



## Outreach

Apart from study on the campus leading to a qualification, a number of universities operate a range of outreach programmes. These vary from courses with a strong base among community activists, where their social impact is strong, to courses which help the life skills of individuals, to courses which meet a need for “hobby” classes.

Inevitably, outreach programmes are limited to certain disciplines and it would be unrealistic to expect that the range of subjects can be extended to a significant extent. The cost would be too high and, in any event, the facilities required by some faculties would not be generally available.

Outreach programmes have merits. They bring the university closer to society and they provide educational opportunities for persons who are not in a position to study on the university campus. Now that there is a greater variety of educational facilities available through various agencies, it might be appropriate to look critically at some of the activities of the universities in this area. However, there is an overall view that the Outreach programmes provide a valuable link between university and community.

## Access for Students with Disabilities

The Education Act 1998 introduces the following definition of “disability”:

- The total or partial loss of a person’s bodily or mental functions, including the loss of a part of the person’s body, or
- The presence in the body of organisms causing, or likely to cause, chronic disease or illness, or
- The malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of a person’s body, or
- A condition or malfunction which results in a person learning differently from a person without the condition or malfunction, or
- A condition, illness or disease which affects a person’s thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgment or which results in disturbed behaviour.

AHEAD<sup>15</sup> (2002) on behalf of the HEA, evaluated the issues of access for students with disability for the academic year 1998/99. The report concludes that the ‘rate remains alarmingly low at 1.1% of the undergraduate population... particularly so when compared to the percentage of people with disability in the population as a whole which is estimated at 10%.

---

15 *Survey on Participation rates of and provisions for students with disabilities in higher education for 1998/99*

Further details of the work of AHEAD are available at the web address: <http://www.ahead.ie>



However, the report also concludes that the ‘experience of students with disabilities entering higher education is relatively new... and can be viewed as an evolving process.’

The Team was impressed with the efforts made by the universities to help students with disabilities to access university and to support them when they are there. The general principle underlying their approaches is that, in so far as possible, no student should be excluded from his/her preferred course of studies by virtue of disability or learning difficulty.

Each university has a committed service for students with disabilities. It supports them academically and seeks to address the difficulties they face, in order to ensure that they enjoy the optimum campus experience. Disabilities are varied and range from physical disability to unseen disabilities such as specific learning difficulties and mental health problems. Frequently they require considerable attention on a one-to-one basis.

In one university, real investment has been made in a very innovative use of existing software to help students with hearing and sight disabilities. There may also be a commercial opportunity for the university in the sale or patenting of these technologies

Individual complaints, which structures in place at local level should be in a position to resolve, were brought to the attention of the Review Team. For instance, it is unnecessary and undignified that a visually impaired student should be obliged to call upon a friend to check examination results.

Problems also remain of inappropriate campus buildings, particularly on the older campuses, where buildings are often protected, imposing severe restraints on planning. The application of the Universal Design Principle<sup>16</sup> should be a guiding principle for all universities, and should be a requirement for any capital investment.

The administration of ESF funding support for students with disabilities gives rise to considerable frustration. There were complaints that it is unduly bureaucratic and lacks transparency. A particular source of concern is that students are not normally aware until December, well into the academic year, whether or not they will be in receipt of support. There is also disquiet about some decisions on funding in relation to students with unseen disabilities and persons pursuing post-graduate courses.

---

16 UNIVERSAL DESIGN: The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest possible extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design.

There has been a considerable increase, from an admittedly low base, in numbers. One university has increased its number of students with disabilities ten fold in ten years. Several reasons were given for this progress:

- Special needs schools have improved so much that students coming from them now expect to be able to progress through the system.
- Diagnosis of conditions like dyslexia have improved, so that students with such conditions can now access university, and are more likely to seek help.

The issue of under reporting is a real one. Students are unwilling to disclose a disability and may not seek available help until the last possible moment, or when it is too late. In one university the team was told that the Disability Office maintained a suite of empty rooms in the weeks and days before exams, as students would arrive then seeking help and needing special arrangements for examinations.

Even allowing for under-reporting, numbers are still relatively small. The main external factor which affects non-participation is aspiration within the educational system. The Team was told:

*“10% of the population have some form of disability but of almost 66,000 total applications to the CAO in the year 2002 only 961 applicants stated that they had any disability.*

*There is frequently an absence of expectation on the part of students with a disability and this also applies to teachers and to parents. There is inadequate access to the second level curriculum. There is a lack of awareness among the general population and among guidance counsellors, teachers, parents etc.*

*Physical barriers are as big a problem as funding.”*

The Review Team has noted that the Minister for Education and Science has recently established an Advisory Group which, as part of its brief, is examining access and support services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students at third level in general.

Another welcome development is the establishment of a National Institute for Study of Learning Difficulties in Trinity College.



## Access for Students from Ethnic Minorities and Travellers

### Ethnic Minorities

The Team was struck by the relative lack of interest on the part of the university sector as a whole in this area, although several universities mentioned “a more diverse campus” as a stated aim. It appears that no effort has been made to keep figures, and there appears to be some confusion about the difference between nationality and ethnic background. It should be understood that recording nationality on CAO forms is not a way of recording race or ethnicity.

While Black-Irish students, and students of other minority ethnic groups resident in Ireland, do not face the same issues in terms of the right of access to college, they can experience racial stereotyping, harassment and discrimination. The Team considered it disappointing that the universities have no information on the ethnicity of its home students. Going forward this is particularly important given the increasingly diverse nature of Irish society.

### Travellers

Out of a total population of 24,000 Travellers in Ireland, only five participated in third level education in 1998.<sup>17</sup>

All universities acknowledge their obligations in this area, and some have specific programmes in place for travellers. The numbers of travellers who have benefited so far from access programmes are very small. The universities point out that programmes are at an early stage and are unlikely to have a substantial impact until more travellers come through second level education. However, in universities where travellers have been particularly targeted, it has been possible to show results. In this case NUI, Maynooth has a good record and the University of Limerick has been imaginative in its attempts to reach out to travellers, with a celebration of their musical heritage.

### International Students

The experience of international students varies widely and is often linked to their country of origin, racial/ethnic background, religious affiliation and financial situation. Numbers indicate that Ireland is an attractive place for international students to study. International students are welcomed and facilitated not least because of the high fees they pay, but they can also occasionally encounter ignorance, prejudice and discrimination. A representative of international students complained to the Review Team, that they were charged high fees, but that there was no transparency about how the fees are calculated or what they have a right to expect in return. In particular, fees are increased substantially from year to year, while students have budgeted, at the beginning, for a certain overall sum to see them through a degree course.

Support seems to be from student societies, rather than specific advisers.

---

<sup>17</sup> *DOING IT DIFFERENTLY!: Addressing Racism and Discrimination Against Members of Minority Ethnic Groups in Higher Education in Ireland.* Higher Education Equality Unit November 1999.

### Refugees and Asylum seekers

Participation rates in higher education by refugees are low. There remains a lack of clarity about who has the right to study in Ireland and some colleges still attempt to charge foreign national fees to people who have been granted refugee status. Asylum seekers have no right to study in Ireland. Universities complained of the lack of coherent guidance from the Department of Education and Science in relation to both of these student categories.

### Sexual orientation

Because of the particularly sensitive nature of this issue, there is a real problem in recording data. Most of the support services available to students appear to come from student societies, which may be the most appropriate arrangement, but it is not clear whether this is provided in the absence of any university initiative. No specific issues were brought to the attention of the Team, by either staff or students. However, sexual orientation awareness should form part of any equality awareness programme. In particular staff handling complaints under the dignity at work policies should be trained in these issues

### National Strategy

In the course of dialogue with the universities, the question of developing a national strategy on access was raised repeatedly and a strong case can be made for such an approach. The impact of a national strategy in breaking the cycle of disadvantage could be very substantial. This would require substantial financial resources over and above what has been available up to now. Ultimately it would need to be underwritten by the State, both in terms of financial contribution and general organisation.

Osborne and Leith (2000) strongly recommended the introduction of a National Access Strategy

“The case for a National Strategy can, therefore, be briefly summarised:

- While the universities have had the opportunity to innovate and develop their own approaches to widening access and each is starting to bear fruit, it is now time to pool expertise and establish best practice in order to deliver national objectives and to put the interests of students first.
- There is an identified task for a fuller development across the third level sector of what has been called in this paper 'the rhetoric of access' to be developed in order to present a robust explanation of and rationale for widening access inside institutions and to the public.



- There is an urgent need to extend widening access across all third level institutions. Currently, the opportunity to participate in such a scheme is a result of the geography of universities. A national policy ought to promote equity in geographical access to widening access that of necessity, therefore, must incorporate all third level institutions. ....
- The issues of mutual recognition and transferability of access activities requires an agreed and transparent framework. This activity must be located in the wider moves to create frameworks for all post school activities. ....”

This was echoed by the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education:

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

The primary goal of the National Office of Equity of Access to Education will be to put in place and oversee an integrated national programme to bring about significant improvement in equity in access to higher education among the target groups. The primary focus of the National Office would be on measures at third level.

The specific objectives would be to ensure that:

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

### *6.10.1 Functions of the National Office*

- The principal function will be to facilitate access to higher education to advise on policy development, to allocate funds, to monitor the implementation of the national programme at all levels through the centralised collection of performance indicator data.
- The National Office will seek to achieve acceptance at whole-community level of the value of a broader intake into third level. The National Office will establish linkages with the Registrars of the institutions and the network of Access/Disability Officers of the institutions. The National Office will promote and facilitate linkages between the higher education institutions and with schools, Partnerships and Community Groups, the structures envisaged in the White Paper on Adult Education and other groups.
- The National Office will work with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland in developing a framework for access, including recognition and transferability.
- The National Office should commission and promote research in relation to access issues impacting on the students in the target groups. The implications of “poverty proofing” in terms of policy, process, attitudes and behaviours at the point of delivery need to be clarified if the requirement is to be realised in the delivery of appropriate services to young people at risk.

### **National Office**

Following approval from the Minister for Education and Science, a National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education is being set up at present within the HEA framework, based on the recommendation in the Report of the Action Group on Access. The new office is to focus particularly on access issues. As part of its brief, it will put in place and oversee an integrated national programme to bring about a significant improvement in equality access to third level education in general. It is expected that, in this context, the National Office will consider in depth the issues that arise in relation to the various access programmes that are already in place. It should lead the way in developing a national strategy on access to third level education in general. It will be well positioned to identify and introduce best practice in this area. It is envisaged that the new office will work in close liaison with the Department of Education and Science and other interested parties with a view to making proposals and overseeing the implementation of a national programme.



According to the HEA

The principal functions of the National Office will be to:

- facilitate access to higher education
- to advise on policy development
- to allocate funds (e.g. the Special Fund for Students with Disabilities, the Millennium Partnership Fund for Disadvantage)
- to monitor the implementation of the national programme at all levels through the centralised collection of performance indicator data.

The specific funding for which the National Office will be responsible is the allocations to publicly funded third-level institutions and other organisations seeking funding such as Partnership and Community Groups – this will include NIP funding and the continuation of the funding available in the HEA's targeted access initiatives and could be added to by private contributions.

### Ombudsman

Some universities have in place an ombudsman type position, the role of which is to act as an advocate for individual students with problems usually of a personal nature. The Ombudsman is a person with long experience of university life and acts in an independent, informal and highly confidential manner. This role, which is a variation on a system used widely in US colleges, has much to recommend it. The Review Team considers that it might usefully be looked at by other universities.

### Anonymous Marking

The subject of anonymous marking was raised before the Review Team on a few occasions. Opinions within the universities seem to be divided on the merits of this approach.





# **chapter two**

**Equality of Opportunity  
in Employment within  
Universities**



In the application of equality of opportunity in employment the universities act as employers and they are subject to the same statutory requirements that apply to employers generally. They have committed themselves in their written policies to following best practice in this respect. Universities have the potential to exert a big influence in society, both as service providers and as centres of knowledge. In the research that they can carry out on issues in society, and as important institutions in their own right, universities can have a substantial impact as centres of excellence in employment practice.

There is a real gap for the universities to make up as employers. They are bound by the legislation which requires that they should not discriminate on any of the nine grounds covered by the Equal Status legislation<sup>18</sup> and the Universities Act requires universities:

- to promote gender balance and equality of opportunity among students and employees of the university.

While the documents submitted to the Team, covered the area of discrimination on grounds of gender (and to a lesser extent disability), there was little or no reference to policies to ensure that equality was being promoted actively under the other main heads.

In the Higher Education sector relatively few women occupy senior teaching and research posts. Just over 1 in 4 of all those occupying senior teaching and research posts in the EU are women. Four Member States – Belgium, Germany, Ireland and the Netherlands – are considerably below the EU average of 26%, with no more than 15% of any of the senior positions of professor, assistant professor and associate professor held by women. Across the EU the proportion of female assistant professors ranges considerably from 45% in Finland down to 13% in Germany. The range is similar at the next grade of associate professor, with Finland again having the highest percentage at 44%, and Ireland the lowest at 8%. The range narrows considerably at the most senior level of full professor, with a high of 18% female full professors in Finland down to a low of 6% in Germany, the Netherlands and Austria, and 5% in Ireland.<sup>19</sup>

The practice in Finland, in relation to gender, is a good illustration of best practice elsewhere. In Finland, every committee or official body must have at least 40% of the other gender, and this applies in universities. Some 35% of the higher teaching staff are women, in Ireland a little over 10%. Last year, some 46% of new PhDs in Finland were women. Here also extensive changes were made to the rules to ensure that family or other personal obligations were not allowed act as a barrier.

---

18 gender, marital status; age; disability; race; sexual orientation; religious belief; and membership of the Traveller Community.

19 Women in public research and higher education in Europe *Statistics in focus Science and Technology* 7/2001 Eurostat



It is important to acknowledge the wider significance (albeit part symbolic) for universities in ensuring employment equality. In particular, there is a difficulty with bringing students into an environment where their potential role models might be seen to be less valued or operating on the fringes. It should be recognised that this sends negative signals to undergraduates (the majority of whom are now female).

In the universities, representation of women in the higher grades, particularly the higher academic grades is poor. The Team sought to ascertain what these reasons might be and what efforts are being made to deal with this situation, but there is an absence of meaningful data, over time. This means that, even if there are successes, it is very difficult to identify them.

Although figures are not available uniformly for non-academic staff in the universities, it did appear to the Team that the proportion of women in higher grades was probably somewhat better.

### Promotion Issues

The most active research programme on the position of women in academic life is that undertaken by the Women in Science initiative of the European Union. The European Union's 6th Framework Programme "Science and Society" has funding for various measures to strengthen the role of woman researchers in the European research field. Special funding is provided towards supporting enhanced mobility of women in science, strengthening their participation in research projects in the private sector and towards creating strategies dealing with gender equality in both scientific organisations and in the private sector.

Documents produced by the Women in Science group outline the "Leaky Pipeline" phenomenon.<sup>20/21</sup> Equal numbers of each gender start at the bottom of the promotion ladder, but at the top the numbers are overwhelmingly male. The question is why so few women attain promotion. One of the suggestions put forward is that, as promotion for academics is largely on the basis of research, women are promoted later, because they have taken time out for family reasons and have lost out on opportunities for research. Another possibility is that they are unable to undertake the same amount of research as men because when time is short and women have both teaching and research obligations, teaching is more likely to be allocated the scarce time available. Also many of the requirements for posts involve significant overseas experience. Given that women usually tend to have more caring obligations than men, spending time abroad may be more difficult, so this requirement may work to disadvantage women.

---

20 *Source Science Policies in the European Union. Promoting Excellence through mainstreaming gender equality*  
European Commission 2000

21 *Women and Scientific Employment: Current Perspectives from the UK Science Studies 1/2002*

Other possible explanations for the poor representation of women at higher levels may, in some circumstances, be linked to the very structure of the university itself. The areas of study where men dominate are normally in the faculties: Agriculture, Engineering, Medicine, Veterinary, where numbers are smaller, but they have access to the same number of promotion posts. In many case, they have access to the greater amounts of research funding, whereas the faculties where women predominate such as Arts, have much less access to research funding, and at the same time, fewer promotion posts.

In two universities, the criteria for promotion are in the course of review. It is proposed that another criterion such as “service to the community” might be added to the usual ones of excellence in teaching and research. This is to be welcomed, as it can be the time spent working in areas such as access or equality which has made the achievement of the more traditional academic markers difficult.

Research<sup>22</sup> has highlighted the difficulty in removing the barriers to promotion and perceived success in universities. These barriers are reinforced by the special dimensions of the academic profession:

- A large degree of professional autonomy;
- An isolationist, competitive culture and
- The nature of management at departmental levels.

The imbalance in appointments to senior positions would seem to be an appropriate agenda item for the Conference of Heads of Universities (CHIU). At a minimum, it is reasonable to ask that the Conference should address this as a common issue and identify the reasons why there is such an imbalance.

### Interview Boards

In general terms, training for interviewing is not compulsory. Instead much reliance was placed on the interview panel being provided with written guidance. While considerable care is taken in appointing interview boards, (in one university the composition of the board must be agreed by the Governing Authority) there does not seem to be a process of monitoring the interview process. Guidelines provided by the Equality Authority suggests that this should always be done.

In some cases the Team were made aware of particular steps taken to facilitate the interviewing of potential staff members with disabilities.

---

22 Academia and the Reproduction of Unequal Opportunities for Women. Barbara Bagihole Science Studies 1/2002.



### Role of an Equality Officer

One university has an Equality Director, who reports directly to the president and monitors the implementation of equality policies and procedures. Two other universities are actively seeking to appoint an Equality Officer. In the other universities the equality agenda is administered by the Human Resource officers, on the basis that this is a responsibility for all managers within the system. Efforts are made to train and support managers in their managerial role. The Team is of the view that the role of an Equality Officer is essential in driving the equality programme.

Two universities, UCD and DCU, are currently undertaking equality audits with the help and support of the Equality Authority. This is funded under the Equality for Women heading in the National Development Plan although the audit will cover all of the grounds for discrimination covered in legislation. The audit is driven by a Partnership Committee within each university, which includes trade unions, and is undertaken with the help of qualified auditors, which the university itself has chosen from a panel suggested. These audits will cover policies, practices and procedures within the institution. They should have the effect of gathering data and making real information available, and will also result in an Action Plan, which should be accepted by the university and reviewed on a regular basis.

Comments were made to the Review Team about a range of other matters such as the provision of crèche facilities, replacements for maternity leave and staff access to library facilities. Some of the additional or improved facilities sought could have significant budget implications for individual universities. Ultimately the authorities must strive to maintain a balance between the differing priorities, while matching best practice as far as possible.

It might be said in some situations that the equality strategies of the universities are driven primarily by a desire to keep within the law (i.e. to avoid litigation re discrimination on recruitment). In a similar vein, the family-friendly policies for the most part seem to provide the statutory minimum, although not always. A good equality strategy should do more than attempt to meet basic legal requirements within the financial and other constraints that exist. It should, in particular, actively address the difficulties, structural and otherwise, that certain categories of staff experience in securing posts or advancement. The culture of the place of employment is the driver in achieving equality goals.

The United Kingdom has recently established the Equality Challenge Unit which is designed to assist universities and colleges as employers, and recognised trade unions, to ensure equality in all aspects of employment practice. In a recent<sup>23</sup> publication guidance is provided on how action plans might be developed.

- Action plans should promote diversity, cover processes to determine how different groups are treated under current policies and practices, and establish means for determining the reasons for any unequal treatment.
- Action plans and implementation arrangements should include: a set of targets, goals or desired outcomes (both qualitative and quantitative); the procedures for monitoring progress towards these outcomes; clear definitions of responsibility and accountability for taking action; identification of the resources allocated to specific actions; and a timetable for implementation of actions.
- Targets should be specific, measurable, achievable, resourced and time-based.
- Collection of workforce monitoring data will be vital in enabling local partners to analyse their current situation, take appropriate action and review progress towards goals.

#### Queen's Gender Initiative<sup>24</sup>

This was established at Queen's University, Belfast in 1999 after a series of focus groups to which all female staff were invited and in which 600 women participated. The programme is overseen by a Professor who reports to the Vice Chancellor and the Women's Forum. The initiative works across all of the key areas of difficulty including equal pay, culture, promotions, childcare. One of the most successful practices has been the mentoring of junior women by senior colleagues outside their department (this is based on a model developed at the University of Edinburgh).

#### Employing People with Disabilities

AHEAD has highlighted the presence of policies within the universities on the employment of people with disabilities. In some cases, policies relate to both students and staff, and in a few cases to staff particularly. No university appears to have met the recommended quota of 3 per cent. This is a disappointing performance.

#### Employing Ethnic Minorities

There is an absence of statistics on the position of members of minority ethnic groups as staff in Irish colleges. There appears to be an under-representation of minority ethnic groups as academic, administrative or ancillary staff. This has implications for the employment prospects of members of these groups. It also means that there is a lack of role models for students from minority ethnic groups in Irish colleges, which may accentuate the impression that Irish colleges are not diverse and welcoming places for members of minority ethnic groups.

---

24 <http://www.qub.ac.uk/qgi/Aboutus.html>

# chapter three | Conclusions and Recommendations





The case of equality of access to higher education is based on economic as well as social and cultural grounds. Economically, the community in general benefits from greater emphasis and greater provision for education. Socially, greater participation by the disadvantaged is justified as a personal entitlement while it also increases social well being and solidarity. In assessing the initiatives taken by universities, it is important to have regard to the wider context of progress being made generally in recent years towards improving equality in society. There is a greater awareness than before and the importance of social inclusion has been headlined in successive national agreements.

As far as policy statements are concerned, universities have sought to respond in a positive manner to equality requirements both in relation to students and employees. The policy statements, without exception, represent an acceptable commitment to good standards and the Team was of the view that they met best practice norms, and could usefully be a guide in other countries.

There are constraints outside the remit of the university authorities, which restrict their capability to achieve more significant results on the ground. This is particularly obvious in the case of student access where financial resources and ultimately Government policies on financial support for students will largely determine the extent to which greater progress can be made in the years ahead.

There have been repeated commitments over the years to increase the numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds entering third-level. The recent public debate has created a new expectation of substantial improvement. The existing system of student support, however, begs the question whether State policy is making the best possible contribution within the constraints of available financial resources. In particular, aspects of the means test are open to challenge. The scale of supports targeted towards those who are most in need is small and cannot on its own bring about fundamental change. The evidence suggests that there has been a widening gap in recent years between the cost of attending university and the level of financial support from the State. This reality has acted as a further deterrent to disadvantaged students. The improvements announced recently by the Minister for Education and Science will go some way towards bridging this gap.



## Recommendations

In the light of its examination, the Equality Review Team makes the following recommendations:

NATIONAL	<p>1. The National Strategy on access to universities and third level institutions in general should be initiated.</p> <p>The central responsibility for this development should rest with the National Office for Equity of Access for Higher Education (the National Office) in cooperation with the individual universities.</p>	
DATA/ PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT	<p>2. It is time to establish benchmark data on access, on a standardised basis and to develop an organised network between universities, and third level institutions in general, for improvement of statistical information and research and the elimination of overlap. The data must be of good quality.</p> <p>3. Funding for access initiatives should be linked in some manner to performance. These initiatives are expensive and it is important that value for money indicators are established.</p> <p>4. Each university should have an equality plan, which sets out explicit and challenging targets and timetables, as well as the names of those responsible for delivery. This information should be publicly available.</p>	<p>National Office and Universities</p> <p>Universities</p> <p>Universities</p>
ACCESS INITIATIVES	<p>5. Extension of access initiatives should be a priority for the HEA, in so far as financial constraints allow. Access initiatives should be funded on a multiannual (at least three years) basis to give them greater continuity. The funding should be part of the core funding of the university, but it should be ring fenced. Individual universities should continue to contribute towards the cost of additional initiatives through matching finance (not necessarily on a 50/50 basis).</p>	<p>HEA and Universities</p>

- |          |   |  |
|----------|---|--|
| 6.       | The position of staff who administer these initiatives should be put on a more secure footing.  | HEA and Universities                                 |
| 7.       | Universities, as institutions, must make the commitment to implement the full range of equality policies, including access, recruitment and promotion. The policies should be compatible and coherent.  | Universities   |
| 8.       | <p>The aspirations and achievements of students at second level and how they relate to entry into third level raises a wide range of issues. The Team recommends</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designated disadvantaged second level schools should focus on university education at an earlier stage and involve career guidance teachers in providing information and advice. This will require increased investment in career guidance.</li> <li>• If subjects are not generally available at Higher Level, every effort should be made to provide an alternative arrangement.</li> </ul> | Department of Education and Science and Universities |
| 9.       | The universities should be encouraged to develop and extend their relationships with second level schools in their area to promote opportunities at third level.  | Universities   |
| 10.      | The issues surrounding the inclusion of a premium in favour of disadvantaged third level students within the State grant support system should be further explored by the HEA, in conjunction with the National Office  | HEA and National Office                              |
| TRAINING | 11. Training of recruitment personnel and heads of departments should be a short term target. Long term, the target is the mandatory training of all personnel in equality issues. All personnel (including academic personnel) should be required to attend periodic briefings on equality issues. This should be part of the Equality Plan and details published accordingly.   | Universities   |



	12.	There should be on going professional development for Access Officers.	Universities
REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS	13.	The issue of fees and fee categories for refugees and asylum seekers and their children should be clarified for the universities. The Department of Education and Science should ensure standard guidelines are available and understood by the universities.	Department of Education and Science
	14.	Universities should take account of the particular needs of refugees and the barriers they face in seeking access to third level education.	Universities
STUDENTS	15.	Foundation courses or other access courses, offered to students to prepare them for academic life should be properly accredited, and part of a nationally recognised path of access, transfer and progression.	Universities and National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
	16.	Internal communication in the universities needs to be reviewed and improved so that students are always aware of formal policies and support measures available. This should be the responsibility of each individual university.	Universities
	17.	Students proposing to enter, or who have entered, university through access programmes should be provided with appropriate guidance to make them aware of opportunities to participate and progress in higher education.	Universities
MATURE STUDENTS	18.	The flexibility of the university's response to mature students needs must be increased.	Universities
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY	19.	Liaison between the designated disability officers and individual faculties is critical to supporting students with disabilities.	Universities
	20.	Application of the "Universal Design Principle" should be a guiding principle of any capital spending.	HEA and Universities

**EMPLOYMENT  
EQUALITY  
PROCEDURES**

- |     |   |                 |
|-----|---|-----------------|
| 21. | The administration of ESF funding support for students with disabilities should be reviewed and made more transparent   | National Office |
| 22. | There should be much greater pooling of assistive technologies.   | Universities    |
| 23. | Effective action needs to be taken by universities to deal with the gender imbalance in higher staff positions. This issue should be a standing item on the agenda of CHIU. | CHIU            |

**REPORTING**

- |     |   |              |
|-----|---|--------------|
| 24. | Proper monitoring of all who apply for vacancies or for promotion is essential. There should be systematic recording of all applicants.   | Universities |
| 25. | In accordance with its responsibilities, the HEA should commission or undertake a further statutory review within five years at most. This review should assess progress made by each university in implementing its equality policies. |              |

# Appendix 1



## Bibliography

- Academia and the Reproduction of Unequal Opportunities for Women. Barbara Bagilhole *Science Studies* 1/2002
- *Access and Equity in Higher Education* prepared for HEA by Professor Malcolm Skilbeck – May 2000
- AHEAD
- *Building the Picture: The role of data in achieving Equality.* Ursula Barry Women's Education Research and Resource Centre. University College Dublin. Equality Authority May 2000
- *Charting our Education Future.* White Paper on Education 1995
- *College Entry in Focus: A Fourth National Survey of Access to Higher Education.* Patrick Clancy HEA 2001
- *Commission on the Points System.* Final Report and Recommendations 1999.
- *DOING IT DIFFERENTLY! Addressing Racism and Discrimination Against Members of Minority Ethnic Groups in Higher Education in Ireland.* Higher Education Equality Unit November 1999
- Discussion Document Towards a National Framework of Qualifications. Response from the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities (C.H.I.U.) to National Qualifications Authority of Ireland. 4th February 2002
- *Evaluation of the Targeted Initiative on Widening Access for Young People from Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Backgrounds.* Report to HEA by Professor Robert Osborne and Ms Helen Leith. September 2000
- *Learning for Life:* White Paper on Adult Education 2001
- *Partnership for Equality: Action for Higher Education* 2003
- *Report of Inaugural Meeting Educational Disadvantage Forum.* November 2002
- *Report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education.* May 2001
- Report to HEA on Equality Policies 2000 – 2003 (reports submitted by all seven universities on foot of statutory obligation on HEA to promote the attainment of equality of opportunity in higher education)
- *Science Policies in the European Union.* Promoting Excellence through mainstreaming gender equality European Commission 2000
- *Social Background of Higher Education Entrants.* Patrick Clancy and Joy Wall HEA 2000
- Summary of All Initiatives Funded By the Department to help Alleviate Educational Disadvantage. Department of Education and Science 2002

- Survey on Participation rates of and provision for students with disabilities in higher education for 1998/99. AHEAD
- *The Finnish success in PISA-* and some reasons behind it: PISA 2000 Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä 2002
- *Women and Science: Review of the situation in Ireland* Helsinki Group on women and science. Irish report by Jacqueline Allan, FORFAS July 2001
- Women and Scientific Employment: Current Perspectives from the UK *Science Studies* 1/2002
- Women in public research and higher education in Europe Statistics in focus *Science and Technology* 7/2001 Eurostat

# Appendix 2



## Details of Members of the Review Group

### Chairperson

Mr. Maurice O'Connell Former Governor of the Central Bank of Ireland.

Dr. Tony Crooks, Chief Executive, Area Development Management Ltd.

Dr. Tony Crooks has been the Chief Executive of Area Development Management Ltd since its establishment by the Irish Government and European Commission in late 1992.

Previously, Dr. Crooks was a research senior lecturer in education in Trinity College Dublin and the Deputy Director of its Curriculum Development Unit. He has published several books including "The Challenge of Change" (1984) and the "Changing Curriculum" (1987). In 1991, he was seconded from Trinity College to the Department of an Taoiseach as a member of the co-ordinating team for an area based response to long-term unemployment.

Dr. Maureen Gaffney

Dr. Maureen Gaffney has a range of experience and expertise in the area of social policy, and in particular in relation to equality. She is currently Chair of the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) which advises government on economic and social policies, particularly in relation to poverty and social exclusion. She is also Chair of the National Monitoring Committee of the Programme for Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development (RAPID), which will target the most disadvantaged areas in Ireland for development under the National Development Plan. She is a Council member of the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). She served as a Law Reform Commissioner from 1986-1996.

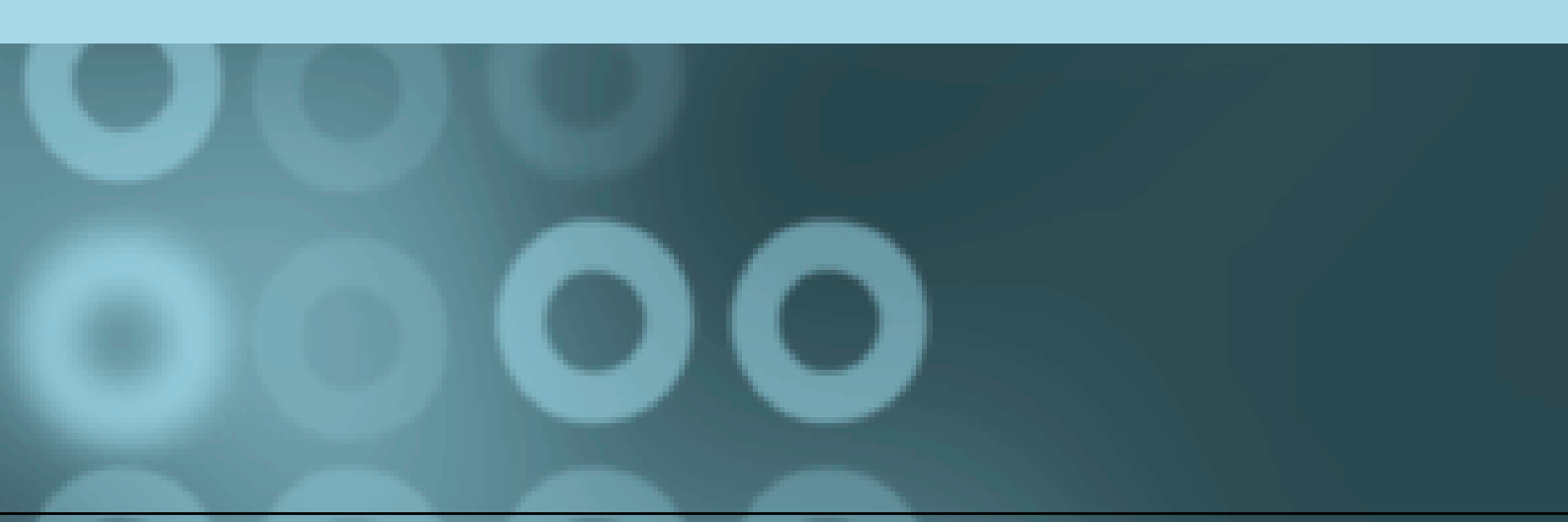
Professor Ossi V. Lindqvist. Chairperson, Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council.

The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council is an independent expert body assisting universities, polytechnics and the Ministry of Education in matters relating to evaluation. The scope of the Council's activities covers twenty university level institutions and a total of thirty polytechnics.

Ms. Laura Lundy, School of Law, Queen's University, Belfast.

Ms Lundy is a senior lecturer in law at Queen's University, Belfast. She has been a member of the Lord Chancellor's Legal Aid Advisory Committee, Vice Chair of Law Centre (NI) and an Equal Opportunities Commissioner for Northern Ireland. She was chair of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's Working Party on Education Rights for the Bill of Rights and acted as a consultant to the Department of Education's Working Group on Equality, Human Rights and New Targeting Social Need in relation to school admissions.







**The Higher Education Authority**

An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas

Marine House, Clanwilliam Court, Dublin 2.

Tel: +353 1 661 2748 Fax: +353 1 661 0492

Lo-Call: 1890 200 637

e-mail: [info@hea.ie](mailto:info@hea.ie)

website: [www.hea.ie](http://www.hea.ie)