



TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION INTO UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES LEADING TO UNIVERSITY AWARDS

A STUDY UNDERTAKEN ON BEHALF OF

**NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY OF IRELAND
IRISH UNIVERSITIES ASSOCIATION
HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

BY
MC IVER CONSULTING

HEA

Higher Education Authority
An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas

IUA

Irish Universities Association
Cumann Ollcoileanna Éireann



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Document Number: 2006/7

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Published by:
National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
5th Floor Jervis House, Jervis Street, Dublin 1

September, 2006

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland is to facilitate and advise existing universities in implementing access, transfer and progression procedures, and review their implementation in consultation with the Higher Education Authority.

Since the launch of the National Framework of Qualifications in October 2003 and the associated policies on access, transfer and progression for learners, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland has been working with stakeholders on the implementation of the Framework and associated access, transfer and progression policies. The policy approach of the Qualifications Authority is to adopt a co-ordinating role in facilitating the web of transfer and progression arrangements and routes across and between the various elements of the system at a macro level.

The National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education, based in the Higher Education Authority, has responsibilities in planning, implementing and reviewing initiatives to achieve equity of access to higher education.

In discussions on the implementation of the policies on access, transfer and progression for learners, the HEA, the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities (now the Irish Universities Association) and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland have identified arrangements for transfer and progression of those with FETAC or equivalent awards, and UK vocational education and training awards (made following programmes completed in Ireland) into undergraduate programmes leading to university Honours Bachelor Degree awards as being a key aspect of the enhancement of transfer and progression.

Mclver Consulting was commissioned by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland to undertake a study on transfer and progression arrangements, on behalf of a group of organisations made up of itself, the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities and the Higher Education Authority.

1.2 Access, Transfer and Progression

The concepts of access, transfer and progression are defined in the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999:

- Access – the process by which learners may commence a course of education and training having received recognition for knowledge, skill or competence required.
- Transfer – the process by which learners may transfer from one programme of education and training to another programme having received recognition for knowledge, skill or competence acquired.
- Progression – the process by which learners may transfer from one programme of education and training to another programme, where each programme is of a higher level than the preceding programme.

However, most university sector institutions consulted used the term "transfer" to encompass some of what is referred to as "progression" in this legislative definition.

- Most institutions in the sector refer to entry on the basis of a Higher Certificate, an Ordinary Bachelor Degree, various awards by professional organisations and various awards of UK origin, as transfer rather than progression. The vast majority of students admitted on this basis are given advanced entry (i.e. entry into a year beyond first year), implicitly positioning them at an academic level similar to that of students transferring mid-course from one Honours Bachelor Degree course to another, despite formal differences in qualifications.
Admissions processes are also generally similar to those for students transferring mid-course between Honours Bachelor Degree courses.
- A minority of institutions use the term "transfer", loosely, to also encompass progression from qualifications such as FETAC (NCVA) Level 5 into the first year of Honours Bachelor Degree courses.
- Many in the university sector use the terms "transfer" and "progression" interchangeably, or as having overlapping meanings.

This report follows the practice seen at the majority of institutions, by referring to admission on the basis of the following qualifications as transfer, rather than progression:

- Higher Certificate;
- Ordinary Bachelor Degree;

- Qualifications of professional organisations, whether Irish based or international; and
- Qualifications of UK origin obtained through study at Irish further education institutions, primarily Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND).

The report refers to entry on the basis of FETAC (NCVA) Level 5, and other cases where entry into first year is the rule, as progression.

1.3 Transfer and Progression in Context

The research shows that numbers transferring and progressing into Honours Bachelor Degree courses at university sector institutions from non-school leaver backgrounds are low in comparison with those progressing on the basis of the Leaving Certificate.

- In academic year 2002/03, university sector institutions had 17,359 first time undergraduate entrants¹, a number which will not have changed greatly in subsequent years.
- This study has identified 554 students progressing or transferring into the sector from further education and similar backgrounds in 2004/05. While it will not have identified all students entering on mature grounds or students with a disability following such qualifications, it is apparent that the numbers involved cannot amount to more than about 4% of first time entrants.
- This study has identified 630 students transferring or progressing from HETAC and similar backgrounds in 2004/05. This number amounts to less than 4% of entrants.
- The study has identified 24 students progressing or transferring from UK backgrounds². This number is small, amounting to approximately 0.1% of entrants.

Numbers transferring and progressing are also low in comparison with most other countries. This appears to reflect a range of factors, including the following:

- There is a lack of a culture of mobility at undergraduate level. Irish students mostly move away from home only if the type of course they want is unavailable locally.
- Undergraduate level transfer between institutions mostly only happens where students are forced to move by a lack of opportunity

¹ Source: HEA

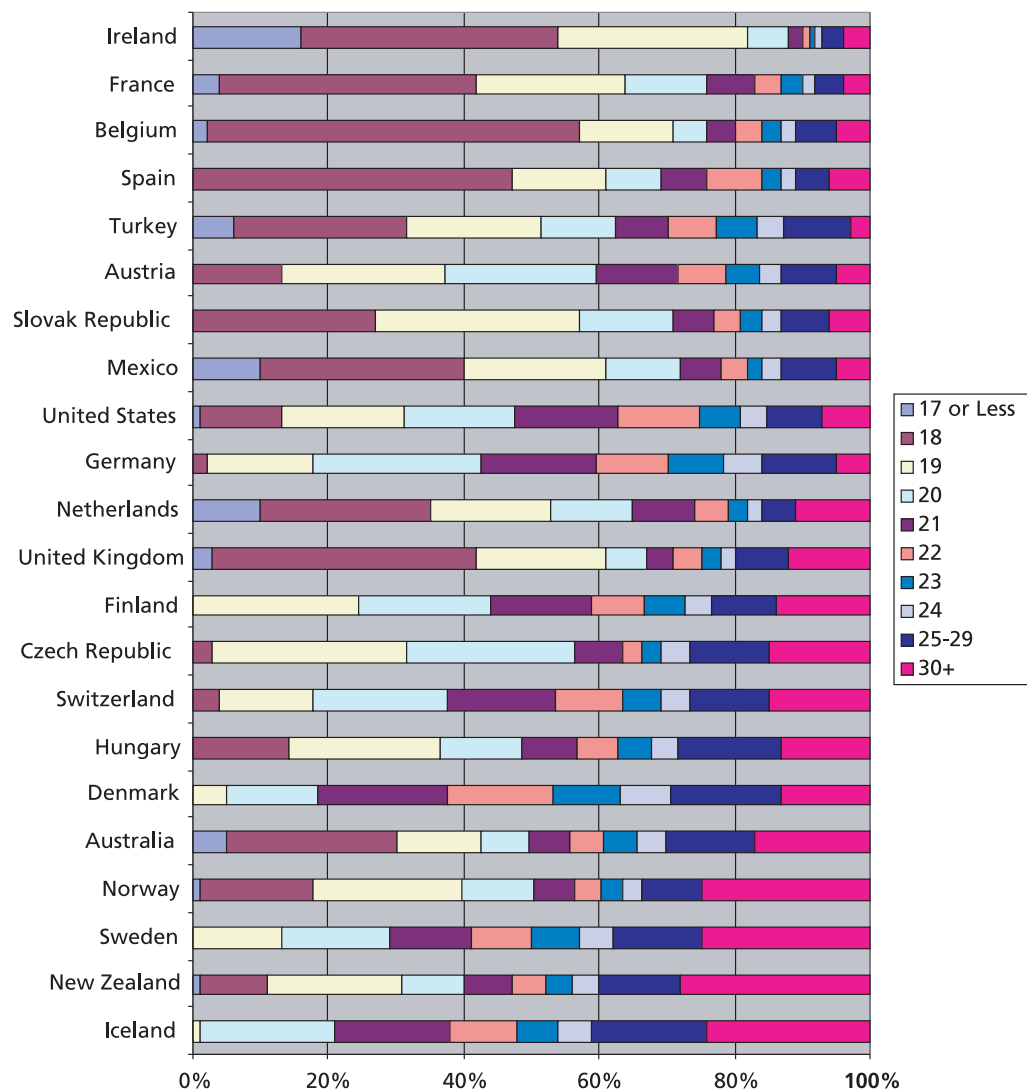
² Note that it is known from interviews with institutions that some students progressing from Northern Ireland institutions were included under the further education heading, rather than the UK heading.

to continue studying at the same institution. Most commonly, this comes about where there is no provision, or a shortage of provision, for students graduating with a Higher Certificates or Ordinary Bachelor Degrees in a discipline to progress to add-on qualifications at the same institution.

- There is a culture of entering college directly upon leaving school, rather than delaying, and possibly obtaining another qualification in the meantime.
- There is a relatively low rate of entry by mature students.

The young age at which Irish students enter college, and the relatively small numbers of mature students, are reflected in OECD statistics for ages of new entrants, which may be seen in Figure 1.1. Ireland stands out as having the youngest entrants to tertiary education of any of the twenty-two countries for which data are provided.

Figure 1.1 Age Mix of New Entrants of Tertiary Education by Country



Countries are sorted according to the % of entrants aged 24 or less.
Source: Based on data for 2003 from OECD Education Database.

The issues around transfer into the university sector from HETAC and DIT qualifications are limited in extent.

- Total numbers actually transferring are stable or falling, and there is no general evidence of pent-up, unsatisfied demand.

- Mechanisms for transfer from HETAC and DIT qualifications are long established. They mostly handle such low volumes of applications from students meeting basic requirements that they can practicably be administered on a case-by-case basis. The small numbers of courses that take significant numbers of transfer students have well established procedures for doing so.
- Specific areas identified where there appears to be unsatisfied demand are limited to Ordinary Bachelor Degree graduates in Civil Engineering and also Higher Certificate and Ordinary Bachelor Degree graduates from courses at private colleges.
 - The main issue with Civil Engineering is of a general shortage of places on add-on Honours Bachelor Degree courses at Institutes of Technology.
 - While there appears to be significant unsatisfied demand from students at private colleges for transfer into the university sector, and while some of the obstacles to transfer are administrative, institutions do not anticipate that they would accept substantial numbers even if these administrative obstacles were eliminated.

The primary policy issues that arise are around progression (and in some cases transfer) from qualifications obtained in a further education and training context.

- Structured mechanisms for progression and transfer from FETAC qualifications, and from other qualifications obtained in a further education context, have been available for only a short period, and are developing rapidly. It is likely that the number of students taking these routes has increased since 2004/05 (the academic year for which statistics were collected), as more institutions have got involved, as routes into more courses have been developed, and as quotas of places have increased.
- There is potential demand for significantly larger numbers to progress and transfer from qualifications obtained in a further education and training context to study in the university sector.
 - In a limited number of areas, demand from students meeting the basic criteria for progression already far exceeds the quota of places available.
 - In other areas, it may be possible to widen and/or relax criteria, while still maintaining satisfactory standards for entry.
 - As further education becomes better established as a route into the university sector, it is likely that it will attract more students whose intention is to use it for progression.

- o Currently, there are no mechanisms for progression into the university sector from FETAC qualifications other than the Level 5 and 6 qualifications originating with NCVA. (For example, those qualifying at Level 6 after apprenticeships are not eligible for progression or transfer.) If mechanisms were established for other FETAC qualifications at Levels 5 and 6, this might increase demand for progression and transfer significantly.
- As FETAC continues its work on developing a new system of awards within the National Framework of Qualifications, there may be a need for changes to the current 8-module, pass/merit/distinction model for FETAC/NCVA Level 5 qualifications that will make it necessary for the university sector to revisit current criteria for eligibility for progression, even in the absence of other developments.
- There are a number of areas where there are particular obstacles to progression from FETAC qualifications, prominent among them high points healthcare courses where there are very few places made available, and Honours Bachelor Degree courses in education, where Department of Education & Science requirements mean that few can qualify for entry other than on purely the basis of their Leaving Certificate.

1.4 Terms of Reference

The brief for the study was to focus on entry into Honours Bachelor Degree courses in the university sector through transfer from HETAC awards, through progression from FETAC or equivalent awards, and entry from UK further education and higher education awards.

The terms of reference were to address the following questions for each of these routes into the university sector.

- What are the existing transfer and progression routes?
- How and why did they develop?
- What routes are developing now?
- Who travels the transfer and progression routes, generally over the last 5 years or so?
- Student profiles and number linked to particular course/disciplines
- What is the experience – successful or not, and why is that?
- What is working? Why?
- What is not working? Why?

- Learner perspective
- Institutional perspective

The specific focus on the university sector, as opposed to the wider higher education sector, in the Terms of Reference reflects the fact that there was perceived to be a particular need for research to underpin the development of transfer and progression in the university sector.

1.5 National Framework of Qualifications

The National Framework of Qualifications has been established by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland under the Qualifications Act of 1999. The framework is organised into ten levels, with one or more award types being available at each level. The following award positionings are particularly relevant to the current study.

- FETAC (NCVA) Level 3 (previously NCVA National Foundation Certificate) – Level 3
- FETAC (NCVA) Level 4 (previously NCVA National Vocational Certificate Level 1) – Level 4
- FETAC (NCVA) Level 5 (previously NCVA National Vocational Certificate Level 2) – Level 5
- Specific Skills Certificate – Range of Levels, from 3 to 5
- FETAC (NCVA) Level 6 (previously NCVA National Vocational Certificate Level 3) – Level 6
- National Skills Certificate – Range of Levels, from 4 to 6
- Special Skills Certificate – Level 6
- National Craft Certificate – Level 6
- Higher Certificate – Level 6
- National Certificate and DIT Certificate (now discontinued) – Level 6
- Ordinary Bachelor Degree – Level 7
- National Diploma and DIT Diploma (now discontinued) – Level 7
- Honours Bachelor Degree – Level 8

The Leaving Certificate is positioned at Levels 4 and 5.

Further information is available from the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (<http://www.nqai.ie>).

1.6 Methodology

The main elements of the methodology were as follows:

- Reviewing relevant published material;
- A detailed survey (or "Request for Information") of each of the institutions in the sector (seven universities and eleven other institutions);
- Detailed interviews at each institution in the sector; and
- Collation and analysis of the information collected.

The survey instrument was made up of two parts: a "request for specific information" on transfer and progression mechanisms and for data on students admitted through transfer and progression routes, and an outline of the issues to be addressed in subsequent interviews with each institution.

The survey instrument is presented as Appendix A.

The universities covered by the research were as follows.

- Dublin City University (DCU)
- National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI Galway)
- National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUI Maynooth)
- Trinity College Dublin (TCD)
- University College Cork (UCC)
- University College Dublin (UCD)
- University of Limerick (UL)

The other university sector institutions covered by the research were as follows.

- Church of Ireland College of Education
- Coláiste Mhuire, Marino
- Froebel College of Education
- Institute of Public Administration
- Mary Immaculate College, Limerick
- Mater Dei Institute of Education
- National College of Art and Design
- Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
- St. Angela's College, Sligo
- St. Patrick's College of Education, Drumcondra
- Shannon College of Hotel Management

All institutions responded to the "request for specific information", although in a small number of cases the response was that there were no relevant mechanisms for transfer or progression, and that no students had travelled such routes.

The consultants undertook an extensive programme of interviews, visiting all of the universities, eight of the other institutions and the National University of Ireland (NUI). The remaining institutions are inactive in transfer and progression, and felt that telephone interviews were sufficient to convey all they had to contribute.

In the course of each visit, the consultants met with staff nominated by the institution. Some of the universities organised a succession of meetings with up to ten senior staff, typically representing the registrar's office and/or admissions office, one or more of the faculties or academic departments with a particular interest in transfer and progression, and a selection of specialist officers such as the mature student officer or access officer. In smaller institutions, the consultants met with the President and/or Registrar.

A number of institutions arranged for the consultants to meet with groups of students who had entered through transfer or progression routes. In total, the consultants met approximately twenty-four students. These represented a good cross section of the entry routes addressed by the study, including:

- Entry through mechanisms for transfer from qualifications obtained at Institutes of Technology and DIT;
- Entry through mechanisms for progression from FETAC (NCVA) Level 5 qualifications; and
- Entrants on 'mature student' grounds who had undertaken studies prior to applying for entry.

1.7 This Study

The study represents a snapshot of a changing position, as it was when the research was undertaken in the first half of 2005. Many university sector institutions are developing their approaches to transfer and progression, and it is likely that some changes have taken place since the primary research was completed.

The report does not present a comprehensive list of mechanisms for transfer and progression in all institutions. It describes all the main types of mechanism, but at the level of the individual institution it often provides representative examples of mechanisms, rather than a full, detailed listing. The text makes it clear where this approach is taken.

1.8 Acknowledgements

The consultants wish to thank the institutions and the many college staff and students who contributed the research. Particular thanks are due to the staff who had the difficult job of extracting statistical information required to respond to the survey, most particularly those who extracted data on entry on 'mature student' grounds.

2. ROUTES FOR TRANSFER AND ADVANCED ENTRY PROGRESSION

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the routes that exist for transfer into undergraduate degree programmes at university sector institutions. The term "transfer" refers to instances where a student already studying beyond second level moves from one institution from another, getting some credit for their existing post second level studies.

Transfers take place under a variety of circumstances³:

- Transfers can take place between Irish university sector institutions, where a student transfers mid-course between courses in the same discipline, or cognate disciplines, in different institutions.
- Transfers can take place from a HETAC or DIT certified course to a university sector institution. Almost invariably, such transfers occur after the student has obtained an award at Level 6 or Level 7 in the National Framework of Qualifications (Higher Certificate or Ordinary Bachelor Degree or former equivalents). As with transfers between university sector institutions, transfers are generally between courses in the same discipline or in cognate disciplines. This transfer route effectively provides an alternative to obtaining an add-on Honours Bachelor Degree at an Institute of Technology.
- Transfers can take place between higher education courses at institutions in other countries and Irish university sector institutions. In principle, this happens in very much the same way as within Ireland. In practice, one of the more common circumstances is where a student visiting an Irish institution on an exchange programme such as ERASMUS decides that they wish to stay here to complete their studies.
- There are transfer arrangements from some non-FETAC qualifications that can be obtained at Irish further education institutions. Some of these qualifications are positioned as higher education in nature, at HNC or HND level, within a qualifications framework in the UK. Others are awarded by professional bodies.

2.2 How and Why Transfer Routes Developed

2.2.1 Transfer Routes between University Sector Institutions in Ireland and in Other Countries

Mechanisms for transfer from university sector institutions in Ireland and other countries into other Irish university sector institutions have a long history. There have always been cases where small numbers of students have wished to transfer for personal, family or academic reasons. Historically, colleges have been prepared to consider such applications, generally allowing the department or faculty concerned to decide on each application on the basis of their own priorities.

While the mechanisms have become somewhat more formalised over time, the numbers involved have remained small. The motivation behind them has not changed markedly.

2.2.2 Transfer from HETAC/ DIT Certified Qualifications

When the Regional Technical Colleges were established, their courses were generally of two years in duration, leading to a National Certificate. Over time, they added National Diploma courses. Ab-initio diploma courses were three years in duration. Add-on diploma courses for certificate holders were one year in duration, for a total of three years in college.

From around the mid-1990s significant numbers of add-on and four-year ab-initio degree courses were introduced. Add-on degree courses were designed for diploma holders, and were mostly of one year in duration, for a total of four years in college. A small number were two years in duration, chiefly in engineering, reflecting the fact that the Institute of Engineers in Ireland (Engineers Ireland) required add-on degree courses to be two years in duration if they were to be accredited⁴.

The Regional Technical Colleges were re-designated as Institutes of Technology in 1997 and 1998.

Developments in the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) were broadly similar to those in the Regional Technical Colleges / Institutes of Technology, but with diploma and degree programmes in place earlier.

⁴ In 2004, the Higher Certificate, the Ordinary Bachelor Degree and the Honours Bachelor Degree were introduced at Levels 6, 7 and 8 of the National Framework of Qualifications respectively. The existing National Certificate and DIT Certificate (positioned at Level 6 in the National Framework of Qualifications), the National Diploma and DIT Diploma (positioned at Level 7) and the existing Bachelor Degree were discontinued.

As student numbers in the Regional Technical Colleges grew through the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, considerable demand built up for opportunities for those graduating with certificates and diplomas to continue their studies, so as to proceed to degree level.

University sector institutions responded to the demand to varying extents.

- A small number of courses started to systematically accept significant numbers of students with certificates and, more commonly, diplomas as transfer students. Resourcing for these courses was planned on the basis that there would be a significant intake of students at a point beyond first year.
- More commonly, some departments and faculties started to regularly accept transfer applications from well-qualified Regional Technical College/Institute of Technology applicants where they had places available. As they were not providing places specifically for transfer students, the numbers involved tended to be small.
- Most departments and faculties accepted transfer applications more intermittently.

However, a greater part of the demand was satisfied by UK universities, a number of which established links with Regional Technical Colleges / Institutes of Technology.

Demand among Institute of Technology graduates for degree places outside the Institute of Technology sector peaked in the mid-1990s. It then decreased rapidly as Institutes of Technology introduced primary degree programmes of their own (and, also, opportunities to further continue studies at Masters and PhD level). This has resulted in a substantial decline in the number of graduates going abroad to study to degree level.

It has had a more modest impact on the number of graduates transferring into university sector institutions. This is for three main reasons:

1. The universities satisfied only a portion of the peak demand for transfer places, so even a substantial decrease in the number of students seeking transfers would not necessarily have a big impact on numbers transferring to universities.
2. Transfers into university sector institutions are concentrated particularly in engineering, science and business. Engineering is the discipline in which Institutes of Technology have made the least progress in introducing add-on Honours Bachelor Degrees. Also, there

has been a boom in demand for degree places in civil engineering in recent years.

3. A proportion of students studying at Institutes of Technology would appear to prefer to obtain their degree from a university. It was not possible to quantify this within the limits of the research undertaken.

In the last two to three years, new transfer mechanisms from some specific HETAC qualifications have been introduced by a small number of university sector institutions, as a part of an initiative that also establishes mechanisms for transfer from non-FETAC qualifications obtained at further education institutions. These mechanisms are addressed in the next section.

2.2.3 New Transfer Mechanisms

In the last two to three years, a small number of universities have introduced new transfer mechanisms into specific courses, that are designed to encourage transfer from specific HETAC qualifications (at Higher Certificate or Ordinary Bachelor Degree level), or specific non-FETAC qualifications typically gained in the further education sector. In many cases, a mechanism is open to graduates with one or more different HETAC qualifications, and also one or more different professional qualifications.

The non-FETAC qualifications targeted are generally associated with courses of two or more years in duration⁵. They lead to British HNC or HND qualifications, or to professional qualifications in areas such as childcare, business studies or Montessori education.

These new mechanisms were first introduced by UCC, which has been followed by NUI Maynooth.

There appear to have been a number of motivating factors.

- Local demand for transfer opportunities has been a significant factor. UCC introduced transfer routes from professional qualifications that were available from further education institutions in Cork. NUI Maynooth has introduced transfer routes from HND qualifications available from further education institutions in Dublin. The mechanisms are available to anyone who has obtained the relevant qualification – not just those at local institutions. The new mechanisms were introduced in parallel with mechanisms for progression from FETAC qualifications that could also be obtained

⁵ This contrasts with the majority of courses at these institutions, which are of one year in duration, leading to the award of a FETAC (NCVA) Level 5 (previously NCVA Level 2) award.

locally, often at the same further education institution, which are addressed in the next Chapter.

- In some cases, the college introducing the mechanism has had a particular interest in attracting students for a specific course who have already developed relevant skills and knowledge, and have demonstrated an aptitude for and interest in the discipline concerned. In some cases this has been related to low demand for the course among mainstream school leaver applicants (e.g. in electronic engineering). In others, it has been simply a matter of attracting the most suitable possible students.
- Once institutions have decided to create a specialised transfer mechanism, they have tended to be inclusive in defining who can use it. Rather than restricting the mechanism to applicants with a single specific qualification, they have tended to draw the mechanism broadly enough to encompass a number of qualifications where possible.
- Other issues have included:
 - A philosophical commitment to alternative entry route admissions on the part of colleges, as a means of combating educational disadvantage;
 - A desire to contribute to national education policy objectives, such as tackling disadvantage and implementing the National Framework of Qualifications;
 - An interest in increasing diversity among the student body in many disciplines, as a means of enhancing the educational experience;
 - A wish to create positive links with other providers of education; and
 - A general interest, in the context of increasing competition for students and the shrinking school leaving age cohort, in broadening the recruitment base, even where demand for courses among college applicants remains strong.

2.3 Transfer from HETAC and DIT Qualifications

2.3.1 Introduction

Mechanisms for transfer from HETAC and DIT qualifications operate in two main ways.

- Almost all university sector institutions are prepared to consider applications for transfer from an HETAC or DIT qualification into an honours degree course in the same discipline, and to evaluate the applications on their merits.
- Some university sector institutions have links between specified HETAC or DIT qualifications and specific courses of their own. They regularly accept students transferring through these links.

Data collected from university sector institutions identified 131 students entering on the basis of National Certificates or DIT Certificates in academic year 2004-05, and 263 entering on the basis of National Diplomas or DIT Diplomas. More detailed numbers are provided in Chapter 5.

2.3.2 Transfer Mechanisms for General Applications

For general applications by those with HETAC or DIT qualifications to transfer into university sector institutions, the decision on admission is generally based on an evaluation of the student's transcript, and on whether there is a place available in the appropriate class. Some institutions specify a minimum grade (e.g. Merit) for consideration for transfer. Others do not.

However, some departments and faculties have more restrictive criteria, and may only accept a transfer in exceptional circumstances (e.g. both from a very similar course, and with compelling personal or family reasons). Dissimilarities in approach between Institutes of Technology and universities make it that are unlikely that an applicant from a HETAC or DIT background will meet these criteria, even from a course with a similar title.

The main purposes of the transcript evaluation are:

- to evaluate how successful the student is likely to be, which will determine whether they are admitted; and
- to evaluate how much credit they should be given for the studies they have undertaken.

In some instances, a transfer applicant who is accepted is given full credit for their existing qualification, and thus may go from a (2 year) Higher Certificate into the third year of an honours degree programme, or from a (3 year) Ordinary Bachelor Degree into the fourth year of an honours degree.

Much more commonly, the applicant is given credit for one year less, so that a graduate with a Higher Certificate enters the second year of the honours degree, or a graduate with an Ordinary Bachelor Degree enters third year. These patterns of transfer are frequently referred to as "two for one" and "three for two" respectively. The underlying logic, as described by universities, is that institutions structure their courses differently, and a student transferring, for example, from second year of a course in an Institute of Technology is likely to have missed out on a significant part of what they need for third year in the same subject in a university sector institution, while perhaps being stronger than the university's students in other areas⁶.

It was also mentioned that a student transferring from an Institute of Technology will frequently not have had the CAO points to enter the university course on the basis of their Leaving Certificate, and that the extra year of study may serve to level the playing field with those who entered on the basis of their Leaving Certificate results.

The Free Fees Scheme, under which the State pays the fees of most undergraduate students⁷, supports this pattern of transfer. Generally, otherwise eligible students repeating a year have to pay their own fees for the repeat year. However, the practice is that students losing a year when transferring continue to have their fees paid under the scheme.

Occasionally, a student transferring is given less credit, or chooses voluntarily to enter an earlier year, but may still be eligible for subject exemptions.

In deciding on transfer admissions from HETAC qualifications, some university sector institutions, or departments within institutions, draw a distinction between Institutes of Technology and private colleges.

⁶ As will be seen later, the loss of a year's credit also commonly occurs in transfers between universities.

⁷ EU nationals and refugees (not asylum seekers) who have been ordinarily resident in an EU Member State for at least three of the five years preceding their entry to their third level course. Also students whose parents have been engaged in some specific types of official overseas posting. Also Volunteer Development Workers and members of the families of Volunteer Development Workers.

Admissions departments consulted for the study stressed the importance of an informative transcript in allowing them to make decisions on admission of graduates with HETAC qualifications. Some indicated that transcripts from private colleges are usually less informative than those from Institutes of Technology, and that this makes it difficult for the institution to form a well-founded view of the suitability any individual, making it difficult to offer a place to any applicant from a private college.

2.3.3 Transfer Mechanisms where Specific Links Exist

There are a number of cases across the sector where an institution has established well-defined mechanisms for students to transfer from specific HETAC and DIT qualifications into specific honours degree courses. Some of the longest standing of these (and also one of the more recent) are concentrated in Engineering.

Examples include:

- NUI Galway has such transfer mechanisms into commerce, engineering and science.
- The University of Limerick has such transfer mechanisms into a number of engineering courses.
- NUI Maynooth has recently established transfer mechanisms into its engineering courses.
- UCC has different regulations for transfer into civil engineering than for other courses. It has a specific link into biomedical sciences.
- UCD allows "HETAC progression" into a number of faculties, with significant numbers transferring into agricultural science and commerce each year.

Most of the recently established links are in caring-related disciplines such as Applied Social Studies or in Science.

In each case, the year of the course into which a student can transfer from a specific qualification is defined. In most cases, the link allows a student to move from obtaining a HETAC Ordinary Bachelor Degree into a third year of an Honours Bachelor Degree programme ("three for two"). In a minority of cases, transfer from Higher Certificate into second year of an Honours Bachelor Degree programme is also permitted ("two for one").

Approaches to defining the number of places available vary. There are three main approaches.

- In some cases, colleges define a specific number of places as being available to students transferring from a specific type of qualification.
- In other cases, colleges define a single pool of places as being available to students from more than one type of qualifications – such as specific HETAC/DIT backgrounds, specific HNC/HND qualifications, and specific qualifications awarded by professional bodies.
- In other cases, there is no limit specified. In these cases, the institution generally expects to be able to accept all of those adjudged to be suitable for transfer.

2.4 Transfer Mid-Course from University Courses

Transfers mid-course between Irish universities work on much the same mechanisms as those from Institutes of Technology to undergraduate university sector courses.

The main practical differences are as follows:

- There is a greater likelihood that the courses will be sufficiently similar so that it will not be necessary for the student transferring to lose a year. Nonetheless, the loss of a year ("three for two" or "two for one") still occurs in a majority of cases.
- In some cases, transfers between constituent universities of the National University of Ireland are looked upon more favourably than transfers from other colleges.
- Many courses in the university sector that are potentially accessible to transfers from other university sector institutions are not accessible to transfer students from HETAC/DIT backgrounds because there are no courses in the Institute of Technology/DIT sector that are sufficiently similar to allow transfer. Examples include medical and many paramedical courses, as well as some courses in the humanities and some specialist science courses.
- Some universities have more specific requirements (such as a merit in a Higher Certificate or Diploma) that prospective potential transfer students from Institutes of Technology have to meet before they can be considered than for transfer students from other universities.

Even so, the number of transfers that takes place between university sector institutions is small. This appears to reflect the fact that there is seldom an advantage to moving between similar institutions. Some students, having accepted a place away from home, would like to move to a similar course in an institution closer to home, but universities are often reluctant to facilitate students in doing this unless there is a very compelling personal or family reason for doing so. A number indicated that they tended to turn down inter-university transfer applications that would have the effect of giving a second opportunity for access to a course for which a student originally had insufficient CAO points.

2.5 Transfers from UK Degree Courses

Transfers from UK degree courses are treated much the same as transfers from within Ireland.

The numbers involved are low, with just 24 students recorded in data collected at entering on the basis of UK qualifications (although some students from further education courses in Northern Ireland may have been recorded under other headings).

A number of factors contribute to this.

- Relatively few students originating from the UK get involved in student exchange programmes with Ireland.
- Irish students who have chosen to study in the UK often do not have the CAO points required for entry into equivalent Irish university sector courses, which can debar them from transferring mid-course.
- The prevalence of three-year degree courses in the UK, compared to four-year courses in Ireland, complicates mid-course transfers.
- There are seen to be significant variations in standards between UK universities, and Irish university sector institutions tend to exclude transfers from institutions that they do not see as having standards comparable to their own.

2.6 Transfer from HNC/HND Qualifications and Qualifications Awarded by Professional Bodies

2.6.1 UK, International and Professional Awards from Courses in Further Education Colleges

In addition to providing courses leading to FETAC (NCVA) qualifications at levels 5 and 6, the further education sector in Ireland provides courses that lead to qualifications from bodies other than FETAC. Many of these are qualifications awarded by professional bodies in areas such as childcare, travel, accounting (at technician level) or alternative healthcare.

In addition, a number of further education colleges provide courses leading to UK qualifications such as Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND). An interpretation of the alignment of these awards in relation to the Irish National Framework of Qualifications is made in a note on the HNC, HND and Foundation Degree, published by National Qualifications Authority of Ireland in a commentary on a general cross-referencing of frameworks agreed between the Irish and UK regulatory authorities (the referencing is set out in the document 'Qualifications can cross boundaries', published in June 2005): "the nearest Irish awards to all these awards ... are the new Higher Certificate at level 6 of the National Framework of Qualifications, and the Advanced Certificate which is to be put in place at the same level". As the Advanced Certificate will be a FETAC award, and the Higher Certificate is awarded by HETAC, this positions the HNC and HND as straddling the boundary in the Irish qualifications framework between further and higher education.

2.6.2 Mechanisms for Transfer or Progression from These Qualifications

A number of NUI colleges have recently put in place mechanisms for entry from specific non-FETAC further education qualifications into a narrow range of degree courses. They position these entries as a form of transfer, similar to transfer from a HETAC, or similar, higher education programme.

The qualifications in question are obtained following courses of two or more years in duration. Some lead to entry into the second year of the degree programme; others to the first year of the programme, albeit with some opportunities for exemptions.

Typically, there is a quota that limits the number of students that can transfer under this mechanism. This quota may be open just to the transfer mechanism in question, or may also be open to students transferring from other qualifications.

Examples include the following:

- Transfers into second year of UCC's B.A. (Early Childhood Studies) are available from: either of two CACHE programmes related to child care; the St. Nicholas Montessori qualification; the AMI Montessori diploma or equivalent qualifications; as well as a range of HETAC and DIT qualifications.
- Transfers into the second year of UCC's B.Comm. are available from the Institute of Commercial Management Diploma in Business Studies, a two-year course.
- Transfer mechanisms are available from some BTEC HND qualifications (Music Technology, Applied Social Studies, Social Care, Media Production) into three honours degree courses at NUI Maynooth (Music Technology, Social Science, Media Studies). These mechanisms were introduced in 2005.

2.6.3 Consistency of Treatment between FETAC and Non-FETAC Qualifications

There are a number of issues to do with consistency of treatment between FETAC and non-FETAC qualifications obtained from studies undertaken at further education colleges.

Currently, a FETAC (NCVA) Level 6 award is typically achieved following a two-year programme, and may allow opportunities for progression into first year of a university sector Honours Bachelor Degree course in Ireland. Its treatment is little different to that accorded to a FETAC Level 5 award.

A two-year course leading to a professional or UK qualification may also take two years, but allow opportunities to transfer into second (or even

third) year of such an Honours Bachelor Degree course. This would appear to place students achieving a FETAC (NCVA) Level 6 award at a disadvantage.

The Qualifications Authority has been consulting with stakeholders on the possible inclusion of professional and international awards in the National Framework of Qualifications for some time and in September 2004 published draft policies and criteria on such possible inclusion. Since that time, the Authority has continued consulting with stakeholders on these issues. The emerging policy position is that policies and criteria will be in place in 2006 for establishing the relationships between the framework and various kinds of professional and international awards; it is envisaged that these relationships will range from direct inclusion to recognition and alignment within the framework, as appropriate.

Section 2.6.1 above notes that the Qualifications Authority, with the agreement of Irish awarding bodies, agreed with UK regulatory authorities the cross-referencing of the Irish Framework to Frameworks in place in the United Kingdom in summer 2005 and that a leaflet setting this out has been published and disseminated.

Thus, for the various non-FETAC qualifications (mostly UK vocational education and training qualifications) that give opportunities for students to transfer into university sector courses and which are generally viewed as having their nearest Irish equivalent awards at level 6 in the Irish Framework, there appears to be an inconsistency between their treatment and that of FETAC awards at level 6.

Discussions with a number of universities indicated that the relatively small numbers of students obtaining FETAC/NCVA awards at Level 6 meant that they had not had a reason to give serious consideration to whether these students should be treated significantly more favourably than those qualifying at Level 5 (which, as seen earlier, leads to first year entry, rather than advanced entry).

There may be a value in considering this issue in advance of any positioning of non-FETAC qualifications in the Framework. One option that could be explored is that of allowing transfer from FETAC level 6 awards on a similar basis to that already offered for many non-FETAC qualifications awarded after studies at further education institutions.

2.7 The Experience with Transfer

2.7.1 Main Transfer Mechanisms are Well Established

Most transfer into the university sector takes place through mechanisms that are long established. Internally within colleges, there is an increased degree of formality in how they operate, and admissions offices often play a greater role than in the past. However, the essence of a system – one that is internal to the institution, and in which the academic department or faculty retains the major influence – generally remains unchanged.

Institutions report that the students they accept on transfer generally perform acceptably well, and some perform exceptionally well. They attribute this in part to the fact that most faculties and departments are fairly selective in choosing who, if anyone, to accept.

2.7.2 Limited Justification for Major Increase in Transfer from HETAC/DIT Backgrounds

In most disciplines, transfer mechanisms do not provide a major route for transfer from HETAC/DIT backgrounds into undergraduate university courses. University sector institutions mostly do not feel under pressure to change this.

However, there is a question as to whether it is right that institutions should make significant efforts to take more transfer students from HETAC/DIT backgrounds.

- They mostly see their primary obligation as being to students who enter at first year level.
- Beyond that, they have an interest in transfer mainly to the extent that they can use it to recruit better students than they can recruit through the mainstream school leaver CAO route. Universities mostly do not see opportunities to recruit substantial numbers of top-flight students through transfer from Institutes of Technology or DIT.
- Except for a limited range of subject areas (notably civil engineering), there is scope for any well-qualified student to progress to Honours Bachelor Degree level within the Institute of Technology sector, which tends to limit the need for transfer to universities.

- It is not clear that the university sector could compete effectively to recruit the better students from HETAC/DIT backgrounds if it tried. The evidence from interviews with students who have transferred from Institutes of Technology into the university sector is that most Institute of Technology students are happy to progress to Honours Bachelor Degree level within the Institute of Technology sector, and many have an active preference for doing so over transferring to a university.

Transfer Mechanisms where Specific Links Exist

The main issue identified in relation to long-established transfer mechanisms where specific links exist, is that demand for places has moderated over time.

High Demand Disciplines

There is a question as to whether university sector institutions should take on responsibility for providing significant numbers of transfer places in disciplines where insufficient add-on Honours Bachelor Degree places are available at Institutes of Technology. The main broad area where this tends to be an issue is with engineering, where Institutes of Technology have been limited in their capability to create 2 year add-on degree courses, suitable for accreditation by Engineers Ireland. The main discipline in which this is currently an issue is civil engineering, reflecting the rapid growth in output of courses at Higher Certificate and Ordinary Bachelor Degree level in this discipline, while programmes in many other engineering disciplines have shrunk.

Private Colleges

There is an issue with scope for transfers from HETAC qualifications obtained at private colleges. Judging by the volume of applications received by some institutions, there appears to be substantial demand among students from these colleges for transfers into university sector institutions. Presumably, economic factors contribute to this demand; transferring to the university sector (or indeed to an Institute of Technology) would save on student fees. However, actual rates of transfer from private colleges appear to be very low.

2.7.3 Experience with New Transfer Mechanisms

At the point when the research was being undertaken, the number of students who had used new transfer mechanisms created in the last two to three years (such as the mechanism for UCC's B.A. (Early Childhood

Studies) described earlier) was very low. It was not sufficient to form a basis for useful comment.

2.8 Learner perspectives on What is Working, and What is Not

The consultants interviewed a number of students who had transferred from Institutes of Technology and DIT at National/DIT Certificate and National/DIT diploma level, in a number of different universities.

They were generally positive about how the transfer process had worked, and felt that the limited actions taken by their university to induct them had been sufficient.

They highlighted differences in approach between Institutes of Technology and universities, primarily that Institute of Technology classes are smaller, and that the style of teaching in Institutes of Technology involves more individual attention. They did not have significant problems with the difference in approach.

They also highlighted the fact that students in the classes they had joined had long established relationships with each other, and that it took some time before they felt they fitted in.

Two civil engineering students were among those interviewed at different institutions. They indicated that they had transferred to university as a second best alternative to remaining within the Institute of Technology system, because, despite having strong results in their National Diplomas, they had been unable to obtain places on add-on degree courses. However, it is understood from interviews with institutions that this small sample may not have been completely representative, and that many of those who take this route do so because they have a preference for graduating from a university.

2.9 Institutional Perspectives on What is Working, and What is Not

The university sector institutions consulted see their main transfer mechanisms as being long established, mature, and operating smoothly. They do not see any requirement for major changes in the numbers accepted, or in the decision-making processes involved.

To the limited extent that there is experience with the new transfer mechanisms, they see them operating smoothly.

2.10 Potential Impact of Changes at Level 7 in NFQ

A number of those consulted for the study speculated that the discontinuation of National Diploma and DIT Diploma qualifications (typically awarded after three years of study, and positioned at Level 7 in the National Framework of Qualifications), and the establishment of the Ordinary Bachelor Degree (also typically awarded after three years of study, and positioned at Level 7 in the National Framework of Qualifications), may tend to reduce demand for transfer into the university sector. There has been an increasing tendency in recent years for students obtaining diploma level qualifications to seek to progress to a degree course, so as to graduate with a degree. Some have achieved this through progressing to add-on degree courses, and some through transferring to degree courses on the university sector (or, equivalently, to ab-initio degree courses in the Institute of Technology/DIT sector). It is speculated that the award of an Ordinary Bachelor Degree, rather than a diploma, will sufficiently satisfy this desire for a degree so that some of those who would previously have progressed to Level 8 in the National Framework of Qualifications, will now choose to terminate their studies at Level 7. By reducing demand for places on courses leading to Honours Bachelor Degrees, this would be likely to reduce that part of the demand that is satisfied by university sector institutions.

3. PROGRESSION ROUTES

3.1 Introduction

Progression refers to cases where a student gaining a qualification uses that qualification as a basis for progressing to study at a higher level.

- Students using a further education and training qualification to gain access to higher education are progressing, and form one of the main focuses of this Chapter. The only further education qualifications that lead to structured progression opportunities in the university sector are the FETAC level 5 and level 6 qualifications that have succeeded NCVA level 2 and level 3 qualifications.
- Apprenticeship qualifications, and the successors to qualifications previously awarded by bodies such as FÁS, Bord Iascaigh Mhara or the National Tourism Awards Council do not have linked progression opportunities.
- School leavers entering higher education on the basis of their Leaving Certificate are also progressing, although these lie outside the scope of the current study, as second level qualifications are not further education and training in nature.
- Students taking the Leaving Certificate in a return-to-education context, and using it to access higher education are also progressing. These straddle the boundary of the formal scope of the study, in that the qualifications are not further education and training in nature, but the students and the setting for return-to-education studies, have much in common with the students and settings involved in further education provision. They are addressed in this Chapter.
- There is quite a variety of different types of university access course, ranging from courses aimed at students still in school to year long full time courses aimed at people who are long out of school. Those access courses which are of sufficient duration to be comparable to further education courses are within the scope of the study, and are addressed in this Chapter.

3.2 How and Why Progression Routes Developed

3.2.1 Progression from FETAC Qualifications

Progression into the Institute of Technology sector from NCVA level 2 (now FETAC level 5) awards, under the Higher Education Links Scheme, has a history dating to the latter half of the 1990s.

UCC took the initiative to open up the first university sector links in 2002/03, and has developed and expanded its offerings since then. A majority of the other universities, as well as a number of other colleges in the sector, have since developed links of their own, largely based on the UCC model. The National University of Ireland specifies a matriculation model that is used by all of its constituent colleges, including three out of the five universities that offer opportunities for FETAC progression.

A number of motivating factors have influenced UCC and other institutions to establish routes for progression.

- UCC was influenced in part by demand from local further education institutions. Cork City has three of the biggest further education colleges in the country, and has a strong tradition of cooperation between local institutions. A number of other institutions have also been influenced by local demand.
- There is an increasingly strong philosophical commitment to alternative entry route admissions in university sector institutions, as a means of addressing educational disadvantage and promoting lifelong learning.
- University sector institutions consulted have a positive view of the National Framework of Qualifications, and are positive about contributing to its implementation through facilitating progression and transfer.
- Under conditions of increasing competition for students, colleges are interested in broadening the pool of potential applicants from which they can draw, even where demand for their courses remains strong. They appear to be particularly interested, and most likely to offer significant numbers of places for progression students, where they feel they may get better students from progression routes than they can get from mainstream school leaver entry.
- There is an interest in using progression routes to boost numbers taking science and technology courses, although the scope for this tends to be limited by the relatively small number of students taking further education science courses, and by the need for strong mathematical capabilities in many technology disciplines.
- For some disciplines, particularly in areas such as childcare, social work, social work and nursing, many colleges see progression routes out of further education as giving them access to significant pools of students with relevant interests and aptitudes, as well as sufficient academic ability to be successful.
- While there can be costs in terms of increased support requirements for some alternative entry route entrants, many lecturers see great

benefits to learning in having students from a mix of backgrounds, including some with significant life experience. This is relevant in all disciplines, but particularly in the social sciences, humanities and caring related disciplines.

In addition to having the option of applying to progress through formal links mechanisms, many of those who obtain FETAC qualifications are old enough to qualify for entry on mature grounds. Assessments of mature grounds applications (which are addressed in more detail in the next Chapter) give considerable weight to education, such as a further education course, undertaken in the recent past.

3.2.2 Leaving Certificate in Return to Education Context

There is no specific mechanism aimed at students taking the Leaving Certificate in a return-to education context. Students progressing in this way either apply, and are assessed, through the mainstream CAO points route, or through mature entry routes.

3.2.3 Higher Education Access Courses

The introduction of, and growth in, higher education access course provision at university sector institutions originally reflected a desire to improve access to higher education for people suffering from educational disadvantage, and to mature applicants. The desire to broaden the pool of potential applicants from which colleges can draw, in the face of increased competition for students was also a factor, although not a dominant one for most disciplines. The perceived benefits to learning in having students from a mix of backgrounds, including some with significant life experience also had an impact.

As with progression from further education, there is an interest in using progression routes to boost numbers taking science and technology courses. A number of colleges have specific activities within their access courses designed to prepare students to study the sciences.

However, Government policy now favours encouraging access through courses leading to awards within the National Framework of Qualifications, and does not provide any course or student funding for access courses. At present, awards made by the universities following access courses are not included in the Framework, but this situation may change as the universities and the Qualifications Authority are working

actively on the identification of appropriate placement or inclusion for a variety of non-degree awards.

3.3 Description of Progression Routes from FETAC Qualifications

3.3.1 Introduction

The biggest developments in progression to the university sector currently underway are in the acceptance of FETAC qualifications for entry. There are also significant developments underway in the Institute of Technology sector, where FETAC (NCVA) Level 5 graduates now apply for the same pool of places as Leaving Certificate applicants, on the basis of a points scheme linked to the results they have obtained in each of the modules they have taken⁸. The Institutes of Technology no longer limit these graduates to applying for courses closely related to their further education studies.

FETAC qualifications accepted for entry to university are restricted to the Level 5 and Level 6 certificates formerly awarded by NCVA⁹ at levels 2 and 3, and exclude qualifications formerly awarded by organisations such as FÁS and the National Tourism Certification Board. The vast majority of these NCVA qualifications are attained through study at Colleges of Further Education (PLC colleges), with some also being attained through VTOS¹⁰ courses.

Each FETAC qualification has an award title and a code. For example, the FETAC award title "Applied Science – Food" corresponds to the code "CASFX". Courses leading to these awards are divided into modules. A college providing a course leading to one of these awards has to provide a standard set of core modules, but can generally choose from a range of optional modules, to bring the total number of modules taken by a level 5 student up to eight.

Almost all FETAC award codes linked to university courses are at level 5. This reflects the relatively small number of level 6 courses available. It also reflects the fact that students graduating with level 6 qualifications having generally studied for two years, are likely to be interested in obtaining advanced entry into a year beyond the first year of a higher education course, rather than entry into first year.

⁸ 50 points are awarded for a Distinction in a module, 35 points for a Merit and 20 for a Pass.

⁹ National Council for Vocational Awards

¹⁰ Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme

All constituent universities of the National University of Ireland, and affiliated colleges, that operate FETAC progression routes operate similar mechanisms, based around a matriculation scheme specified by the National University of Ireland. Other institutions in the sector have based their mechanisms on those of NUI, but with variations. NUI Galway is piloting its first FETAC progression mechanisms in academic year 2005/06. FETAC progression to Trinity College, introduced late in 2005, is limited to a small number of specialised access courses provided in specific further education colleges. The University of Limerick only operates a FETAC progression mechanism indirectly through its involvement with Mary Immaculate College of Education.

3.3.2 National University of Ireland

Matriculation

The National University of Ireland (NUI) now accepts the FETAC (NCVA) Level 5 award for matriculation to many courses. Distinctions are required in five modules in cognate areas. A Distinction is the highest grade available in FETAC (NCVA) qualifications.

The NUI also accepts the FETAC (NCVA) Level 6 award for matriculation to some courses. Distinctions are again required in five modules.

As four of the seven universities are constituent universities of NUI, and six of the other colleges in the sector are recognised colleges of NUI, the decision to accept these awards for matriculation covers a substantial part of the sector.

Arrangements to Offer Places

Matriculation means that an applicant has met the minimum requirements for entry into an institution. It does not, in itself, lead to the offer of a place. Three of the NUI's constituent universities (University College Cork, University College Dublin and NUI Maynooth) have put in place mechanisms to allow places to be offered to applicants matriculating through FETAC qualifications, and NUI Galway is piloting similar mechanisms. All have taken a similar approach, which was first implemented by UCC in academic year 2002/03.

Of the recognised colleges of NUI, the National College of Art and Design and Shannon College of Hotel Management have also taken this approach.

The main features of the approach are as follows:

- The institution decides on a course-by course basis whether progression from a FETAC qualification will be allowed. In UCC and UCD, the number of courses covered has increased each year, but it is not expected that the scheme will be extended to all courses. 2005 is the first year of operation of the NUI Maynooth scheme.
- A quota of places for progression from FETAC qualifications is established each year for each course covered by the scheme. Quotas have tended to increase as more experience is gained with the scheme.
- There is a link established between the course and one or more specific FETAC awards, for example between MH203 – Computer Science and Software Engineering and FETAC level 5 CITXX.
- Specific module requirements, associated with the FETAC award code, are set out for each course. Academics responsible for providing the course review relevant FETAC modules. Based on this review, they cooperate with the institution's admissions office to develop criteria for entry that should indicate that a successful applicant is well prepared for entry, and has a sufficient aptitude for, and interest in, the subject matter. Typically, four of the five distinctions required for matriculation must come from a short list of modules cognate with the subject matter of the course. In some cases, one or more specific modules (often mathematics) is required.
- Applications from students with level 5 qualifications are made through the Central Applications Office (CAO). In the small number of cases where links are available from level 6, applicants apply directly to the institution.
- Where the number of applicants with FETAC/NCVA Level 2 certificates (NFQ Level 5) meeting the criteria exceeds the quota of places available, a points system is used to rank the applications. Three points are awarded for a distinction; two points for a merit; and one point for a pass. There are generally eight modules in a FETAC level 5 qualification, some of which may be divided into separate half modules. Each half module scores half the points in the above scheme. The resulting score is multiplied by 15.
- Admission is into the first year of the course.

The main institutions taking this approach indicate that they are careful not to negotiate with further education providers on criteria for admission. Recognising that the majority of students on further education courses will take other routes (e.g. to employment), they wish to avoid creating inducements to optimise courses for university entry. Not all students graduating under a linked FETAC award code have the

potential to qualify for admission. FETAC allows further education providers significant flexibility in the range of modules they provide.

Thus, a FETAC graduate may not have the opportunity to satisfy all of the requirements for admission to a course to which their qualification is formally linked. De facto, this is more likely to occur where the further education college (or other provider) concerned is not local to the university sector institution.

NCAD Core Entry - Exception

NCAD has adopted the general NUI approach for entry into its BA (Hons) in Art & Design Education. It is less prescriptive about the specific FETAC qualification requirements, accepting any combination of five distinctions, from any of twenty-two cognate FETAC Level 5 qualifications.

However, it has taken a different approach for entry into its Core First Year programme in Art and Design. Places on the First Year Core programme are split into two equal pools. One pool is reserved for those applying on the basis of their Leaving Certificate (or other school leaving qualification) who have not undertaken a post-school leaving portfolio preparation course. The other is for those who have undertaken a portfolio preparation course, whether applying on the basis of a school leaving qualification or on the basis of a further education qualification.

3.3.3 Dublin City University and Mater Dei Institute

Dublin City University has adopted arrangements that are generally similar to those in NUI constituent universities and recognised colleges. The main exception is that DCU does not establish a quota for each course. Instead, the number of places allocated to FETAC progression (and to other entry routes) each year is established by the programme board, taking account of the range of applications received.

Mater Dei Institute, a college of education linked to Dublin City University, operated links to two courses under these arrangements in 2005, each accessible from both Language and European Studies – ELESX; and Cultural and Heritage Studies – ECHSX.

3.3.4 Mary Immaculate College

Mary Immaculate College, a college of education linked to the University of Limerick, has one course (B.A. (Hons) in Early Childhood Care and Education) that can be accessed from a FETAC (NCVA) Level 5 qualification (Childcare – DCHSC). As with other institutions in the sector, distinctions are required in five modules. Four of these distinctions must be in specific modules.

3.3.5 Nursing Degree Programmes

In 2005, five universities offered Honours Bachelor Degree programmes in nursing, as did six Institutes of Technology. Universities offering these programmes were Dublin City University, Trinity College Dublin, University College Cork, University College Dublin and University of Limerick. As An Bord Altranais controls admissions to these programmes, all operated the same criteria.

The arrangements in all but one¹¹ of the higher education colleges are similar to those in NUI institutions, except that:

- the module requirements are set by An Bord Altranais, and are therefore uniform across all colleges; and that
- the set of modules required is more prescriptive than for other courses, with distinctions required in three specific modules, and in at least one out of two other specific modules. This approach is feasible because the further education courses involved are explicitly designed as pre-nursing courses, and therefore it is reasonable to expect that all the required modules will be made available to all students taking these courses.

The arrangements for admission to nursing education now in place follow from the introduction of degree level nursing qualifications, accessed through CAO applications.

The introduction of these arrangements for admission to nursing has resulted in a major shift in patterns of entry into nursing. Prior to the changes, nursing was one of the leading areas where progression from further education took place. Pre-nursing courses leading to NCVA Level 2 qualifications (now FETAC (NCVA) Level 5) featured strongly among the backgrounds of those admitted to study nursing.

¹¹ Trinity College Dublin indicated that it does not operate a mechanism for progression into nursing from further education qualifications.

However, following from the change in admission practices, and the move to degree level studies, demand from applicants with good Leaving Certificates has increased steeply, bringing overall demand for places in nursing studies to a level far above the supply of places. The number of places in nursing studies made available to students progressing from further education is much lower than in the past, and is substantially less than demand from students graduating from pre-nursing courses who meet the criteria for entry.

3.3.6 Teacher Education Programmes

According to colleges of education consulted, the Department of Education and Science imposes constraints on the qualifications of alternative entry route applicants that can be accepted as adequate. The extent of the constraints actually implemented varies between colleges. However, these colleges most commonly insist on applicants having a Leaving Certificate that meets the minimum requirements for entry on mainstream grounds (including Irish language), and at least comes close to reaching the current CAO points threshold, as well as meeting any of the more common requirements for alternative entry route entry.

A result of this is that it is difficult for institutions to develop mechanisms for progression from further education and training qualifications.

3.4 Description of Progression from Leaving Certificate in a Return-to-Education Context

Progression by entrants to higher education based on a Leaving Certificate obtained at the time of leaving school falls definitively outside the scope of this study.

However, it is common for students returning to learning to take a number of Leaving Certificate subjects. Frequently, these subjects are undertaken in a further education context, often in a college whose main focus is on FETAC qualifications, or on a VTOS course. Sometimes, most commonly on VTOS courses, a student may take a combination of FETAC modules and Leaving Certificate subjects.

Having undertaken one or more Leaving Certificate subjects in a return-to-education context, a student may use these towards applying for

college entry through the main CAO points route, or may use them for a mature grounds application. Institutions consulted for this study say that they value Leaving Certificate subjects taken in the recent past, when evaluating mature grounds applications, particularly where they are in disciplines that have some bearing on the subject matter of the course for which the application has been received, in much the same way that they value FETAC qualifications.

A number of those interviewed in the course of the study stressed that some academic departments, particularly in engineering and the sciences, place a high value on higher-level Leaving Certificate mathematics when assessing mature applications, and may also place a significant value on Leaving Certificate science subjects when evaluating mature grounds applications.

Students who have undertaken Leaving Certificate subjects in a return-to-education context are, strictly speaking, not progressing from further or higher education, and are thus outside the strict scope of this study. Nonetheless, they form a significant part of the picture of progression from post school leaving qualifications to university sector institutions, and form an important part of the context for progression from further education.

3.5 Description of Progression from higher Education Access Courses

There is a spectrum of different types of access course operated or sponsored by universities.

- **Second level students** – Access courses targeted at second level students are outside the scope of this study.
- **Short courses** – There are access courses of short duration aimed at individuals who have left school in the recent past or at potential mature entrants. These are outside the scope of the study as they do not lead to substantive qualifications, and are not similar to courses that lead to such qualifications.
- **Extended courses offered by university** – There are extended courses, typically of one year in duration, in a number of institutions, aimed at people who have left school, including people who are mature. While these courses do not all lead to qualifications, they are sufficiently comparable to FETAC level 5 courses so that it is meaningful to treat

them as a substantial form of further education from which progression could be considered to take place.

- **Extended courses sponsored by university** – There are cases where access courses sponsored by, or linked to, a university are undertaken in further education colleges. While these lead to FETAC (NCVA) Level 5 qualifications, decisions on admission follow criteria more similar to those attached to other access courses than to mainstream FETAC progression. Examples include Trinity College access courses provided at three CDVEC Further Education Colleges, and a science course at Coláiste Dhúlaigh (CDVEC) linked to Dublin City University. Again, it is meaningful to consider entry from these courses into university as a form of progression.

Institutions operate a spectrum of approaches to progression. In most cases, opportunities for progression only exist within the university sector institution itself, although there are cases where there is a link between institutions (e.g. NUI Galway and St. Angela's College), which allows students from an access course at one institution to gain access to a course at the other institution. There were some suggestions in interviews that links might be established between NUI colleges at some time in the future, so as to facilitate progression from access courses to degree courses provided in other institutions.

The main types of approach to progression from access courses are as follows:

- "Right of progression", where students meeting an appropriate standard are guaranteed a place in the course of their choice to which the access course is linked.
- Quotas for progression in each course that are high enough so as to be almost guaranteed to admit all who meet the standard, or with an allowance for flexibility in admissions that largely removes the risk that a student meeting the standard will be refused admission into the linked course of their choice
- Quotas for progression in each course that stand a significant chance of limiting numbers accepted into particular courses.

The first two of these clearly put successful students in a better position for progression than most of those obtaining FETAC qualifications.

3.6 The Experience with Progression

3.6.1 Progression Generally Works Well, but with Some Costs

Institutions have proceeded cautiously enough with schemes for progression to avoid any serious problems. They have started small, with small numbers of courses, and small numbers of places, and have gained experience, and resolved any issues that have emerged, before increasing the numbers of courses participating, and any quota of places reserved for progression.

Institutions report that, where any type of alternative entry route entry has been established, including progression, success levels (as measured by grades and completion rates) are generally comparable with, or superior to, those of students who have arrived through the mainstream LC points route.

In a narrow range of cases, success rates are reported to be higher among those entering on the basis of Leaving Certificate results. In contrast, in some areas oriented towards practical work in social-type areas, alternative entry route students have been found to be much better prepared than Leaving Certificate entrants.

However, there appear to be costs too. According to many of those interviewed for the study, students from non-Leaving Certificate entry routes are more likely to need support from academic staff, and are more likely to have or develop personal issues that result in a requirement for advice and assistance. College support services, such as access offices and mature student offices address parts of these issues. In many cases, academic departments and faculties, and administration offices (including admissions and registrars offices) have moved to increase the support provided for students from progression backgrounds to a level somewhat greater than that traditionally provided to Leaving Certificate entrants. The most common focus is on providing induction processes that introduce students to the college and its services, and to the academic expectations of the institution.

Thereafter, most institutions take care to avoid appearing to differentiate between students on the basis of their mode of entry.

However, a number of institutions indicate that they check on the academic progress of students from non-Leaving Certificate backgrounds periodically, with a view to intervening if significant problems arise.

Thus, overall, progression generally operates successfully in university sector institutions.

3.6.2 Issues About Criteria for Progression

The research raises some questions about whether the criteria for allowing a student to progress may, in some cases, be overly exclusive. The further education progression mechanisms are well designed to admit the best progression students, but they are restrictive, often very restrictive when account is taken both of the minimum requirements for entry, and of the quota of places reserved for students progressing from FETAC qualifications.

It is understandable, and arguably desirable, that institutions should have been cautious when they first established FETAC (NCVA) progression routes. Admitting students with uncertain prospects of graduation could have been damaging for the students, for the colleges, and for the principle of progression from FETAC (NCVA) awards.

Even with the extension of the progression mechanism to more colleges and more courses, and with recent increases in entry quotas, the entry criteria currently in place will only admit quite small numbers of FETAC graduates into the future, with the numbers being limited by:

- the five-distinction criterion;
- the specific module requirements criteria for each Honours Bachelor Degree course; and
- the quota of places allocated.

However, now that the principle of FETAC progression has been established, and that experience has been gained with the performance of FETAC entrants, it is reasonable to ask whether the entry criteria now in place are excluding FETAC graduates who it might be better to admit. Are university sector institutions rejecting FETAC progression applicants that they would benefit from accepting? And, if so, does this mean that FETAC graduates are losing out on progression opportunities?

These questions have to be asked in the context that, for most university sector courses, demand for places exceeds the supply of suitably qualified applicants. For some courses it exceeds the supply to a very great extent. For others, demand and supply are more nearly in balance.

Any decision that has the effect of increasing rates of progression from FETAC will, other things being equal, reduce the number of places available for students seeking to enter through other through other routes. This burden is likely to be borne most heavily by those seeking entry to college on the basis of their Leaving Certificates. It is likely to be felt most strongly where the excess of demand for places over supply is greatest.

For any university sector institution, there are several factors to be taken into account when deciding what mix of student intake routes to aim for. The main reasons why existing FETAC progression routes have been developed can be summarised as:

- responding to policy imperatives such as educational disadvantage, lifelong learning and the National Framework of Qualifications;
- the educational benefits of a diverse student body; and
- underpinning the supply of applicants.

By themselves, these justify at least the modest levels of FETAC progression into undergraduate university courses now underway and being planned. In many areas, they may justify significant further expansion in the supply of places allocated to FETAC progression.

Beyond this level, colleges should at least take account of where they can source the best students, defined not so much in terms of existing academic achievement (it may in any case be difficult to make well-founded direct comparisons between different grades in different types of qualification), but in terms of measures such as expected retention rate, grade of degree eventually obtained, labour market outcome post-graduation and rate of progression to studies at higher degree level.

The data on which institutions can make such assessments are currently quite sketchy. Experience with progression from FETAC qualifications is limited. The first students admitted under FETAC (NCVA) progression mechanisms are only now nearing graduation, and the numbers involved are still small. However, if mechanisms were put in place now to ensure the systematic collection and analysis of relevant data, then it is likely that sufficient information to inform decision-making would become available within a small number of years.

Without major changes to the structure of existing mechanisms, increases in FETAC progression could potentially be achieved by modulating one or more of the following:

- the FETAC progression quota for each course;
- the number of distinctions required for entry;
- the level of specificity in module requirements for entry into each course; and
- the points allocations for each grade in each module (if universities were to adopt the Institute of Technology practice of operating a common pool of places between FETAC and Leaving Certificate applicants, with an associated points system).

There is a need to examine the “five distinction” criterion because it is applied so universally across the university sector. It has much the same practical function as the “two higher level Leaving Certificate C3s” minimum requirement imposed on students seeking entry to a number of the universities in the sector on the basis of their Leaving Certificate results. However, it is not clear that it places the bar at a similar level to “two C3s”. Some of those interviewed for the study suggested that it had intentionally been placed at a relatively high level, so as to minimise the number of FETAC students disappointed by failing to obtain a place despite meeting the minimum requirements for entry.

If this was the intention, then it has not worked. There are many areas, the most notable of which is nursing, where the number of FETAC students obtaining five distinctions or more far exceeds the number of places available. Indeed, in some areas the maximum possible eight distinctions are required to qualify for the possibility of a randomly allocated place.

At the same time, however, for significant numbers of courses (in the sciences, for example) FETAC (NCVA) progression quotas are undersubscribed. It may be that four or three distinctions would represent a sufficiently demanding threshold for entry into some or all of these courses, and that the five-distinction requirement is artificially holding back progression into these courses.

Leaving Certificate applicants do not expect to gain access to a course just because they obtain the minimum two higher level C3s required for entry to university. They expect to gain access only if they win one of the available places through the CAO-operated points system. With a similar system operating to allocate the FETAC progression places in most universities, FETAC applicants for courses where there is a shortage of places must expect that they too will have to compete on the basis of their results, and cannot reasonably expect to obtain a place on the basis of reaching the minimum threshold for entry, whether it is set at five distinctions or at some other level.

3.6.3 FETAC Level 6 Qualifications

While the numbers of further education students involved are not large, there are a number of anomalies concerning mechanisms for progression from FETAC level 6 awards.

- As already noted, these awards have much in common with HNC/HND and some qualifications awarded by professional bodies, but, unlike them lead to progression into first year of a course, rather than transfer into second or third year.
- There are few links established between FETAC level 6 awards and university sector courses.
- Where there are links, those with FETAC level 6 awards are sometimes not treated much differently to those with level 5 awards.

3.7 Learner Perspectives on What is Working, and What is Not

The consultants met with a number of students from progression backgrounds in the course of the research to review their experiences. They were generally positive about how progression operates.

Many indicated that they felt they needed somewhat more induction assistance than Leaving Certificate entrants. Most said that they had received an appropriate level of assistance, with the contributions of experienced students to the induction process being particularly useful.

Several of those from further education backgrounds highlighted differences in expectations regarding essays and other coursework between further colleges and universities, with a greater requirement for critical analysis in university. Some of those from the first iteration of FETAC (NCVA) progression at UCC had initially not understood what was expected in this area, but this problem had been resolved. It appeared not to have recurred, either at UCC or at other institutions, which had consulted with UCC before themselves introducing FETAC (NCVA) progression mechanisms.

3.8 Institutional Perspectives on What is Working, and What is Not

The university sector institutions mostly say that they are happy with arrangements they have put in place, and that they are working well.

There are minority views in some institutions that alternative entry route entry, including progression, has not been pushed far enough or hard enough.

In relation to progression, some argue for more substantial quotas, or for more extensive rights for admission by FETAC graduates and students from access courses. They argue that a greater value should be placed on further education and training qualifications relative to the Leaving Certificate. At the extreme, some argue that anyone meeting the minimum standard for progression from FETAC qualifications should have a right of admission. Some of these argue that more should be done to allow alternative entry route entry to penetrate more into engineering, and into high points healthcare-related courses.

A number raised issues about obstacles to alternative entry route entry into courses in education. The Department of Education and Science imposes constraints on the qualifications of alternative entry route applicants that can be accepted as adequate. The extent of the constraints actually implemented varies between colleges. However, these colleges most commonly insist on applicants having a Leaving Certificate that meets the minimum requirements for entry on mainstream grounds (including Irish language), and at least comes close to reaching the current CAO points threshold, as well as meeting any of the more common requirements for alternative entry route entry.

A result of this is that very few applicants are eligible for alternative entry route entry.

A number of colleges consulted suggest that there is need for reform in this area, so as to allow more students to enter courses in education from alternative entry route backgrounds. They propose this partly out of a belief that alternative entry route entry is valid and desirable in itself; partly out of the expectation that students from alternative entry route backgrounds have much to contribute to the learning process; and partly out of the belief that a more diverse population of teachers (including some from other countries and cultures, and some with significant life experience outside teaching) would be good for the primary and second level education sectors.

4. ROLE OF MATURE ENTRY IN PROGRESSION

4.1 Introduction

Almost all institutions operate a mechanism to allow the entry of mature students, separate from the main flow of students qualifying on the basis of Leaving Certificate results. Most institutions define mature as being aged 23 or more. A small minority of institutions set the threshold at 21. Mature applicants who might qualify for regular entry on the basis of their existing Leaving Certificate results are free to apply on mature grounds, or on the basis of their existing results. If they wish, they can submit applications on both grounds, and some institutions encourage this.

Mature grounds entry is relevant to any consideration of progression because many of those obtaining further education qualifications are over the age of 23, and mature-grounds entry provides them with an alternative mechanism (other than the FETAC progression mechanism) for entry into the university sector. Also, some students undertaking access courses are mature, and can use mature grounds entry as an alternative to the arrangements for progression associated with their course.

While the FETAC qualification or access course is not a requirement for entry in these cases, it typically forms an important part of the background to the decision to apply for mature grounds entry, and also typically forms an important factor in the decision by the college to admit the student. This makes mature entry in such circumstances a form of progression.

4.2 How and Why Mature Entry Routes Developed

Most institutions in the sector have had mechanisms for mature entry for a considerable period of time. However, until recent years the number of students admitted on mature grounds was low in most institutions in the sector, and near zero in some of the smaller institutions.

In recent years, there has been a significant build-up in the number of students admitted into university sector institutions on mature grounds¹².

The main factors that have driven this are:

- A strong policy drive by the State to boost mature entry into higher education, primarily as a means of addressing issues of educational

¹² This is, for example, evidenced by an increase in acceptances of students aged 23 or above onto degree courses from 812 (4% of total) in 2000, to 2,034 (8% of total) in 2004. Sources: CAO Board of Directors Reports for 2000 and 2004.

disadvantage and lifelong learning, and informed by the ongoing decline in numbers of school leavers, which has been underway since the late 1990s.

- There is an increasingly strong philosophical commitment to alternative entry route admissions in university sector institutions, as a means of addressing educational disadvantage and promoting lifelong learning.
- Under conditions of increasing competition for students, colleges are interested in broadening the pool of potential applicants from which they can draw, even where demand for their courses remains strong.
- For some disciplines, particularly in areas such as childcare, and social work and social work, many colleges see mature applicants as giving them access to significant pools of potential students with relevant interests and aptitudes.
- While there can be costs in terms of increased support requirements for some alternative entry route entrants, many lecturers consulted see benefits to learning in having students from a mix of backgrounds, including some with significant life experience. They say this is relevant in all disciplines, but particularly in the social sciences, humanities and caring related disciplines.

4.3 Applications for Mature Entry

Applications for entry on mature grounds are assessed for suitability on the basis of a range of factors, in contrast with the simple scoring system applied to those applying on the basis of their Leaving Certificate. For most courses, requirements for mature entry are not fixed. The institution leaves itself free to accept any mature entrant it believes is likely to benefit from being admitted, and also retains flexibility in how it should rank applicants in cases where the number of applicants applying on mature grounds exceeds the number of places for mature students.

The main exception is with primary degree courses in education, which are provided by the colleges of education. According to the colleges, the Department of Education and Science imposes constraints on the qualifications of mature-grounds applicants that can be accepted as adequate (as with other forms of alternative entry route entry). The extent of the constraints actually implemented varies between colleges. However, in some significant instances colleges that accept mature grounds applications insist on applicants having a Leaving Certificate that meets the minimum requirements for entry on mainstream grounds

(including Irish language), and comes close to reaching the current CAO points threshold, as well as presenting more general evidence of suitability for mature admission.

4.4 Supply of Places for Mature Entry

Most institutions operate a quota system, formally reserving a pre-determined number of places on each course for students applying on mature grounds. As a variant on this, some institutions, or faculties within institutions, that do not have large numbers of suitable mature applicants, say that their practice is to accept all mature-grounds applicants that they think are likely to succeed.

It is only for a limited range of courses that the quota system actually constrains the numbers admitted. For most courses, the number of places on offer exceeds the number of offers made. For more courses, there is a degree of flexibility built into the system. Quotas not taken up by other categories of alternative entry route entrant may be transferred to mature grounds entry. With courses where there are no rigid constraints on student numbers (e.g. relating to placements or to laboratory space), the number of places on offer may be increased to make room for additional mature grounds entrants should the demand arise.

It is only with a relatively small range of courses for which there is high mature applicant demand that the number of applicants deemed suitable regularly exceeds the quota of places available for mature grounds entry. These are concentrated mainly in disciplines relevant to health care, social development, social care, child development and psychology.

There were suggestions in interviews with colleges that demand for mature entry places might also exceed supply in teacher education if the assessment criteria were relaxed.

4.5 Decision Mechanisms for Mature Entry

Colleges operate a variety of mechanisms to assess applications by those applying for entry on mature grounds. Colleges all say that the mechanisms they apply are designed to distinguish between applicants who are likely to be successful academically and those who are unlikely to be successful.

All ask for detailed information in a written application. Some make their decision based solely on the application. Others undertake interviews. There is a divergence of opinion as to the best approach, with some of those interviewed holding that interviews are necessary, and others holding that the benefits of interviews are limited, and are not commensurate with the effort required to organise and conduct them. Some institutions have moved away from interviewing in the recent past, and say they will be looking for evidence as to whether this makes any difference to the rate of success among entrants admitted on mature grounds.

The extent to which the assessment criteria are standardised and systematised varies between colleges and can vary between courses within a college. Some have gone a significant way towards systematising the assessment; others apply standard criteria in a less systematic way; and others operate more on the judgement of the individuals undertaking the assessment. The interview evidence is of colleges taking a progressively more systematic approach, associated partly with the move away from interviews and the consequential increase in reliance on documentation.

In smaller institutions, the Registrar's office typically plays a major role in the decision. In larger institutions, the decision generally rests with the faculty or academic department responsible for the course, but the admissions office and the Mature Student Officer may also have significant formal roles in reaching the decision.

Nursing courses form an exception. An Bord Altranais (the Nursing Board) assesses applicants in agreement with, and on behalf of, the Higher Education Institutions.

4.6 Criteria for Mature Entry

Most colleges say that the main issue they consider when assessing a person applying on mature grounds is the likelihood that they will succeed academically. They consider a range of factors, which vary to some extent between academic disciplines and between institutions.

All institutions say that they look for evidence that an applicant has taken an active interest in learning in the recent past, when assessing the likelihood that they will succeed, and that this is one of the main indicators considered. Most frequently, this means participation in some

form of formal education, whether in the further education sector, in the adult education sector, in extramural university courses, in the Institute of Technology sector, or in the community education sector.

It is for this reason that mature entry is relevant to a study of transfer and progression. A post-second level qualification is not a formal requirement for admission on mature grounds, but it frequently forms an important part of the background to the student's decision to apply, and to the institution's decision to accept. It is reasonable to describe this as a form of progression.

Institutions also consider other indicators, such as evidence of experience relevant to the course, evidence of an existing interest in the subject matter, and, for vocationally oriented degrees, evidence of suitability for the occupation concerned.

Where the application is for a course that requires a high level of numeracy, such as in Engineering or some scientific disciplines, the institution looks for evidence of this. Most university Engineering schools look for a C3 or better in Leaving Certificate Higher Level mathematics, or its equivalent, and some are prepared to take almost any mature applicant who meets this criterion.

4.7 The Experience with Mature Entry

Mature grounds entry into university sector institutions has a long history, but numbers taking this route have increased substantially in recent years. Institutions see this as having proceeded successfully, and without major problems.

Institutions report that success levels are comparable with, or superior to, those of students who have arrived through the mainstream LC points route. In a narrow range of cases, success rates are higher among those coming through mainstream routes. In some areas, for example, in fields oriented towards practical work in community and social contexts, alternative entry route students have been found to be much better prepared than LC entrants.

However, according to a number of the people interviewed in connection with the study, on average mature students take more resources in terms of academic personal supports than mainstream entrants and than students entering through progression mechanisms.

One significant issue with mature entry is that there is a mismatch between the courses where places are available for mature entrants and the courses that mature entrants are interested in pursuing. The total number of places available to mature grounds applicants across all disciplines far exceeds the number of places taken up each year. There are generally plenty of places available in the natural sciences and engineering, but few mature applicants deemed suitable interested in pursuing them. There is more demand in areas such as business and the humanities, but again the supply of places usually exceeds demand by a significant margin. It is only with a relatively small range of courses for which there is high mature applicant demand that the number of applicants deemed suitable regularly exceeds the quota of places available for mature grounds entry. These are concentrated mainly in disciplines relevant to health care, social development, social care, child development and psychology. This gives rise to a question as to whether institutions should respond to demand from mature grounds applicants by expanding provision in the disciplines in which places are in short supply.

As with further education progression mechanisms, mature grounds entry mechanisms are well designed to admit the best alternative entry route entrants, but there is a possibility that they could be overly exclusive in some areas. Many interviewees indicated that academics have historically resisted accepting students qualifying on mature grounds, rather than on the basis of Leaving Certificate results, but that views throughout the university sector have shifted strongly in favour of accepting suitable mature applicants. Most of those interviewed are happy that the decision mechanisms in place now are fair. However, some suggest that there is a remaining unconscious bias in the assessment system that causes excessive numbers of mature applicants to be filtered out. These interviewees favour approaches that are more objective (less reliance on interviews and more on systematic scoring systems), and that rely more on evidence-derived criteria and less on the views of the academic staff teaching each course.

4.8 Learner Perspectives on What is Working, and What is Not

The mature-entry learners consulted were mostly positive about how transfer and progression operate FE and mature entrants said they needed more induction assistance than mainstream entrants

Learners consulted were generally positive about how mature entry operates.

Most said that they had received an appropriate level of assistance. They indicated that both formal supports from the Mature Student Officer and other college services, and informal supports from the community of mature students, were of great value. Those in classes with other mature students indicated that they found the mutual support that this allowed very helpful. Those in classes otherwise made up of recent school leavers tended to feel a little isolated, but indicated that this did not cause major problems.

4.9 Institutional Perspectives on what is working, and What is Not

The university sector institutions mostly say that they are happy with arrangements they have put in place, and that they are working well.

However, there is, in varying degrees, a view among some of those interviewed that mature grounds entry has not been developed sufficiently.

- Some argue for making assessment more systematised, and reducing departmental level input into decision-making, to overcome a reluctance to admit mature entrants that they see as being deep-rooted. There is already a trend underway towards greater formality and transparency in assessments of mature grounds applications.
- Some argue for more substantial quotas and/or more extensive rights of admission. They argue that a greater value should be placed on mature grounds qualifications, relative to the Leaving Certificate. At the extreme, some argue that everyone meeting minimum standard on mature grounds should have a right of admission.
- A number argue that more college places should be created in areas that are popular among mature grounds applicants.
- Some argue that there is a need for action to allow alternative entry route entry to penetrate more into engineering¹³, and into high points healthcare-related courses.

The issues about progression from FETAC qualifications into courses in teacher education were raised equally emphatically in relation to mature grounds entry. Some significant colleges insist on applicants having a Leaving Certificate that meets the minimum requirements for entry on mainstream grounds (including Irish language), and comes close to reaching the current CAO points threshold, as well as meeting any of the more common requirements for mature entry.

¹³ There is a feeling among some of those interviewed that the requirement for a C in higher level Leaving Certificate mathematics applied by many colleges for mature entry into engineering is not in keeping with the spirit of promoting mature entry. However, there is a countervailing view, centred in the engineering schools, and accepted reluctantly by many strong advocates of mature entry, to the effect that a student accepted into engineering who did not meet this criterion would have an unacceptably low likelihood of graduating. It was also argued that, while mature applicants may have learned a considerable amount that is relevant to other disciplines since undertaking their Leaving Certificate, justifying their acceptance into a degree course, few will have learned much more mathematics.

A result of this is that mature applicants can mostly only gain access to courses in education if they can qualify for entry through the mainstream CAO route, on the basis of their existing Leaving Certificate. Only a small number are in the position of being almost eligible for entry on the basis of their Leaving Certificate that allows them to benefit from the mature grounds mechanism.

As with FETAC progression, a number of colleges consulted suggest that there is a need for reform in this area, so as to allow more students to enter courses in education from alternative entry route backgrounds.

5. QUANTITATIVE PROFILE OF TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION

5.1 Introduction

This Chapter reports on the data on transfer and progression collected from colleges, through the Request for Information instrument presented in Appendix A. All institutions responded to the “request for specific information”, although in a small number of cases the response was that there were no relevant mechanisms for transfer or progression, and that no students had travelled such routes.

The Request for Information sought data on transfer and progression admissions, at the level of the individual course, for three specific academic years:

- 1999/00;
- 2003/04; and
- 2004/05.

Some institutions had difficulty in fully retrieving data for 1999/00, and were unable to provide data for this year. Tables 5.2, 5.4 and 5.6, which include data for 1999/00, also provide comparable data for 2003/04 and 2004/05, based on the same subset of colleges.

The Request for Information asked colleges for data both on:

- instances where students admitted had used their earlier qualification to qualify for entry (Scenario 1); and
- instances where students admitted had an earlier qualification that was relevant to their admission, but which had not strictly been a requirement (Scenario 2).

Colleges were asked to distinguish between Scenario 1 students admitted into first year of the course (such as students progressing from FETAC (NCVA) qualifications and from access courses), and those given advanced entry into the second or subsequent year of the course (such as those transferring from HETAC/DIT qualifications).

The expectation was that Scenario 2 would principally encompass students admitted on mature grounds who had undertaken a previous qualification that had formed an important part of the context for their admission. In general, mature grounds entrants do not require any specific qualifications, but frequently have undertaken some form of study prior to entry that has influenced them in their decision to apply, and has influenced the college in deciding to admit them. In principle, it

should also have encompassed mechanisms for disabled entry. All instances of Scenario 2 entry discussed with colleges were into first year of the course concerned.

Responding properly on Scenario 2 required that colleges review their mature entry records manually, a labour intensive process. Whether this could be done or not depended on the information recorded. Four out of the seven universities, and about half of the smaller colleges were able to respond.

The consultants aggregated the course level data provided by colleges by disciplinary area, using the subject framework used by the Higher Education Authority for student and graduate statistics. However, as there is a degree of subjectivity in coding courses, it is not certain that the resulting numbers are strictly comparable with HEA statistics.

5.2 Share of Entry Accounted for by Transfer and Progression

The research shows that numbers transferring and progressing into Honours Bachelor Degree courses at university sector institutions from non-school leaver backgrounds are low in comparison with those progressing on the basis of the Leaving Certificate.

- In academic year 2002/03, university sector institutions had 17,359 first time undergraduate entrants¹⁴, a number which will not have changed greatly in subsequent years.
- This study has identified 554 students progressing or transferring into the sector from further education and similar backgrounds in 2004/05. While it will not have identified all students entering on mature or disabled grounds following such qualifications, it is apparent that the numbers involved cannot amount to no more than about 4% of first time entrants.
- This study has identified 630 students transferring or progressing from HETAC and similar backgrounds in 2004/05. This number amounts to less than 4% of entrants.
- The study has identified 24 students progressing or transferring from UK backgrounds¹⁵. This number is small, amounting to approximately 0.1% of entrants.

¹⁴ Source: HEA

¹⁵ Note that it is known from interviews with institutions that some students progressing from Northern Ireland institutions were included under the further education heading, rather than the UK heading.

5.3 Transfer and Progression from Further Education and Similar Backgrounds

Table 5.1 summarises the data on transfer and progression from further education and similar backgrounds, for academic year 2004/05. In addition to further education qualifications, it includes craft qualifications (now also awarded by FETAC), university access courses, a category for "other Irish further education and training qualifications, and the Leaving Certificate when undertaken in a return to education context.

Table 5.1

Data on Transfer and Progression into University Sector Institutions from Further Education and Similar Backgrounds for Entry in Academic Year 2004/05

Discipline of Course Entered	Scenario*	Prior Qualification		NCVA/FETAC Foundation or Level 1		NCVA/FETAC Level 2 or 3 (NFQ Level 5 or 6)		Craft Qualification		University Access Programme		Other Irish Further Education and Training Qualification		Leaving Certificate Subjects Undertaken Recently in Return to Education Context					
		Year Entered		1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2				
		1st Year	2nd Year	1st Year	2nd Year	1st Year	2nd Year	1st Year	2nd Year	1st Year	2nd Year	1st Year	2nd Year	1st Year	2nd Year				
Arts		0	0	2	0	0	21	0	0	0	109	0	96	0	0	44	0	0	16
Education		0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	19	0	1	0	7	2	0	0	9
Art & Design		0	0	0	12	0	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Business, Economic & Social Studies		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Equestrian		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
European Studies		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Social Science		0	0	2	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	8	0	0	2	0	0	0
Communications & Information Studies		0	0	4	0	0	5	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Commerce		0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	26	0	5	2	0	2	0	0	0
Law		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Science		0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	14	0	9	0	0	4	0	0	0
Engineering		0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	9	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0
Architecture		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medicine & Nursing		0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	17	0	3	0	0	2	0	0	0
Dentistry		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Veterinary Medicine		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Agricultural Science & Forestry		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Food Science & Technology		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Computing & IT		0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	8	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Not Specified		0	0	0	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total		0	0	8	46	0	42	0	0	7	226	0	130	3	7	59	0	0	26

* Scenario 1 numbers in the Table are based on the records of virtually the whole university sector. Because of the challenges faced by colleges in retrieving data on mature entry, Scenario 2 numbers are drawn from the records of four of the seven universities, and approximately half of the smaller colleges.

Main points emerging from the data are as follows.

- Only small numbers progressed from FETAC qualifications below what is now level 5, with all of those using mature grounds mechanisms to progress.
- 46 progressed from what are now FETAC levels 5 and 6 using progression mechanisms for which the qualification is a formal requirement. At least 42 did so through mature grounds entry, for which it is not.
- Very few progressed from craft qualifications, and all of them did so through mature grounds mechanisms.
- Significant numbers progressed from access courses, which dominated overall progression into the first year of university sector courses. However, these were concentrated in a small number of universities. Entry through access courses was modest for most of the sector.
- Significant numbers were recorded as progressing through “other Irish further education and training qualifications”, mostly through mature grounds mechanisms. Interview evidence suggests that quite a mix of qualifications was included in this category, including a range of awards now made by FETAC.
- At least 26 progressed on mature grounds, assisted by Leaving Certificate subjects taken in a return to education context.

Table 5.2 presents summary data on transfer and progression from further education and similar backgrounds for entry in academic years 1999/00, 2003/04 and 2004/05. It shows numbers progressing from FETAC qualifications, access courses and “other further education and training qualifications” increasing steeply between 1999/00 and 2004/05.

Table 5.2

Data on Transfer and Progression into University Sector Institutions from Further Education and Similar Backgrounds for Entry in Academic Years 1999/00, 2003/04 and 2004/05

Academic Year	Scenario*		Prior Qualification		Craft Qualification		University Access Programme		Other Irish Further Education and Training Qualification		Leaving Certificate Subjects Undertaken Recently in Return to Education Context							
			NCVA/FETAC Foundation or Level 1		NCVA/FETAC Level 2 or 3 (NFQ Level 5 or 6)													
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2						
Year Entered	1st Year	2nd Year	1st Year	2nd Year	1st Year	2nd Year	1st Year	2nd Year	1st Year	2nd Year	1st Year	2nd Year						
All Colleges Responding																		
2003 / 04	0	0	6	28	1	42	0	0	4	173	0	86	20	13	71	5	0	25
2004 / 05	0	0	8	46	0	42	0	0	7	226	0	130	3	7	59	0	0	26
Colleges That Responded for 1999/00																		
1999/00	0	0	5	3	0	10	1	0	1	46	0	34	0	0	15	7	0	24
2003/04	0	0	3	27	1	28	0	0	3	173	0	67	19	0	57	5	0	10
2004/05	0	0	4	46	0	35	0	0	1	226	0	129	3	0	52	0	0	16

It should be recalled that mechanisms for progression from FETAC/NCVA Level 2 qualifications were in the midst of a multi-year roll-out in academic year 2004/05. Significant numbers were only accepted from UCC and NCAD in that year. However, UCC planned to increase substantially the extent of opportunities for progression from FETAC/NCVA Level 2 in 2005/06, and a number of other major institutions planned to introduce or extend such opportunities. Thus, while the numbers progressing from FETAC/NCVA Level 2 qualifications in 2004/05 were modest, it is likely that they grew substantially in 2005/06, and will grow again in 2006/07.

5.4 Transfer and Progression from HETAC/DIT Backgrounds

Table 5.3 summarises the data on transfer and progression from HETAC / DIT backgrounds, for academic year 2004/05.

Table 5.3
Data on Transfer and
Progression into University
Sector Institutions from
HETAC / DIT Backgrounds
for Entry in Academic Year
2004/05

Discipline of Course Entered	Prior Qualification	National Certificate /DIT Certificate / Higher Certificate		National Diploma /DIT Diploma / Ordinary Bachelor Degree			HETAC / Institute of Technology / DIT Qualification - Transfer Mid-course from Degree / Honours Bachelor Degree ⑥			HETAC / Institute of Technology / DIT Qualification - Other Higher Education Qualification					
		Scenario*		1		2		1		2		1		2	
		Year Entered		1st Year	2nd Year+	1st Year	1st Year	2nd Year+	1st Year	1st Year	2nd Year+	1st Year	1st Year	2nd Year+	1st Year
Arts		4	1	9	1	1	2	11	15	12	8	4	13		
Education		0	0	4	2	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0		
Art & Design		0	1	1	0	4	1	0	3	0	0	0	0		
Business, Economic & Social Studies		0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Equestrian		0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
European Studies		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Social Science		0	0	3	0	1	2	1	1	1	0	0	0		
Communications & Information Studies		0	0	2	1	0	3	2	1	4	0	0	0		
Commerce ⑥		8	62	1	3	88	0	7	11	0	13	28	0		
Law		0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0		
Science		0	19	2	0	54	2	2	16	0	0	0	0		
Engineering		0	29	0	2	59	2	1	0	0	0	1	0		
Architecture		0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4		
Medicine & Nursing		0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	3		
Dentistry		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Veterinary Medicine		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0		
Agricultural Science & Forestry		1	2	0	4	20	4	0	0	1	1	0	0		
Food Science & Technology		0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Computing & IT		3	1	1	0	5	1	5	5	1	0	0	2		
Not Specified		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Total		16	115	24	21	242	20	29	53	19	33	33	25		

⑥ A significant proportion of these are part time students.

⊗ The data on transfer mid-course from degree should be treated with caution, as some colleges included transfers from outside the HETAC/DIT sphere in the data they provided.

* Scenario 1 numbers in the Table are based on the records of virtually the whole university sector. Because of the challenges faced by colleges in retrieving data on mature entry, Scenario 2 numbers are drawn from the records of four of the seven universities, and approximately half of the smaller colleges.

Main points emerging from the data are as follows.

- 115 students from certificate level backgrounds transferred into the university sector at second year or above. The main disciplines were commerce (many into part time courses), engineering and science. A further 16 transferred into first year. At least 24 people with certificate level qualifications used them in gaining entry on mature grounds.
- 242 students from diploma level backgrounds transferred into the university sector at second year or above. The main disciplines were again commerce (many into part time courses), engineering and science, with some also entering agricultural science. A further 21 transferred into first year. At least 20 people with certificate level qualifications used them in gaining entry on mature grounds.
- A significant number of students were admitted with what colleges considered to be "other higher education qualifications". Qualifications awarded by professional bodies appear to have made a significant contribution to the totals here.

Table 5.4 presents summary data on transfer and progression from HETAC and DIT backgrounds for entry in academic years 1999/00, 2003/04 and 2004/05.

Table 5.4

Data on Transfer and Progression into University Sector Institutions from HETAC/DIT Backgrounds for Entry in Academic Years 1999/00, 2003/04 and 2004/05

Discipline of Course Entered	Prior Qualification		National Certificate / DIT Certificate / Higher Certificate		National Diploma / DIT Diploma / Ordinary Bachelor Degree		HETAC / Institute of Technology / DIT Qualification - Transfer Mid-course from Degree / Honours Bachelor Degree		HETAC / Institute of Technology / DIT Qualification - Other Higher Education Qualification					
	Scenario*		1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2				
	Year Entered		1st Year	2nd Year	1st Year	2nd Year	1st Year	2nd Year	1st Year	2nd Year	1st Year			
All Colleges Responding														
2003 / 04			24	165	35	36	259	17	27	41	24	20	35	37
2004 / 05			16	115	24	21	242	20	29	53	19	33	33	25
Colleges That Responded for 1999/00														
1999/00			33	102	12	37	135	6	3	13	19	31	28	8
2003/04			11	150	25	12	218	10	16	35	19	19	34	35
2004/05			14	112	16	11	193	15	22	45	14	32	33	24

The main point emerging from the data is that numbers transferring from certificates and diplomas rose sharply between 1999/00 and 2003/04, and fell in 2004/05. Interview evidence suggests that the peak may have occurred before 2003/04. Interviewees suggested that the fall had been underway for a number of years, triggered primarily by the introduction of degree programmes in the Institute of Technology sector.

5.5 Transfer and Progression from UK Backgrounds

Table 5.3 summarises the data on transfer and progression from UK backgrounds, for academic year 2004/05.

Table 5.5
Data on Transfer and Progression into University Sector Institutions from UK Backgrounds for Entry in Academic Year 2004/05

Discipline of Course Entered	Scenario*		UK Qualification - Further Education Qualification		UK Qualification - Higher Education Sub-Degree Qualification (HNC / HND / etc.)		UK Qualification - Transfer Mid-course from Degree	
			1	2	1	2	1	2
	Year Entered	1st Year	2nd Year	1st Year	2nd Year	1st Year	2nd Year	1st Year
Arts	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	3
Education	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Art & Design	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Business, Economic & Social Studies	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Equestrian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
European Studies	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Social Science	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Communications & Information Studies	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Commerce	0	0	0	0	4	1	1	0
Law	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Science	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Engineering	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Architecture	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medicine & Nursing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dentistry	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Veterinary Medicine	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Agricultural Science & Forestry	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Food Science & Technology	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Computing & IT	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Not Specified	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	1	0	6	4	4	8

* Scenario 1 numbers in the Table are based on the records of virtually the whole university sector. Because of the challenges faced by colleges in retrieving data on mature entry, Scenario 2 numbers are drawn from the records of four of the seven universities, and approximately half of the smaller colleges.

The main point emerging from the Table is that the numbers transferring or progressing from UK qualifications are very low. As indicated earlier, this appears to reflect the following factors.

- One of the factors that tends to encourage students to transfer from courses in other countries is where they undertake a temporary transfer under a programme such as Erasmus, and decide that they would like to stay. However, few students from UK universities study in Ireland under Erasmus.
- The three-year duration of many primary degree courses in the UK fits poorly with the four year duration of most Irish Honours Bachelor Degree courses. A student transferring might often add two years to the duration of their degree, between accepting one year's credit for two years of study, and accepting a one year increase in the duration of the course.
- Irish university sector institutions say they are most likely to accept applications for transfer from academic departments that they see as being comparable to their own in terms of quality and standing. This tends to limit the range of UK universities from which they will accept transfers.
- While significant numbers of Irish students attend UK universities, and might possibly be interested in transferring back to Ireland, many of them do so because their Leaving Certificate results are not good enough for entry into the Irish course of their choice. Many Irish institutions say that they are reluctant to accept such students on transfer. Some indicate that they will only accept Irish students on transfer from overseas if their Leaving Certificate was good enough for entry into the course into which they are endeavouring to transfer, in the year when they started college.

Table 5.6 presents summary data on transfer and progression from UK backgrounds for entry in academic years 1999/00, 2003/04 and 2004/05.

Table 5.6

Data on Transfer and Progression into University Sector Institutions from UK Backgrounds for Entry in Academic Years 1999/00, 2003/04 and 2004/05

Discipline of Course Entered	Scenario*	UK Qualification - Further Education Qualification		UK Qualification - Higher Education Sub-Degree Qualification (HNC / HND / etc.)		UK Qualification - Transfer Mid-course from Degree				
		1	2	1	2	1	2			
		1st Year	2nd Year	1st Year	2nd Year	1st Year	2nd Year			
All Colleges Responding										
2003 / 04		1	13	0	4	11	2	3	11	0
2004 / 05		0	0	1	0	6	4	4	8	1
Colleges That Responded for 1999/00										
1999/00		0	23	0	1	2	1	0	1	0
2003/04		1	13	0	4	11	1	1	11	1
2004/05		0	0	0	0	6	3	3	8	1

The only clear-cut trend emerging is a fall-off in progression from further education qualifications, which relates to admission practices at just one specific college.

5.6 Transfer from Within the University Sector, and from Beyond the UK

Transfers from within the university sector, and from beyond the UK, fell outside the scope of the study. However, a small number of colleges provided supplementary data on such transfers.

The data indicate that:

- transfers take place between university sector institutions, but the numbers involved are not large; and
- there are modest numbers of transfers from higher education institutions in EU countries beyond the UK, and from non-EU countries.

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out and discusses the main conclusions of the study that form the basis for recommendations. Earlier chapters report on and interpret the evidence gathered. This chapter reviews key points from this evidence, and uses them to draw conclusions as to the issues that require attention.

The research shows that numbers transferring and progressing into Honours Bachelor Degree courses at university sector institutions from non-school leaver backgrounds are low in comparison with those progressing on the basis of the Leaving Certificate.

- The study has identified 554 students progressing or transferring into the sector from further education and similar backgrounds in 2004/05. While it will not have identified all students entering on mature or disabled grounds following such qualifications, it is apparent that the numbers involved cannot amount to more than about 4% of first time entrants.
- This study has identified 630 students transferring or progressing from HETAC and similar backgrounds in 2004/05. This number amounts to less than 4% of entrants.
- The study has identified 24 students progressing or transferring from UK backgrounds¹⁶. This number is small, amounting to approximately 0.1% of entrants.

6.2 Transfer and Progression from HETAC and DIT Backgrounds

In most cases, students transferring into undergraduate university sector courses from studying for HETAC and DIT qualifications do so after completing a qualification at Level 6 or Level 7, rather than transferring mid-course. The numbers involved are substantial in the context of the overall numbers taking transfer and progression routes into the university sector, but reflect quite a modest overall rate of transfer between the sectors.

The interview evidence is that demand for transfer into the university sector from among students studying at Institutes of Technology (beyond that already underway) is quite modest, and that scope for increasing numbers transferring is limited. Indeed, interviews indicate that applications for transfer are falling, as Institutes of Technology develop

¹⁶ Note that it is known from interviews with institutions that some students progressing from Northern Ireland institutions were included under the further education heading, rather than the UK heading.

their own progression routes. The survey evidence is of a fall in numbers transferring between academic years 2003/04 and 2004/05.

Conversely some institutions report relatively large numbers of applications from students taking HETAC qualifications at private colleges, but report that few of them are accepted.

While transfer from HETAC and DIT qualifications has characteristics of progression (moving from one qualification to a higher level qualification), university sector institutions mostly administer it through their inter-institutional transfer processes. As well as looking at the qualification and final grade received, they generally scrutinise the applicant's transcript thoroughly to assess the likelihood that they will be successful.

While there are well-established patterns of transfer in some areas, and while some academic departments make a significant effort to accommodate transfer applicants, academic departments in university sector institutions are mostly not organised or resourced to accept substantial numbers of transfer students, and are frequently quite selective about whom they will accept.

Issues that may need to be addressed include the following:

- **The potential benefits for a stronger facilitation of transfers (including transfers / advanced entry progression from HETAC and DIT qualifications) throughout the university sector, subject to resource constraints and considerations of student suitability; and**
- **Investigating whether there is scope to satisfy more of the demand for transfer / advanced entry progression from private colleges into undergraduate courses in the university sector.**

6.3 Progression from FETAC (NCVA) Qualifications

The first mainstream mechanism for progression from FETAC qualifications into a university was introduced by University College Cork (UCC) in academic year 2002/03. Most universities, and a number of other institutions in the sector, have subsequently also introduced such mechanisms. Colleges have generally increased the number of courses accessible, and the quota of places available, on each course once they have gained experience with these mechanisms. As a result, the number of places available under these mechanisms nationally has increased

substantially even since academic year 2004/05 (the most recent year for which data on students progressing was collected), and seems certain to increase further in academic year 2006/07.

Thus, while the data collected from institutions indicates that just 46 students progressed on the basis of FETAC/NCVA qualifications in 2004/2005, the likelihood is that the number in 2005/06 has been significantly greater, and that it will be greater again in 2006/07.

Moreover, the interview evidence is that interest among students in using FETAC qualifications for progression has increased, and that demand from students meeting the minimum criteria for acceptance will substantially exceed the quotas of places available in some academic disciplines (nursing, for example).

The interview evidence is that progression from FETAC/NCVA qualifications has worked well in the sense that students admitted under these mechanisms have generally performed in line with those admitted on the basis of their Leaving Certificate, and better than average in some cases.

However, there are issues with the design of the progression mechanisms.

- No substantial research has yet been undertaken to establish how FETAC qualifications compare with Leaving Certificate qualifications as preparation for successful undergraduate studies at a university sector institution. There is no researched basis for comparing the FETAC points score calculated for most institutions by the Central Applications Office (CAO) with points calculated on the basis of Leaving Certificate results. Neither is there any researched demonstration that such a comparison would be stable across different disciplines.

In the absence of a strong mechanism for maintaining identical scoring between different providers of similar FETAC qualifications (such as exists within, for example, any subject in the Leaving Certificate), it is not known how consistent a standard a given number of points awarded by universities for a FETAC qualification represents within a discipline.

Issues arising from these points include the following:

- It is not known how the most basic requirement for progression from a FETAC (NCVA) qualification – five distinctions – compares with various levels of success in the Leaving Certificate as an indicator of likely success in college. However, the available evidence suggests that it is generally a more demanding requirement than the two higher level C3s, plus four passes required for matriculation by a number of institutions in the university sector. The five-distinction requirement appears to have been pitched intentionally at a fairly demanding level.
- It is not known whether the notional formula calculated by CAO that equates a Distinction to 45 points obtained through the Leaving Certificate, a Merit to 30 points and a Pass to 15 points, represents a reliable equivalence. Neither is it known whether any variation on the scheme that might be adopted would do so. It is noteworthy that the scheme operated by Institutes of Technology is somewhat more generous, offering an additional five points for each module, whether submitted with a Distinction, Merit or Pass.
- The five distinction requirement appears to have been set with a view to achieving more than one objective:
 - To establish a basic level of qualification suitable for establishing that an applicant has sufficient ability to study at university level; and
 - To limit the number of applications meeting the basic requirements for admission in popular disciplines.

The requirement appears possibly to have been set at a higher level than is required to meet the first of these two objectives. This is not a problem where the number of qualifying applicants greatly exceeds the quota of available places. However, in other disciplines it may serve to exclude students with perhaps three or four distinctions who might perform well if admitted. Where there is a balance between the quota of places and the supply of qualifying applicants, it may serve to dampen pressure to raise the quota.

At the same time, the requirement is having only partial success in limiting the number of applications meeting the basic requirements for entry in some popular disciplines, and in some disciplines where the quota of available places is small. In these cases, points systems for comparing FETAC (NCVA) applicants determine the allocation of

places. It is understood that demand exceeds supply in some areas (notably nursing) to the extent that available places are being allocated randomly between applicants with eight distinctions, with many applicants on eight distinctions failing to obtain a place.

It could possibly be appropriate to stop seeking to use basic entry requirements to meet the objective of limiting the number of applications meeting basic requirement for admission. This could mean reducing the five-distinction requirement to a level designed purely to filter out those who are not suitable for university level study.

Institutions looking for a higher standard on a particular course could still achieve this by limiting quotas, or by operating points systems, similar to those operated by the Institutes of Technology, linked to Leaving Certificate points systems.

- There are grounds for thinking that strengthening of progression routes from FETAC (NCVA) qualifications may affect the operation of further education courses. To the extent that students entering further education courses do so with the intention of progressing to higher education, it is likely that this will induce providers of further education to focus their courses on optimising prospects for progression. In courses where the majority of students are likely to progress to higher education, this is arguably desirable. In courses where only a minority are likely to progress, it is arguably undesirable, even where students' main purpose in participating is to progress.

Given such pressures, it would be reasonable to anticipate that student results will improve over time, as further education providers focus on ensuring their students perform well enough to progress to higher education, increasing the number of students graduating with high numbers of distinctions.

- There is an issue that should be faced about the allocation of scarce university sector places in highly popular disciplines, and in disciplines with small numbers of places available, between students from Leaving Certificate backgrounds, and those from other backgrounds such as further education and training, access and mature grounds entry. In most cases, quotas of places for students progressing from further education backgrounds are small relative to the total number of places available, and do not have a major impact on the numbers of places available to school leavers.

In many disciplines (e.g. most areas of science for the foreseeable future), demand from those wishing to progress from further education is unlikely ever to be great enough to cause problems with allocation of places. However, in some disciplines with a stronger presence in further education, there is such a substantial flow of further education students who could potentially be assessed as being suitable for university sector education that few places would be left for school leavers if they were all accommodated.

Realistically, institutions have to make reasonable accommodation for students from a variety of backgrounds, which is likely in most cases to mean substantial numbers of places being kept for school leavers, whatever the demand from other groups. In some courses, there will be little room for flexibility in how places are allocated once reasonable accommodation has been made for applicants through all mechanisms. In others, however, there will be a choice to be made as to the balance between satisfying demand for progression from further education and demand from school leavers. This is a live issue in nursing and in art & design at present.

One possible line of enquiry that could be used by institutions seeking to resolve these issues is that of developing a better understanding of the prospects for academic success of students with different results from different qualifications backgrounds. Rather than considering just how demonstrably suitable students are at the time of application¹⁷, they could also consider how well they are likely to perform over the full duration of the course – how likely they are to complete and how likely they are to graduate with good honours – and perhaps even how likely they are to succeed in the employment market or further studies upon graduation.

- There is an apparent inconsistency between the mechanisms for progression from FETAC (NCVA) Level 6 qualifications (formerly NCVA Level 3) following two years of study at a further education college, which (where they exist) lead to progression into first year of an undergraduate course, and a range of non-FETAC qualifications taken at further education colleges following two years of study that lead to advanced entry progression/transfer into second year of an undergraduate course.
- Many of the foregoing points point towards a possible need to reform mechanisms for progression from FETAC (NCVA) qualifications. As FETAC develops a new system of further education and training awards under the National Framework of Awards, it is possible that a

¹⁷ NCAD has moved in the current year to redress the advantages of students who have undertaken further education portfolio preparation courses over school leavers.

need for changes in the existing structure of modules and grading will arise, and it is likely also that the distinction between FETAC (NCVA) and other FETAC awards will be blurred or eliminated. FETAC's need for change will reinforce the impetus for the university sector to change its progression mechanisms, and will present the potential for the changes in progression mechanisms and developments in the Framework of Qualifications to be coordinated with each other.

Many of the issues emerging from this study relate to the future of progression from FETAC qualifications.

Significant issues include the following:

- That there is no consistent understanding of how various attainments in FETAC (NCVA) qualifications function as indicators of likely success in university sector institutions. (By contrast, there is a longstanding understanding of how Leaving Certificate grades predict success at university.)
- That the five distinction requirement for progression from a FETAC (NCVA) qualification may be too demanding;
- That strengthening of progression routes may affect the operation of courses leading to FETAC (NCVA) qualifications;
- That there is a need for institutions to look more closely at how they allocate places in short supply between different groups, and that that an improved understanding of the performance of students from different backgrounds could be useful in this;
- That FETAC (NCVA) Level 6 is treated less favourably for access to university sector institutions than other qualifications gained in the further education sector after a similar duration of study; and
- That developments in further education and training aspects of the National Framework of Qualifications are likely to provide an impetus for change in FETAC progression mechanisms.

6.4 Progression from other FETAC (NCVA) Qualifications

There are no mechanisms in place for progression from FETAC qualifications other than from certain awards formerly made by the National Council for Vocational Awards at two levels. This is reflected by the small numbers found to be progressing from these backgrounds, as seen earlier in Figure 5.1. Most of those who do progress into the university sector despite the lack of such mechanisms appear to do so on mature grounds.

FETAC/NCVA awards, from which progression arrangements into higher education have been developed, are at levels 5 and 6 in the National Framework of Qualifications. There are many other existing and former awards at these two levels. Substantial numbers of apprentices and trainees obtain FETAC National Craft Certificate, National Skills Certificate, Special Skills Certificate and Specific Skills Certificate qualifications (and indeed other FETAC qualifications) at Levels 5 and 6 each year.

The lack of mechanisms for progression from these qualifications appears to place a barrier in the way of progression from apprentice qualifications, and from further education and training courses provided by organisations such as FÁS and Fáilte Ireland. It is unclear how distinctions in relation to progression can or should be made between various FETAC awards at a particular level in the context of the emerging new system of awards for further education and training generally. Future developments in the further education and training parts of the National Framework of Qualifications may blur or eliminate the distinction between FETAC (NCVA) and other FETAC qualifications, adding to the impetus for change.

There is a need to consider extending mechanisms for progression and transfer from FETAC (NCVA) qualifications to other comparable FETAC qualifications.

6.5 Progression from Access Courses

As of 2004/05, access courses formed the route followed by most students for non-Leaving Certificate progression into the first year of university sector courses. The gap with FETAC qualifications seems likely to be narrowing, however, as quotas for FETAC places increase.

There are contrasting views in relation to access courses.

- Some are interested in developing access course entry further, and may favour underpinning this with improvements to eligibility for progression.
- Others observe them becoming a more standard route for access to university education, travelled by increasingly significant numbers of college entrants, and argue that it would be better if this growth was instead centred in courses outside the university sector, leading to

FETAC qualifications. The issue is not particularly with access courses that have a tight focus on addressing disadvantage, or with courses that focus on introducing students to disciplines where there is a national economic interest in boosting student numbers. It is with access courses that prepare students who may not be disadvantaged for entry into undergraduate courses where there is a shortage of places, and where this shortage may constrain the acceptance of students progressing from FETAC qualifications and the acceptance of people from the general population of mature grounds applicants.

Whichever view is taken, it would be desirable that access courses, which do not generally lead to qualifications at present, should in future lead to qualifications positioned within the National Framework of Qualifications. It is understood from the Irish Universities Association that the universities already envisage taking action on this. The National Access Office in the HEA is also working with the Department of Education and Science in this matter.

6.6 Progression on Mature Grounds

Significant numbers of students with FETAC and HETAC (and equivalent) qualifications progress or transfer to study at university through mature grounds application mechanisms, rather than through mechanisms designed for transfer and progression.

Some of those interviewed in university sector institutions suggest that there is a remaining unconscious bias in the assessment system that causes excessive numbers of mature applicants to be filtered out. These interviewees favour approaches that are more objective and transparent (less reliance on interviews and more on systematic scoring systems), and that rely more on evidence-derived criteria and less on the views of the academic staff teaching each course. Indeed, a number of institutions have moved in this direction, in some cases abolishing interviews for mature entry.

It would be desirable that institutions should explore the scope for making their systems for assessing mature grounds applicants more objective and transparent, where they have not already done so.

6.7 Education Courses

According to institutions providing Honours Bachelor Degree courses in education, the Department of Education and Science exercises influence over admissions criteria for these courses in ways that have the effect of limiting opportunities for admission of students from alternative entry route backgrounds, including transfer and progression students.

The exact pattern of admissions practices for courses in education varies between institutions, from having no provision for alternative entry route entry, through systems of criteria that allow suitable alternative entry route applicants in on slightly reduced CAO points, to operating alternative entry route criteria similar to those for non-education courses in the same institution.

The effect is that many education courses are treated as special cases for purposes of transfer and progression, and for purposes of other forms of alternative entry route entry.

A practical implication of this is that it tends to limit the cultural diversity of primary teachers, ensuring that few immigrants can gain entry (because of the Irish language requirement), that relatively few entrants have substantial post school leaving experience (because normal mature entry processes do not apply), and that most entrants are drawn from the particular social backgrounds that tend to attain strong Leaving Certificate results (while mechanisms for transfer and progression tend to offset this tendency in other disciplines to some extent).

On the whole, discussions with institutions about the logic for courses in education being a special case did not raise issues that were substantially different to those that could be raised for courses in any other high demand discipline.

It would be desirable for the Department of Education & Science and institutions providing courses in teacher education to explore what can be done to open up admission for alternative entry route applicants more effectively to these courses.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This Chapter presents recommendations based on the conclusions drawn earlier.

7.2 Need for Systematic Ongoing Review of Success of Alternative Entry Route Entrants

Institutions in the university sector have undertaken a range of internal analyses, looking at the success of graduates from alternative entry route backgrounds. They report that these have mostly found alternative entry route students to be performing "as well as or better than" students from school leaver backgrounds. In a limited number of cases, they have found alternative entry route students tending towards one or other end of the distribution (outperforming mainstream school leaver entrants, or performing in line with lower performing mainstream school leaver entrants), but the extent of any underperformance has not been sufficient to give rise to serious concerns.

It was apparent from interviews that there are generally staff in key positions who maintain an awareness of the progress of alternative entry route entrants, and that these would be in a position to notice any substantial problems that might emerge, and to trigger action to resolve them.

However, the consultants are of the view that the very limited extent of systematic measurement of the success of alternative entry route entrants poses problems for the management of alternative entry route entry, including entry through transfer and progression.

The extent of alternative entry route entry, including entry through transfer and progression, is influenced heavily by the criteria applied to qualify applicants for entry through each alternative entry route mechanism. However, the issue of whether the criteria currently are well tuned so as to admit the optimal mix of students from each of the possible routes does not appear to have been addressed sufficiently by colleges.

The consultants suggest that a constructive approach to addressing this would be for institutions to shift from periodically researching the success of students admitted through alternative entry route routes, to making the generation and review of data on this one of their standard management information practices.

Institutions should develop a regular process of reviewing quantitatively the success of students through each alternative entry route, in each broad disciplinary area, and should periodically review their admissions criteria based in part on this evidence.

This has implications for IT systems for admissions and student records.

Institutions should establish a rigorous rationale for admissions criteria, so that significant marginal differences in expected academic outcomes between different routes are preserved only if they meet stated objectives (which might be in areas such as social mix, experience mix, age mix or maintaining opportunities for entry from specific mechanisms).

7.3 Evaluating Mature Grounds Applications

There would be value in exploring what can be done to make the evaluation of mature grounds applications more transparent. While institutions should be slow to abandon mechanisms that they believe to operate effectively, at the same time there is a value in exploring more transparent approaches. Some institutions are already moving in this direction.

Institutions should complement existing mature grounds application processes by developing objective scoring systems.

- **They should use these initially as a tool to support and complement existing methods of evaluation.**
- **They should test outcomes quantitatively for effectiveness against interviews and against less structured means of evaluation of written applications.**

7.4 Future Progression from FETAC Qualifications

This study has identified issues with the current operation of progression from FETAC qualifications, which include the following.

- **Criteria for progression from FETAC qualifications may in some instances be overly restrictive, in terms of the number of distinctions required, the range of course codes that will be accepted, and the specific module requirements.**

- Mechanisms for progression from FETAC qualifications are only available for qualifications previously awarded by NCVA at Levels 2 and 3, and now positioned at Levels 5 and 6 respectively in the National Framework of Qualifications. Qualifications now positioned at the same levels, and originating with other historical awarding bodies, do not lead to opportunities for progression into the university sector.

Systems of further education and training under the National Framework of Qualifications will undergo changes in future that may affect the operation of progression from FETAC awards over time. Existing awards have been placed at levels within the framework, and a directory of awards will shortly classify them as major, minor, special purpose, supplemental award types¹⁸. It is understood that it will still be possible for university sector institutions to distinguish ex-NCVA awards, and that course codes will be preserved, making it possible for existing progression mechanisms to continue to operate.

It appears likely that development of these parts of the National Framework of Qualifications will continue in ways that will erode or eliminate legacy distinctions between qualifications positioned at the same level in the National Framework of qualifications. This will form an important part of the context for university sector institutions considering how to develop and manage progression from FETAC qualifications into the future.

The university sector and FETAC share an interest in there being a system of Further Education and Training qualifications that facilitates progression efficiently and effectively. As both control key parts of the system, it will be important that there should be an ongoing dialogue.

The university sector and FETAC should engage in ongoing consultation about interaction between developments in the system of further education and training qualifications, and progression from FETAC qualifications to university sector institutions. It would be reasonable for this consultation to also involve the Council of Directors of the Institutes of Technology, and to also address progression into the Institutes of Technology.

Institutions accepting FETAC qualifications should look at broadening their criteria for progression from FETAC qualifications.

- They should consider broadening the range of FETAC/NCVA course codes they will accept for progression into each course, and narrowing the range of required modules.
- They should also review the 5-distinction criterion, to assess whether it should always be required for progression.
- They should look at broadening the range of FETAC qualifications accepted for progression so as to include more of the substantial awards made at levels 5 and 6, including apprenticeship-based qualifications.

7.5 Consistency Between FETAC Level 6 and Non-FETAC Awards

There are apparent inconsistencies between FETAC level 6 awards and non-FETAC awards pursued in the further education sector that give the outward appearance of being at a similar level. Level 6 awards give limited opportunities for progression into first year of a university Honours Bachelor Degree course, while some non-FETAC awards that require similar durations of study give opportunities for transfer into the second year of linked courses in Ireland.

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and university sector institutions should look into the relationship between professional/HNC/HND qualifications arising from courses taught in FE colleges, and level 6 FETAC/NCEA¹⁹ awards, and should work with colleges to resolve any anomalies. This could involve allowing transfer from level 6 awards into 2nd year of a linked course.

7.6 Number of Places in Course Areas Popular with Mature Students

One of the significant constraints on the number of mature students is that demand for university education among potential mature students is concentrated in a narrow range of course areas, where there is an excess of demand for places over supply. If there is a desire to increase mature student numbers, this could be addressed in part by increasing the number of places available on courses they are interested in taking.

¹⁹ National Council for Education Awards

Bodies interested in expanding mature student entry into higher education should give consideration to increasing numbers of places in course areas of particular interest to mature grounds applicants.

7.7 Transfers from Private Colleges

Few if any students obtaining HETAC awards from studies at private colleges are successful in transferring into the university sector. This is despite that fact that demand for transfer into the university sector is stronger among this group than among most other HETAC graduates at Higher Certificate and Ordinary Bachelor Degree levels.

Some colleges report that shortcomings in transcripts provided by private colleges form one of the barriers to transfer.

HETAC should look into transcripts issued by private colleges for transfer purposes, with a view to assuring that they are as informative as those from Institutes of Technology.

7.8 Progression into High Points Healthcare Courses

There are few opportunities for FETAC students to progress into the high points healthcare courses.

Colleges should explore alternative entry arrangements into high points healthcare courses, with a view to establishing whether the benefits arising from increased student diversity are sufficient to balance any difficulties or perceived unfairness that may arise.

7.9 Education Courses

According to colleges providing Honours Bachelor Degree courses in education, the Department of Education and Science exercises influence over admissions criteria for these courses in ways that have the effect of limiting opportunities for admission of students from alternative entry route backgrounds, including transfer and progression students.

The exact pattern of admissions practices for courses in education varies between colleges, from having no provision for alternative entry route

entry, through operating criteria that allow suitable alternative entry route applicants in on slightly reduced CAO points, to operating criteria similar to those for other courses in the same institution.

The effect is that many education courses are treated as special cases for purposes of transfer and progression, and for purposes of other forms of alternative entry route entry.

A practical implication of this is that it tends to limit the cultural diversity of primary teachers, ensuring that few immigrants can gain entry (because of the Irish language requirement), that relatively few entrants have substantial post school leaving experience (because normal mature entry processes do not apply), and that most entrants are drawn from the particular social backgrounds that tend to attain strong Leaving Certificate results (while mechanisms for transfer and progression tend to offset this tendency in other disciplines to some extent).

On the whole, discussions with institutions about the logic for courses in education being a special case did not raise issues that were substantially different to those that could be raised for courses in any other high demand discipline.

It is suggested that the Department of Education & Science should:

- **consider developing the criteria that it seeks to have operated by colleges, so as to allow colleges to apply approaches to alternative entry route admission to education degree courses similar to those applied in other disciplines;**
- **consider facilitating colleges in developing creative means to ensure that second level and also primary teachers have adequate Irish language skills on graduation, without necessarily having strong Irish when they arrive.**

APPENDIX A

THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Research on Transfer and Progression into Undergraduate Programmes Leading to University Awards

Request for Information Introduction

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, the Higher Education Authority and the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities have jointly commissioned Mclver Consulting to undertake research into transfer and progression to undergraduate university sector programmes leading to Honours Bachelor Degree awards from further education (including university access programmes), the Institutes of Technology, other providers of courses leading to HETAC qualifications and UK universities.

The research is targeted on the seven universities, the colleges of education and recognised colleges of the National University of Ireland.

The direct purpose of the research, as set out in the Terms of Reference, is to provide answers to the following questions:

- **What are the existing transfer and progression routes?**
 - How and why did they develop?
 - What routes are developing now?
- **Who travels the transfer and progression routes, generally over the last 5 years or so?**
 - Student profiles and number linked to particular course/disciplines
- **What is the experience – successful or not, and why is that?**
 - What is working? Why?
 - What is not working? Why?
 - Learner Perspective
 - Institutional Perspective
 - What potential transfer and progression arrangements are being planned by institutions?

The more general purpose of the study is to provide a base of information and analysis on transfer and progression to inform and underpin efforts by university sector institutions, and others, to improve access to undergraduate university level education.

Purpose of this Request for Information

This document has two main purposes, each addressed by one part of the document.

Part 1 – Request for Specific Information

The purpose of this part (pages 3 to 10) is to request specific information from each institution on transfer and progression into its courses. It is requested that this information should be returned to the consultants by Monday 16 March, 2005.

Part 2 – Outline of Broader Questions

The purpose of this part is to provide an indication of the broader questions it is hoped to address in the course of visits to colleges. It is envisaged that the consultants will visit each institution during March/April 2005, and will meet with the Registrar, other relevant staff and, where feasible, a group of students who have progressed from further education, the Institutes of Technology or UK qualifications.

PART 1 REQUEST FOR SPECIFIC INFORMATION

1.1 Briefing

This section of the document sets out a request for specific information required for the study. If you find the request in any way ambiguous, if you anticipate problems in answering a question posed, or if you feel you need further guidance for any other reason, please phone or e-mail Xxx Xxxx or Xxx Xxxx of McIver Consulting.

Contact details are:

Phone: (01) 676 6647 Fax: (01) 661 2528
e-Mails: xxx.xxxx@mciver-consulting.com
xxx.xxxx@mciver-consulting.com
Address: McIver Consulting, 49 Upper Mount Street, Dublin 2.

The information requested is of two types:

1. Information on existing and planned mechanisms for admission of students transferring or progressing from relevant backgrounds (1.2 and 1.3); and
2. Data on actual numbers of students transferring and progressing (1.4).

The information provided by institutions through this stage of the research will be collated and analysed, and will be used to develop a description of transfer and progression into undergraduate degree programmes in the university sector as it has developed over the last five years.

The information you provide will also be used to inform discussions in the course of the subsequent visit to your institution by the consultants. The confidentiality of institutions assisting the research will be respected.

The report on the research will avoid referring to individual examples that give rise to confidentiality issues.

It is requested that your response to this Request for Specific Information should be returned to the consultants by Monday 16 March, 2005.

1.2 Existing Mechanisms for Transfer or Progression

Please describe any specific mechanisms your institution has for transfer or progression into undergraduate degree programmes from:

- Higher Education qualifications awarded by HETAC, DIT or NCEA;
- Irish Further Education and Training Qualifications (including qualifications from university access programmes); or
- UK Further or Higher Education qualifications

The main Irish **Higher Education** qualifications of interest are:

- the National Certificate, the DIT Certificate, and the Higher Certificate, which replaced these in 2004;
- the National Diploma, the DIT Diploma and the Ordinary Bachelor Degree, which replaced these in 2004; and
- degrees (Honours Bachelor Degrees from 2004) awarded by HETAC/DIT/NCEA (transfer of students in mid-course is within the scope of the study).

Typical **Irish Further Education and Training** qualifications (all of the following now made by FETAC) include NCVA/FETAC levels 0 to 3, craft qualifications following on apprenticeships, and skills certificates awarded arising from courses provided by FÁS or Fáilte Ireland (previously CERT)²⁰. Prior to the launch of FETAC in 2001, relevant qualifications were also awarded by the National Tourism Certification Board²¹ (NTCB), Teagasc and Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM).

Leaving Certificate subjects undertaken recently in a return-to-education context are also of interest.

You should also give details of mechanisms for progression from university access courses conducted at further education level.

Typical **UK Further and Higher Education** qualifications include²²:

- Further Education Qualifications:
 - BTEC / Edexcel – National Certificate, National Diploma
 - Qualifications & Curriculum Authority – NVQs, GNVQs
 - Scottish Qualifications Authority – SVQs, "Highers", "Intermediates"

²⁰ If you are unsure about whether a qualification counts as further education, please check with Xxx Xxxx or Xxx Xxxx of Mclver Consulting (contact details page 3).

²¹ NTCB operated within CERT, which has since become a part of Fáilte Ireland.

²² If you are unsure about the status of a UK qualification, please include it anyway if this is straightforward, or alternatively check with Xxx Xxxx or Xxx Xxxx of Mclver Consulting (contact details page 3).

- Subdegree Higher Education Qualifications: BTEC / Edexcel Higher National Certificate (HNC); Higher National Diploma (HND)
- Undergraduate degree programmes (transfer of students in mid-course is within the scope of the study)

In each case, you should give information on:

- The specific qualifications and grades required to avail of the mechanism;
- The course, or courses, in your institution to which the mechanism applies;
- Information on scope for direct entry into years beyond first year, and on scope for subject exemptions;
- Limitations on the number of students who can avail of the mechanism;
- Whether the mechanism operates through:
 - A. a structured CAO scoring process;
 - B. an assessment process internal to your institution;
 - C. some combination of the above; or
 - D. some other type of process (please describe)
- Whether it (or a substantially similar mechanism) was in operation in academic year 1999/2000, and, if not, in what academic year it was introduced;
- Whether it is anticipated that the mechanism will continue to operate in 2005.
- Any other information on the mechanism that you think might be useful

Please try to give all of this information for each mechanism, and try to follow the above structure for its presentation.

There is a form on the next page that can be copied to respond to the questions above for each transfer and progression mechanism.

Title of Mechanism:

Qualifications and Grades Required to Avail of Mechanism

Qualification

Grades

Course(s) in Your Institution to Which Mechanism Applies

Scope for Entry into Years Beyond First Year

Scope for Subject Exemptions

Limitations on Number of Students Who Can Avail of Mechanism

Does the mechanism operate through (please circle):

- A. a structured CAO scoring process?
- B. an assessment process internal to your institution?
- C. some combination of the above?
- D. some other type of process? (please describe briefly)

Was the Mechanism (or a Substantially Similar Mechanism) in Operation in Academic Year 1999/2000? (Please circle)

Yes / No

If Not, in What Academic Year was it Introduced? (Please circle)

2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004
2004/2005	New for 2005 Entry		

Is it anticipated that the mechanism will continue to operate in Academic Year 2005/2006? (Please circle)

Yes / No

Please append any other information you think necessary.

1.3 Planned Mechanisms for Transfer and Progression

If your institution has specific plans to introduce new mechanisms for transfer and progression from Irish Further Education, from the Institutes of Technology, or from UK qualifications, please give as much of the following information as is available for each.

- The course, or courses, in your institution to which the mechanism will apply;
- The specific qualifications and grades that will be required to avail of the mechanism;
- Information on planned scope for direct entry into years beyond first year, and on scope for subject exemptions;
- Planned limitations on the number of students who can avail of the mechanism;
- How it is envisaged the assessment of applications will operate;
- When (in what year) is it envisaged that the mechanism will be introduced;
- Any other information you think necessary to understand the planned mechanism.

(New mechanisms that have already been launched should instead be addressed under the questions posed in Section 1.2.)

1.4 Data on Transfer and Progression into Undergraduate Degree Programmes

The research requires data on transfer and progression into undergraduate degree programmes.

It is concerned both with situations:

- Where the earlier qualification is used towards satisfying formal requirements for entry onto the degree programme (**Scenario 1**); and
- Where your institution has a record of an earlier qualification that forms a part of the background to the decision to allow entry, but is not a formal requirement (**Scenario 2**).

Within Scenario 1, the research is concerned with distinguishing between students entering the first year of a course, and those allowed to enter directly into second year or at a later point.

Examples of Scenario 2 include instances where mature entrants provide information on earlier qualifications, and instances where students are known to have succeeded in satisfying portfolio, performance, interview or similar requirements in part through earlier further education or higher education studies.

Further education and training awards previously made by NCVA, FÁS, NTCB/CERT, Teagasc, BIM, Dept. of Education & Science and others are now made by FETAC.

Higher education and training awards previously made by NCEA were subsequently made by HETAC, and have recently (2004) been replaced by new HETAC awards designed in accordance with the National Framework of Qualifications award types. The NCEA/HETAC National Certificate has been replaced by the Higher Certificate at level 6 in the framework. The NCEA/HETAC National Diploma has been replaced by the Ordinary Bachelor Degree at level 7. The NCEA/HETAC Degree has been replaced by the Honours Bachelor Degree at level 8.

DIT awards at Certificate, Diploma and Degree levels have also been replaced by the Higher Certificate, Ordinary Bachelor Degree and Honours Bachelor Degree respectively.

It is requested that you complete a Table indicating the number of students transferring or progressing into each undergraduate course your institution provides, similar to the example below for academic years:

- 2004/05
- 2003/04
- 1999/00

You may do this on paper (see example of blank table two pages further on) or in the Excel spreadsheet provided on CD-ROM²³. A delimited text file suitable for importation into Excel would also be acceptable if it used the same layout.

Academic Year: 2004/05	Irish Further Education or Training/ FETAC Qualification			HETAC/Institute of UK Technology/DIT Qualification				Qualification												
											Course – CAO Code & Title	Total First Year Intake	Scenario	Year of Course at Which Entry Took Place	NCVA/FETAC Level 0* or 1	NCVA/FETAC Level 2 or 3	Craft Qualification	University Access Programme	Other Irish Further Education and Training Qualification*	Leaving Certificate Subjects Undertaken Recently in Return to Education Context
MH302 Electronic Engineering	200	1	1st			1														
		2	2nd+																	
			Any																	
MH109 Media Studies	300	1	1st		3		4			2										
		2	2nd+																	
			Any		2															
Etc.																				

* 'Level 0' is used here as shorthand for Foundation Level

* In this context, "Other Irish Further Education and Training Qualifications" include, for example:

- FÁS Skills Certificates
- Non-Craft CERT/NTCB qualifications
- Qualifications awarded by Teagasc or Bord Iascaigh Mhara
- Further education qualifications awarded by Irish professional bodies

You should include all undergraduate courses leading to Honour Bachelor Degree awards. You should have a separate entry for each CAO code²⁴.

In the Table on the previous page:

- "Scenario 1" refers to instances where the earlier qualification is used towards satisfying formal requirements for entry onto the degree programme. Examples include:
 - *Entry from a FETAC CITXX qualification, satisfying particular module requirements, to a Computer Science degree course (see "1st Year" below); or*
 - *Advanced entry from a Higher Certificate into the second year of an Honours Degree course (see "2nd Year+ below).*
- "Scenario 2" refers to instances where your institution has a record of an earlier qualification that forms a part of the background to the decision to allow entry, but is not a formal requirement. An example is where participation on a further education course forms a part of the background leading to the offer and acceptance of a place to a mature student.
- "1st Year" refers to instances where entry was into the first year of the course.
- "2nd Year +" refers to instances where entry was into the second or subsequent year of the course.
- "Any Year" indicates that no distinction should be made between Year 1 entry and Year 2 or later entry when providing data on Scenario 2 entrants.

No student transferring or progressing should be included in the Table more than once.

²⁴ Exception: TCD should aggregate all two subject moderatorships under TR001.

- Where they qualify for inclusion under Scenario 1, they should not be included under Scenario 2.
- Within Scenario 2, where they qualify for inclusion under more than one type of qualification, priority should be given to the qualification that was most persuasive in securing entry.
- If this is unclear or otherwise difficult to determine, priority should be given to the highest level of qualification they are known to have attained.
- If it is also unclear which is highest in level, priority should be given to the qualification obtained most recently.

Please make reasonable, but not extraordinary, efforts to identify "Scenario 2" instances. The extent to which students admitted are progressing from qualifications not identified under this analysis will be a topic for discussion when the consultants visit your institution.

Blank Table for Data on Transfer and Progression (see earlier example)

Academic Year:		Irish Further Education or Training/ FETAC Qualification						HETAC/Institute of UK Technology/DIT Qualification				Qualification				
Course – CAO Code & Title	Total First Year Intake	Scenario	Year of Course at Which Entry Took Place	NCVA/FETAC Level 0 or 1	NCVA/FETAC Level 2 or 3	Craft Qualification	University Access Programme	Other Irish Further Education and Training Qualification*	Leaving Certificate Subjects Undertaken Recently in Return to Education Context	National Certificate / DIT Certificate / Higher Certificate	National Diploma / DIT Diploma / Ordinary Bachelor Degree	Transfer Mid-course from Degree / Honours Bachelor Degree	Other Higher Education Qualification	Further Education Qualification	Higher Education Sub-Degree Qualification (HNC / HND / etc.)	Transfer Mid-course from Degree
		1	1st													
			2nd+													
		2	Any													
		1	1st													
			2nd+													
		2	Any													
		1	1st													
			2nd+													
		2	Any													
		1	1st													
			2nd+													
		2	Any													
Total		1	1st													
			2nd+													
		2	Any													

Remember that no individual should be included in more than one category. See page 10 for details.

* In this context, "Other Irish Further Education and Training Qualifications" include, for example: FÁS Skills Certificates; Non-Craft CERT/NTCB qualifications; Qualifications awarded by Teagasc or Bord Iascaigh Mhara; and Further education qualifications awarded by Irish professional bodies.

PART 2 OUTLINE OF ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED IN COLLEGE VISITS

2.1 Briefing

It is envisaged that the consultants will visit each institution during March/April 2005, and will meet with the Registrar, other relevant staff and, where feasible, a group of students who have progressed from further education, the Institutes of Technology or UK qualifications.

The purpose of this part is to provide an indication of the broader questions it is hoped to address in the course of visits to colleges.

2.2 College Visit

It is envisaged that the consultants will visit larger institutions for a period of up to a working day, and smaller institutions for a period of two hours to half a day.

In the course of each visit, it is envisaged that the consultants will meet:

- The Registrar, or a person deputising for the Registrar;
- The Admissions Officer, where considered relevant by the institution;
- Appropriate representatives of academic departments with significant involvement or interest in progression and transfer from further education, from the Institutes of Technology or from UK institutions;
- A person very knowledgeable about mature students in the institution; and
- A person very knowledgeable about any access programme operating in the institution.

Where feasible, it is also hoped to meet with a group of students who have progressed from further education, from the Institutes of Technology or from UK qualifications.

It is envisaged that the consultants will agree a date with the institution, and that the institution will take responsibility for arranging the meetings on that date.

2.3 Broad Issues to be Addressed

The broad issues to be addressed in the course of the visit are as follows:

Strategic Overview

- How transfer and progression into undergraduate degree courses fits into your institution's current strategy;
- How this has changed in recent years;
- Future strategic relevance of transfer and progression for your institution;

Existing Mechanisms for Transfer and Progression

- Background to existing transfer and progression mechanisms and routes (building on information provided by your institution);
- How transfer and progression mechanisms have changed since academic year 1999/2000;
- The extent to which there is a requirement or an option for students using transfer and progression mechanisms to undertake sandwich or access studies to prepare them better for entry;

Existing Patterns of Transfer and Progression

- Background to existing patterns of transfer and progression revealed by data provided by your institution;
- Profile (qualifications, gender, age, social background etc.) of students progressing to particular courses/disciplines;
- Extent to which progression from further education may be invisible or difficult to measure, where students rely on other qualifications or experiences to qualify for entry;

Functioning of Transfer and Progression

- How well existing mechanisms function in identifying which prospective students interested in transferring or progressing will perform well on an undergraduate degree programme;
- Differences in learning, teaching and support services required for students transferring/progressing versus those coming from school leaver backgrounds;
- Performance of students transferring/progressing versus those from school leaver backgrounds;
- Issues perceived with transfer and progression perceived by your institution;
- Student experiences and perspective on what works and doesn't work;
- Any relevant research undertaken within your institution;

Plans for the Future

- Background to planned transfer and progression mechanisms and routes planned for 2005 (building on information provided by your institution);
- Longer term plans for developments in transfer and progression;
- Future balance between university-based access programmes and progression from further education provision;

AOB

Any other information or issues you feel may be relevant.

NOTES

NOTES

National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
5th Floor, Jervis House, Jervis Street, Dublin 1

Tel: (01) 887 1500
Email: info@nqai.ie

www.nqai.ie



Your Plan - Your Future

Funded by the Irish Government and part Financed by the European Union
under the National Development Plan, 2000 - 2006

