2009-01-01

Widening participation in higher education and the resultant diversity of learners: A review of government policies, the academy and market demands that may influence this trajectory.

Ann Conway
Dublin Institute of Technology, ann.conway@dit.ie

Recommended Citation

Widening participation in higher education and the resultant diversity of learners: A review of government policies, the academy and market demands that may influence this trajectory.

Ann Conway – Student Reg. No. 080124793

EdD Dublin Cohort

Introduction

Widening participation according to Greenbank (2006: 141) encompasses issues such as ethnicity, age, gender and disability and focuses on students from lower socio-economic groups (2008: 492; Jary, 2008; Heagney, 2006). These groups are sometimes referred to as 'non-traditional' students (O'Connor, 2006) and those underrepresented in higher education in Ireland. O'Connor, (2007) also includes travellers and students from lower middle classes which should be encouraged to participate in higher education. Migrant adult learners are also important as accession states increase membership to the EU especially since May 2004. The author of this paper is interested in increased participation of adult and migrant learners in part-time programmes in the hospitality and tourism school within DIT and some of the data represented in this paper will be from this area as examples.

As the field of widening participation is by nature a highly politicised one (Jones and Thomas, 2008) this paper examines and discusses the recent research into access and widening participation in higher education, and the policies and policy makers. This will be organised in the following document in relation to their impact on the changes in the academy and the demand in the market and subsequent uptake of courses in universities and institutes in Ireland which has resulted in diversity of learners.

Clark (1983: 143) outlines the triangulation of the relationship of these higher educational players of the state, market and academy. The question is are they all equal in their authority in the widening participation and access debate or could the access policies created by the 'state' and involvement of the 'academy' be viewed as simply 'places' for 'student (registration)[1] fees' or is there a legitimate player in the 'market' such as industry and 'consumer' (student) demand forces at play?

---

[1] A debate on the re-introduction of higher education fees this year has resulted in the increase of registration fees for students but not the re-introduction of higher education fees which were brought to an end after a 1996 government policy of widening participation in higher education was introduced which called for a free fees initiative (Department of Education, 1996; O'Keefe, 2008; Flynn in The Irish Times, 2008; McCoy and Smith, 2003).

As the involvement of the state and academy widen even more to involve access 'partnerships' within the community and 'market' this has an implication of the state and academy as 'service' providers to its citizens and a wider market of 'service consumers'. The 'market' provides the 'consumers' of education and therefore it is important to know, as a higher education institution, who your student market is, where they come from and their general demography.

This paper will look at participation in higher education in Ireland and the current focus of encouraging students from non-traditional and underrepresented groups to understand the 'why' of the widening participation debate in higher education. It will then review the evolution of government policies in relation to higher education and in particular of widening access and participation, for example Bologna and Erasmus at EU level and the encouragement of mobility of students within the EU.

The resultant shift and change in higher education policies to focus on widening participation has changed the traditional view of the academy which was once elitist in nature and has moved to a more pluralist perspective. The academy and its players will be reviewed in relation to the access and participation debate and how the academy is trying to deal with the increasing diverse student body to bring higher education into the 'real world'. Finally the area of the market demand will be reviewed to understand how education and the markets have changed over the last number of years and why we as educators are now looking at the widening participation debate.

Participation in Higher Education in Ireland

Ireland has experienced substantial increases in participation in higher education in recent years and since the 1960s its education and skills development has been one of the main factors underlying Ireland's rapid economic growth during the 1990s and into the 2000s (O'Connell *et al.* 2006: 312). Existing expansion and planned investment in third-level education has resulted in admissions to higher education rising from 20% in 1980 to 40% in 1998 (Clancy and Wall, 2000). Nonetheless, profound demographic change is taking place, the number of births in Ireland reached a peak of over 74,000 in 1980 and declined by 36% to just fewer than 48,000 in 1994. This reduces the age cohort of school leavers from 2000 onwards.

While the Report of the Review Committee on Post-Secondary Education and Training Places (De Buitleir Report, 1999) acknowledges that the number of births increased again in subsequent years, reaching 52,300 in 1997, it argues that the demographic shift will result in a substantial reduction of school leavers entering higher education. Clancy (1995) supports this analysis and estimates that by 2015 the number of school leavers could have fallen by nearly 20%. In the medium term the Central Statistics

Office (CSO) (2004) predicts that the numbers of school leavers will decline. However, the predicted negative demographic decline is expected to be reversed to some extent as a result of inward migration.

The increased retention rates at second level education (Department of Education and Science, 2008) coupled with the increased second level enrolments from the early to mid 1990s, has led to increased transfer rates into the higher education sector. In 1980, 20% of the age cohort advanced to third-level education. This increased to over 50% by 1995, and approximately half of those entered undergraduate degree programmes. The admission rates of new entrants to higher education for the period 1980-2004 increased steadily. The admission rate in 2004 was 55%, almost three times that of the 1980 rate (HEA, 2006).

At the moment participation in higher education in Ireland is high by European standards, with participation rate at 38% in the 20-year-old category compared to 32% across the other 25 European countries (O'Connell *et al*. 2006: 313). O'Connor (2007) indicates that 50-55% of 17-18 year olds now participate in higher education in Ireland and that the National Skills Strategy has set a target of 72% by 2020. The OECD has established that the expansion in participation in Ireland however has mainly taken place in the 18-21 year olds, disproportionately from managerial and professional classes (OECD, 2006).

Entry into universities is normally done through the CAO or Central Applications Office. In this way, students wishing to enter university apply to the CAO rather than the individual university. Places in courses are usually awarded based on results in the Leaving Certificate Examination or any international equivalent. Each university and institution has a minimum entry requirement, usually requiring a pass grade in English or Irish, as well as maths. Some also require a pass grade in a modern continental European language (French, German, Spanish or Italian). Each individual course has further entry requirements, for example, science courses usually require a certain grade in one or two sciences. The student must also achieve the number of points required for the course under the points system. Academies also have systems in place for accepting mature students, and students who have successfully completed a Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) course and there are still a number of students who gain access to participate in higher education based on experience in a specific industry (see appendix 1 tables 3 and 4).

Among young adults, entry into third-level is very high at the moment in Ireland, and those aged 25 to 34, 41.6%, have attained third-level degrees - the second highest level in the EU after Cyprus, and substantially ahead of the average of 29.1% (Central Statistics Office, 2008: 50). However participation levels of mature students is one of the lowest in the OECD (Department of Education and Science, 2000:

18) although this level is increasing in Ireland over the last number of years. As highlighted by O'Connell *et al* (2006: 312) earlier, Ireland has experienced substantial increases in participation in higher education since the 1960s and currently the higher education system in Ireland produces over 35,000 graduates every year (www.hea.ie).

From table 1 (appendix 1) it can be seen that full-time enrolments are increasing year to year whilst the increases in participation to some extent are as a result of changing demographics and within Ireland it is also as a result of the increase in population (Osborne, 2003: 5) and migration from accession states (deducted from tables 3 and 4 appendix 1).

As the European Union (EU) enlarges increasing numbers of people from different EU member states migrate to find work and live in other countries. A lot of the work sourced is in the services industries, e.g. tourism and hospitality, and the construction industries etc. These migrant workers frequently choose to attend college courses in their industry area to attain qualifications from that member states' higher education institutions that will be recognised[2] and may further them in their employment. Data obtained on the domiciliary origin of students (please see table 2, appendix 1) and also from statistics of students registered on a part time programme within DIT (please see tables 3 and 4, appendix 1) would suggest that this is the case and has been increasing since accession day, May 1st 2004. Since then over 200,000 Personal Public Service numbers have been issued to immigrants from Eastern and Central European countries (Gilmartin, 2006).

The Chief Executive of the Higher Education Authority (HEA), Tom Boland, has stated that Ireland should aim to double the number of full-time non-Irish higher education students studying here from 12,000 at present to 24,000 over the next decade. The Irish education system has at the moment fulltime students from 114 countries other than Ireland now studying here, with an increase of 170% of overseas students (HEA, 2008a). Part time enrolments are also an important factor when attracting students who have been underrepresented in higher education in the past due to its mainly flexible mode of education (Murphy *et al,* 2002; http://www.iua.ie/iua-activities/widening-participation.html). Figures from the Department of Education and the HEA show that in 2006 there were 31,354 part-time students enrolled in higher education institutions aided by the state (see also tables 3 and 4, appendix 1 for student enrolments on a typical part-time, course in DIT) (www.cso.ie; Central Statistics Office, 2008: 47).

---

[2] Students' whose qualifications come from academies under the Bologna Process will be accepted, but this is not normally the case of migrants from states who are not part of this agreement although the use of European credit transfer system and recognising accredited prior experiential learning will be employed as much as possible.

To encourage the 'non-traditional' students into higher education, widening access to increase participation has become central to national policy and economic competitiveness through Ireland becoming a "knowledge society" and a "learning economy". Policies for participation in higher education are extremely important to help widen access and increase numbers participating in higher education. Policies are directed from the EU to each member state and adopted into national policies in many ways.

The State – European and National

The European Dimension

As Ireland is a member of the European Union (EU) since the early 1970s (1973) all policies and laws, regulations and treaties made by the EU directly affect Irish law although in some cases referenda have been used to accept or reject certain aspects of EU treaties (The Lisbon Treaty is one such example). The following are EU policies directed at widening participation and encouraging access to higher education through ECTS (European credit transfer system) and LLP (Europe's Lifelong Learning Programme).

In the early years of the EU from 1957 to the mid 1970s education and training were relatively minor interests, with attention restricted to the recognition of qualifications (article 57, Treaty of Rome, 1957: 55-56) and the promotion of co-operation between member states in basic and advanced vocational training (article 118, Treaty of Rome, 1957: 99; Davies, 2003: 100; The Treaty of Rome, 1957 http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/treaties/index.htm#founding). Subsequently in the 1980s task forces were set up in relation to education and training, most notably the Task Force on Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth in 1981, and following the Single European Act (SEA) of 1986 (McKenzie and Venables, 1991), the drive for more involvement in training was made possible with the emergence in the 1990's of the Bologna Process.

The Bologna Process is an area of EU policy[3] which aids the access and mobility of students by trying to align systems of higher education in the member states in order to homogenize programmes, ensure credible quality assurance, facilitate the transferability of students, the compatibility of qualifications and mobility of labour and the increased competitiveness of European higher education (Papatsiba, 2006: 97, 98, 104).

---

[3] Or non-EU policy as 21 of the 46 countries who have agreed to reform the structures of their own higher education system in such a way that overall convergence emerges from the process at European level are non EU countries.

Since the beginning of the Bologna process, the Bologna Declaration (1999) has been described as a "wake up call alerting us all to the major forces for change now at work in Irish higher education" (Thornhill, 2001: 1). While yet to be fully incorporated into the academy it is concerned with integration and breaking down of barriers between national educational systems in higher education across Europe and internationally to "make their higher education systems increasingly comparable and compatible……and to ease student mobility and to assist young people obtaining mutually recognised qualifications" (Zgaga, 2003: 251). Participants in the Bologna process recognise the importance that higher education plays in fostering social inclusion and equality of opportunity (Kelly, 2007) through widening participation throughout Europe.

The Bologna process also established a system of credits (or ECTS) as a means of promoting student mobility, with particular attention for students to be able to access study and training opportunities, and for teachers and other staff by recognition of periods spent in a European context on various activities. It also laid the foundation for the promotion of co-operation in quality assurance and of a European dimension and co-operation in higher education (Bologna Declaration, 1999: 2; Zgaga, 2003: 256). There is broad agreement within the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) to support the Bologna Declaration (DIT Academic Council, 2001).

Policies such as in areas of access and mobility have included the ERASMUS programme, a university exchange programme which began in 1987 (www.dit.ie) and Europe's LLP. This has opened the way for the European Commission to support projects in universities. It has also encouraged participation in higher education across regions within the EU. Since it began the ERASMUS programme has witnessed the support of 1.5 million university and college students in international exchange programmes and it has become a part of European university life (http://www.dit.ie/study/international/erasmus; http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/erasmus20_en.html). ERASMUS is also part of Europe's Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) and the main objectives of the LLP are to promote lifelong learning, to encourage access to education for everybody, to help people acquire recognized qualifications and skills, and to create a European Higher Education Area by 2010 (Department of Education and Science, 2000).

Since the introduction of these policies by the EU, Irish policy has had to come in line with competition from its neighbouring states and bring in policies that will deal with the increasing diversification of the population and the decline in numbers of school leavers. Encouraging and widening participation from 'non-traditional' students has been one area which Irish higher educational policy has highlighted since the 1990's.

National polices of access to, and widening participation in, higher education

Irish Government policy has been redirected towards widening participation of underrepresented groups in higher education since the mid 1990s. Access programmes have become fundamental to policy and are expected to promote equality of opportunities and foster social, cultural and economic inclusion (see also Clancy, 2001; Department of Education and Science, 1992, 1995, 2000, 2001, 2005, 2006, 2008; Skillbeck and O'Connell, 2000; Osborne and Leith, 2000; Lynch, 1999; National Development Plan 2007-2013, 2007; National Development Plan 2000-2006, 2001; Government of Ireland, 2000). Categories of government polices, plans and programmes will frame the following section.

Policy

National legislation governing widening participation and the operation of our universities under the Irish Universities Act (1997) and the earlier introduction of the Institutes of Technology (IoTs) Act (1992) have led the way towards access and equal opportunities for students by allowing more places on higher education courses and introduction a free fees initiative (Department of Education and Science, 1996) for higher education students. Thornhill (2002; 53) outlines the message in the Universities Act that impose a duty on universities to prepare and implement statements of their policies in respect of access to the university's education for all and especially those from underrepresented groups in society. This formula provides the foundation for many of the following policies on higher education.

Other legislation including the Equal Status Act (updated 2000 – identifying equity groups) and the Disability Act (updated 2005 – outlines the assessment and provision of education for persons with disabilities), the Employment Equality Act (updated 2006 – provides for equal employment and training of persons) and the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004 – to provide for an inclusive environment in education for persons with special needs), have paved the way for creating economic prosperity and social justice within Ireland and creates the framework for equal access and encouraging widening participation in education from underrepresented groups.

Plans

Facilitating positive social change and inclusion and economic development of higher education also requires substantial and sustained public investment. Under the new seven year National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013 €13 billion for investment in higher education has been provided in order to promote continued strategic and structural development in the higher education sector (National

Development Plan 2007-2013, 2007; National Development Plan 2000-2006, 2001; Government of Ireland, 2000).

The NDP covering the period 2000-2006 confirmed a public investment package in excess of €10.5 billion over seven years to widen participation in higher education. The NDP covering the period 2007-2013 recognises the importance of the tourism and hospitality industry to the Irish economy and the education of people in this industry is viewed as providing a principle source of competitive advantage (Failte Ireland, 2005). €148 million has been allocated for the provision of education and training of both domestic and non-national Irish staff in tourism and hospitality as well as sustaining structured educational opportunities in the higher education sector including the IoTs.

The NDPs have provided for a special fund, known as the Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) to support modernisation and reform within the higher education sector. €510 million will be allocated by the Higher Education Authority to IoTs over the next seven years (Department of Education and Science, 2006), €45 million already having been allocated and roughly a quarter (€10.208 million) going to projects promoting access and lifelong learning (Kelly, 2007). A further €11.8 million was awarded for the support of access for underrepresented groups in an announcement by the (then) Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin, on February 19th 2008 (www.hea.ie/ga/sif).

Another initiative under SIF, according to The Chief Executive of the HEA, Tom Boland, is that the HEA will be funding a project by the Dublin Regional Higher Education Alliance (a consortium of the universities and IoTs in the Dublin region) to promote the city as an international knowledge area (HEA, 2008b) attracting increasing numbers of international students to Ireland and encouraging networks of migrant students already based in Ireland. This should encourage social inclusion and participation among those within or connected to these migrant groups not already participating in higher education.

There are other funding initiatives provided for by the HEA for access and participation under the Access Fund for Students and Student Financing. These are funds to aid students from lower income groups or students financially disabled to gain access to higher education formulated out of the access plans devised by the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education in Ireland, under the HEA.

Plans and Programmes

The work of the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education is important for driving and evaluating access programmes in higher education in Ireland. The establishment of the Access Office has been one of the most important developments in recent years in the higher education sector and having a

legislative unit with responsibility for developing and implementing national policy on equity of access to higher education is significant.

The National Access Office has made immense progress since its initiation starting with a three year action plan (2005-2007 Action Plan on Equity of Access to Higher Education) (HEA National Access Office, 2004; HEA National Access Office, 2005) for achieving equity of access to higher education. This initial plan has raised the profile and importance of the access and participation debate in higher education in Ireland. This was followed by the report of the Action Group on Access to Higher Education (2001; Clancy, 2001) which was set up to develop a framework to promote access and participation for three equity groups: mature, low-socio economic and students with disabilities.

The current access plan, the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013 (National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education and HEA, 2008: 10) outlines the progress made already in the area of access and widening participation in higher education and also sets targets which are consistent with the timeframe and objectives of the National Development Plan outlined above. The plan also outlines an integrated, 'joined-up' approach to the multidimensional needs of individuals and communities of those learners wishing to return to education (O'Keefe, 2008 in National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education and HEA, 2008: 5) and it also highlights the increase in students from outside of the state from 4% ten years ago to just over 10% presently. However the plan does not include any action plan relating to ethnicity but does forecast a review of participation by ethnicity by 2010. It suggests that the areas of equality, flexibility and widening participation in the general plan should ensure that any problems that may arise in the area of immigrant learners can be addressed (National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education and HEA, 2008: 37).

Arrangements for the first collection of data in relation to participation rates and indicators of progress within the access programmes in each institution are being put in place at the moment through the national student records system which is administered within the HEA as it is important that the operation of equity and access are kept under review and do not become rigid or obsolete.

Programmes

Programmes for access have been put into operation within institutions involved in widening participation and equity of access such as Access Officers[4] and Disability Officers, transition from second to higher education programmes (such as a maths initiative introduced to DIT by Michael Tully, Tully (2008)) and

---

[4] The author of this paper has had the opportunity to be an access officer for two years in DIT.

return to learning programmes for adults and mature students on all full time and part time programmes in the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism, DIT.

The recent introduction of modularisation and semesterisation and the use of ECTS, RPL (recorded prior learning) and AP(E)L (accredited prior (experiential) learning(a flexible and integrated system of qualifications for access, transfer and progression in the educational system) (NQAI, 2005; NQAI, 2003)) have enhanced the flexibility of programmes in the higher education system and which can facilitate lifelong learning which has been highlighted in the Department of Education and Science (2000) Green (Department of Education and Science, 1992) and White (Department of Education and Science, 1995) papers on learning for life. This would help develop greater links with industry and communities and fill the gap between formal and informal education and qualifications. The White paper specifically looked at adult education and lifelong learning. It set out a framework for the expansion and development of education with a focus on widening access and participation, quality, and flexibility of learning and teaching (Department of Education and Science, 2000: 9-10).

The National Qualifications Framework of Ireland's higher and further education system further emphasises the need for flexible progression in higher education and outlines ten levels of educational qualifications for students. This aids in their access and progression to higher education and onto higher levels within higher education.

The NQAI[5] together with Ireland's national policies for education help to enhance and develop higher and further education in Ireland for future generations of learners (NQAI, 2003; NQAI, 2005). These policies provide for the foundation of opening and widening access to and participation in higher education in academies around Ireland. They also provide for a balance between the right of academic freedom and the concern of the state as the major funding agency for the efficient use of resources and public accountability.

Academies once focused on providing higher education for the elite few (Trow, 1974) however now we are moving to mass higher education with more students entering third level education than ever before (O'Brien, 2005). Ireland's targets of 72% by the National Skills Strategy by 2020 and a current participation rate of 55% have resulted in a change in student typology and diversity. Academies and institutions are no longer as elite and separate from society as they once were and must now provide for the needs of these diverse groups (Brew and Boud, 1996: 7; Duke, 2005: 2) and to continue to encourage

---

[5] The NQAI is soon to amalgamate with FETAC and HETAC under the last Budget guidelines for education (Budget (Ireland) 14/10/2008)

participation of those underrepresented groups within society as there is still disparity amongst different student groups (professionals versus lower socio-economic groups) in the increase in participation rates. Academies in Ireland must provide equality of access for all students.

Academy

Access and Diversity within the Academy

Access and success deals with recruitment, retention and inclusion of underrepresented groups on all aspects of academic life on campus (Sotello and Turner, 2002). These underrepresented groups would have in Bourdieu's view a sense of 'place' that may lead to self exclusion from places they do not feel are rightly theirs and would therefore not be accustomed to being in or among others from other groups. College or university life would not have been part of their 'habitus' or culture and social class (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; cited in Crozier *et al.,* 2008). They may have to abandon certain features of their background class habitus – modes of thought, perception, appreciation and action (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 40-41; cited in Carpenter, 2004; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; 39-41 available at http://books.google.com/books?id=TPp4o2EpTK8C&printsec=frontcover&hl#PPA41,M1) in a way that is normal for other social groups. Educational success then provides them a new identity in society (Lynch, 1999; Carpenter, 2004).

The economic advantage and aid to social mobility derived from gaining educational qualifications, together with the barriers associated with gaining employment by unqualified school leavers has impacted on the demand for higher education. However, it is argued that the growth in the sector has not facilitated equal access to third- level education and the continuing social inequity has been frequently documented (see Clancy, 1982, 1988, 1992, 2001; Lynch, 2006).

Research conducted fifteen years ago by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), (1993) indicated that a significant proportion of full-time students between 1984/85 and 1989/90 were from middle to high income families with almost fifty percent from the professional farming and business sector. While all socio-economic groups have increased participation in higher education little change is evident of increased participation of lower socio-economic groups in higher education, in fact they have one of the lowest participation rates at less than 25% (Clancy, 2001).

Clancy's (2001) study on access to higher education found large differences between socio-economic groups in terms of their level of participation in the higher education sector. 58% of higher education entrants still originate from four socio-economic groups which include; higher professionals lower

professionals, employers, managers and farmers. These groups constitute only 37% of the relevant population. In marked contrast only 41% of entrants came from non-manual, manual skilled, semi skilled, unskilled, own account workers and agricultural workers even though they constitute 63% of the relevant age cohort. Clearly these groups continue to remain considerably underrepresented in higher education (HEA, 2008c). The skilled, semi skilled, and unskilled manual groups together with own account and agricultural workers have their highest proportionate representation in the Institutes of Technology sector (Clancy, 2001; HEA, 2008c).

However things are now changing and over the last two decades, there is evidence of developing patterns in higher education of a diverse student population; students are coming from a wider range of social and cultural backgrounds, experiences and changing educational needs as a result of increase in population, change in demography with inward migration and success in access policy implementation in the academies (Clancy 2001; Clancy and Wall, 2000; HEA, 1995a, 1995b; Clancy, 1982, 1988, 1992). The change and diversification of the sector is also due to the increase in accession states since 2004 and evidence of this can be seen from registration on two consecutive years of a night time part time programme within DIT (see appendix 1 tables 3 and 4).

Melia and Kennedy (2005; 44) suggest that the promotion of cultural diversity and social acceptance of differences is known as multiculturalism. Failte Ireland (2005; 5) suggests that cultural diversity may be interpreted as encompassing 'language, culture, race, nationality and religion.' The changing demographics of student bodies, the global work environment, the diverse workforce and the need for inclusive education and campus environment have given higher education institutions the impetus for promoting diversity and multiculturalism in college campuses (Krishnamurthi, 2003; 264).

The increasingly internationalisation of higher education of students and staff mobility has also contributed to the growth of the sector. Allied to the growth in numbers entering higher education in the past two decades, the sector has been undergoing structural change. The development and expansion of the vocational sector at third-level culminated, firstly, in 1989 when the two former National Institutes of Education were designated universities. Four years later in 1993 the Regional Technical Colleges and the Dublin Institute of Technology were established as statutory bodies.

The university sector has seen growth continue, particularly in the disciplines of business and technology, which has been accompanied by innovative development in arts and social science programmes (Department of Education and Science, 1995). The growth of non-state funded colleges, together with the push by British and Northern Ireland third-level institutions to attract Irish students due to their falling

numbers, and the increasing availability of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) accreditation by on-the-job-training is creating competition in the market place. Work based initiatives are viewed as an effective means of providing entry routes to sections of the population unable to take advantage of higher education and involving the linking of academic credit to student/ employer negotiated projects.

The increased competition facilitated through new technologies and open and distant learning opportunities largely made available by private providers is also challenging the traditional higher education sector (Webber, 2000). Thornhill (2001) believes that increased competition into the sector with the entry of new providers both from within and outside Ireland, coupled with increased international mobility of students will generate competition between institutions to attract students. He also argues that there is a need to develop effective funding mechanisms for higher education.

There is also need for an increased emphasis on research in the higher education sector to support Irelands' competitiveness in a global market place and continued economic growth (HEA, 2000a). Boland sees research as the key driver for "our hoped for knowledge economy" (Ahlstrom, 2008). Central to this is maintaining the capacity to produce superb graduates who have the opportunity to go on to become the next generation of postgraduate and post doctoral researchers. In 2006 approximately 59,000 individuals graduated from higher education though many continued to further study (National Skills Bulletin, 2007). Graduates of level eight programmes would seem to have little difficulty in sourcing employment as only three percent of those graduating from the class of 2004 were seeking positions in April 2005 (HEA, 2006).

International research indicates that adults in Ireland currently have low participation rates in continuing education and training in comparison to other countries (Hannan, *et al*, 2003). According to the HEA's Capital Review Report (2004) the number of mature and second chance learners taking full time programmes is predicted to rise slowly over the next fifteen years (HEA, 2004). In 1999 the De Buitleir Report (1999) presented a strategy to increase the intake of mature students and part-time students in higher education with a recommendation that there should be a target intake of 10,000 mature students over a number of years in order to redress the imbalance of the past. Now almost 21,000 Irish adults participate in education outside the higher education system, and 7,000 Irish adults participate in distance through National Distance Education Centre (OSCAIL) and the Open University (Department of Education and Science, 2000: 144).

As the nature of work continues to change, there will be an increasing need for individuals to return to education throughout their careers to seek formal qualifications, or re-orientate their career paths. This

can be achieved through a combination of measures; by increased flexibility and accessibility to programmes; expansion of part-time options and increased participation of adults in whole-time programmes. This linked to the impact and application of new technology: particularly in the area of E-Learning (HEA, 2000b). The White Paper on Adult Education (Department of Education and Science, 2000) recommended that higher education institutions work towards expanding open and distance learning provision in a collaborative and cost effective way.

The policy agenda of the HEA and Government as expressed in the Green Paper and White Paper on education is based on the need for greater accountability and transparency, while at the same time preserving autonomy of the academy (HEA, 2000c). However, importance is now placed on the academy to 'fit' into the needs of the wider society, rather than the other way around as the future is in the "knowledge society" with the "knowledge worker" needing flexibility in learning and teaching.

Market Demands

Over the past two decades there have been two conceptual shifts in how education is perceived, from a cultural element to largely an economic apparatus of society. Education has moved from being valued for the intrinsic properties it contains, to being and instrument of wider social market value particularly to assist economic growth and development in an increasingly global marketplace (Barnett, 1992). As consumers of products/services are generally becoming more cognisant of standards, demands are increasing in all sectors of society. Given the level of public investment in education there is an increasing demand for optimum value for money.

Nationally and internationally, higher education institutions actively pursue quality in terms of transparency and accountability, access to information and with value added and institutional effectiveness (HEA and Conference of Heads of Irish Universities (CHIU), 2000). The issue of quality is familiar in the Irish educational sector, and its implementation is being pressurised by educational policy (Department of Education and Science, 1995; Department of Education and Science, 1992; Department of Education and Science, 2000) social and cultural change, and budgetary constraints (OECD, 1993; Budget, 2008[6]; Black, 2008) and the predicted decline in the traditional student population (CSO, 2004). Creating 'new' demand is a key aspect to widening participation and this new demand can come from those groups who would not otherwise consider higher education an option, i.e. encouraging the 'non-traditional' student as outlined earlier.

---

[6] The National Adult Learning Council and the Educational Disadvantage Committee were both disbanded under Ireland's Budget, 2008 – 12/10/2008.

It is also becoming more common that quality higher education is provided by the academies for the many rather than excellence for the few (Edwards, 2001:250). The diversity of the student population and a move away from an almost exclusive school leaver focus for entry into higher education together with the concept of lifelong learning are key issues facing the higher education sector as education and training is envisaged as the solution to achieving a flexible workforce (Department of Education and Science, 2000; Dearing Report, 1997). In such an environment non traditional learners need to be facilitated to enter education and avail of retraining opportunities throughout their lives facilitated by the Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning (AP(E)L) and ECTS systems.

A plethora of government commissioned reports substantiate the view that education and training is perceived as a vital resource for a successful modern economy, as it is estimated that both have a crucial influence on economic performance at an individual and aggregate level. State policies of expanding third-level education, is based on the premise, that a highly skilled and educated workforce will enhance economic competitiveness, and industrial growth and increased levels of prosperity. The long term vision for Ireland to become a highly skilled knowledge based global economy or "knowledge society" (Irish Council for Science, Technology and Innovation, (ICSTI) 1999; Ahlstrom, 2008) in which skills and knowledge must be continually adapted and upgraded to meet evolving market needs through flexible modes of teaching and learning is in line with European policy on the creation of a "knowledge economy" as the key to competitiveness advantage launched at Lisbon European Council Summit in March 2000 (http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_en.htm?textMode=on), which is also supported by Edwards (2001: 239).

Final Thoughts

The European Union (EU) aims to become the world's most competitive economic region and the promotion of the concept of lifelong learning and widening participation are key features to achieving this aim by enhancing the quality of labour. The development of a knowledge intensive workforce is perceived as the primary source of competitive advantage (National Competitiveness Council, (NCC) 2006; Ahlstrom, 2008) and in a rapidly changing world lifelong learning (Report of the Task Force on Lifelong Learning, 2002) and widening participation can assist and maintain economic competitiveness. Central to this aim is the development of a "knowledge society" in which individuals are committed to continuous training and lifelong learning (National Competitiveness Council (NCC) 2003). The higher education sector is a key source of skills for the Irish economy and is viewed as being fundamental to generating Ireland's economic success by meeting the needs of industries through flexible modes of teaching and learning providing highly educated and trained graduates.

Skillbeck (2001) contends that the educational environment of the academy in the future will place the student at the centre of the learning process. The emphasis will be on a student /client relationship, the student as a learner and a client/customer; an environment which is more flexible in delivery and more business orientated i.e. attracting a broader range of students, non-traditional students, cost effective programs, self-financing, and a partnership approach with closer industry and academic links. The Skillbeck Report (2001; Skillbeck and O'Connell, 2000) is not unanimously accepted in higher education as many question its conceptual basis, however, it has some obviously attractions to governments and regulatory authorities dedicated to contain spending.

As flows of capital, people and information span the entire world, de-centring the nation-state is the uncontested focus of social integration (Jansen and Dekkers, 2006; 193). The art of policy making will in future involve ensuring that public goals are met in higher education through influence from a "bottom-up" approach rather than "top-down" direction and the state will be able to cater for new markets without compromising the independence of the academies through a framework that incorporates all players equally through a "joined up" approach to higher education.

Post script and further research

I would like to further research the motivation of "non-traditional" students into higher education and subsequently their retention and progression within higher education to follow a holistic trajectory of these students as I feel from carrying out the research for this paper that access and widening participation is only part of the equation, and it only "opens the door" to a world beyond these students' usual habitus which certainly must have an influence over their retention and progression within higher education.

Bibliography

Action Group on Access to Higher Education (2001) *Report of the Action Group on Access to Higher Education.* Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Ahlstrom, D. (2008) Time to plan for an economic upswing, *The Irish Times*, October 9th 2008.

Ball, S. J. (2003*) Class strategies and the education market.* London: RoutledgeFalmer – Taylor & Francis Group.

Barnett, R. (1992) *Improving Higher Education: Total Quality Care*. Buckingham. Bristol, PA: Society for Research into Higher Education: Open University Press.

Black, F. (2008) We have too many colleges, says UCC Chief. *Irish Independent*, December 3rd 2008.

Bologna Declaration (1999) *Bologna Declaration, Rome: SEPS*. Retrieved from http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/bologna_declaration.pdf 27th October 2008.

Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. (1992) *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. In Crozier, G., Reay, D., Clayton, J., Colliander, L. and Grinstead, J. (2008) Different strokes for different folks: diverse students in diverse institutions – experiences of higher education, *Research Papers in Education,* Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 167-177.

Bourdieu, P. (1990) *In other words: Essays towards a reflexive sociology*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. In Crozier, G., Reay, D., Clayton, J., Colliander, L. and Grinstead, J. (2008) Different strokes for different folks: diverse students in diverse institutions – experiences of higher education, *Research Papers in Education*, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 167-177.

Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J-C. (1977) *Reproduction in education, society and culture,* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul cited in Carpenter, A. (2004) Social class, inequality and higher education in Ireland, paper presented to the conference on *Leaving early: International perspectives on working class students' withdrawal,* Staffordshire University, Stoke-on-Trent, UK, 28th June 2004.

Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J-C. (1990) *Reproduction in education, society and culture,* 2nd Edition, London: Sage Publications. Retrieved from: http://www.infoamerica.org/infolibros/bourdieu04.html 1st December 2008.

Brew, A. and Boud, D. (1996) Preparing for new academic roles: A holistic approach to development. *The International Journal for Academic Development*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 7-25.

Budget 2008 (2008) *Ireland's Budget*. Launched 14/10/2008. Retrieved from http://www.budget.gov.ie December 1st 2008.

Carpenter, A. (2004) Social class, inequality and higher education in Ireland, paper presented to the conference on *Leaving early: International perspectives on working class students' withdrawal,* Staffordshire University, Stoke-on-Trent, UK, 28th June 2004.

Central Statistics Office (CSO) (2008) *Measuring Ireland's progress*, Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Central Statistics Office (CSO) (2004) *Population and labour force projections 2006-2036.* Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Clancy, P (2001) *College Entry in Focus: A Fourth National Survey of Access to Higher Education.* Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Clancy, P. and Wall, J. (2000) *Social Background of Higher Education Entrants*. Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Clancy, P. (1982) *Participation in Higher Education*. Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Clancy, P. (1988) *Who goes to College?* Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Clancy, P. (1995) *Access to College: Patterns of Continuity and Change.* Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Clark, B.R. (1983) *The higher education system: Academic organisation in cross-national perspective,* Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, pp136-145.

Crozier, G., Reay, D., Clayton, J., Colliander, L. and Grinstead, J. (2008) Different strokes for different folks: diverse students in diverse institutions – experiences of higher education, *Research Papers in Education*, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 167-177.

Davies, P. (2003) Widening participation and the European Union: Direct action – indirect policy? *European Journal of Education, Vol. 38, No.1, pp. 99-116*.

De Breadun, D. (2008) Hayes proposes graduate tax to fund third-level education, *The Irish Times*, November 22nd 2008.

De Buitleir, D. (1999) *Report of Review Committee on Post Secondary Education and Training Places.* Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Deering, R. (1997) *Higher Education in the Learning Society.* London: The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education.

DEIS (2005) *Delivering equality of opportunity in schools: An action plan for educational inclusion,* Department of Education and Science, Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Education and Science (1992) *Education for a Changing World: Green Paper on Education.* Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Education and Science (1995) *Charting our Educational Future: White Paper on Education.* Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Education and Science (2000) *Learning for life: White paper on adult education.* Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Education and Science (2006) *Strategy for science, technology and innovation 2006-2013.* Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Education and Science (2008) *Retention rates of pupils in second level schools.* Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Devine, F., Hearns, N., Baum, T. and Murray, A. (2007) Perceptions and attitudes of hospitality and tourism academics towards cultural diversity in the curriculum: Experiences from Ireland in O'Connor, N., Keating, M., Malone, J. and Murphy, A. (Eds.) *Tourism and hospitality research in Ireland: Concepts, issues and challenges,* Waterford: Waterford Institute of Technology.

Devitt, F. (2008) We need to look out, not inward, to innovate best. *The Irish Times, Innovation Special,* September 15th 2008.

Disability Act (2005) Retrieved from: http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=4338&CatID=87 24th November 2008.

Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) (2001) *Interim Report from the Sub-Committee of Academic Council. The Implications of the Bologna Declaration –A Discussion Document.* Dublin: DIT.

Duke, C. (2005) The crabs progress: Approaching a tertiary system for lifelong learning, *in* Duke, C. (Ed.) *The tertiary moment: What road to inclusive higher education,* Leicester: NIACE.

Education for Persons with Special Needs Act (2004). Retrieved from: http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2004/en/act/pub/0030/index.html 24th November 2008.

Edwards, T. (2001) Educational performance, markets and the state. In Philips, R. and Furlong, J. (Eds.) (2001) *Education reform and the state: 25 years of politics, policy and practice.* London and New York: Routledge Falmer - Taylor Francis Group, pp 239-253.

Employment Equality Act (2006). Retrieved from: http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2006/20061031.htm 24th November 2008.

Enterprise Strategy Group (2004) *Ahead of the curve: Ireland's place in the global economy.* Dublin: Forfas.

Equal Status Act (2000). Retrieved from: http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/bills28/acts/2000/a800.pdf 24th November 2008.

Expert Group on Future Needs Report (2005a) *Language and Enterprise The Demand and Supply of Foreign Language Skills*. Dublin: Forfas.

Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (1998) *The first report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs.* Dublin: Forfas.

Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (2000) *The second report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs.* Dublin: Forfas.

Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (2001) *The third report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs.* Dublin: Forfas.

Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (2003) *The fourth report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs.* Dublin: Forfas.

Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (2005b) *Skills need in the Irish economy: The role of migration*. Dublin: Forfas.

Failte Ireland (2005a) *Cultural diversity strategy and implementation plan*, Dublin: Failte Ireland.

Failte Ireland (2005b) *A human resource development strategy of Irish tourism: Competing through people*. Dublin: Failte Ireland.

Fas (2007) *Monitoring Ireland's Skills Supply: Trends in Education/Training Outputs*. Dublin: Fas for the Expert Group in Future Skills Needs.

Flynn, S. (Education Editor) (2008) Making sense of the fees controversy, *The Irish Times, Education Supplement, September 23rd 2008.*

Flynn, S. (Education Editor) (2008) University heads want fees paid by student loans, *The Irish Times, Education Supplement, September, 23rd 2008*.

Forfas (1999) *The First Report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs*. Forfas. Dublin.

Gilmartin, Dr. M. (2006) The same but different. *Who we are – A special supplement on the people of Ireland. The Irish Times*, 23rd May 2006.

Government of Ireland (2000) *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness. National Agreement.* Retrieved from http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/index.asp?docID=265 March 27th 2008

Greenbank, P. (2006) The evolution of government policy on widening participation, *Higher Education Quarterly, Vol. 60, No. 4, pp. 141-166.*

Hannam, Dr. K. (2003) *European motilities, citizenship and multiple identities, ATLAS Research Group.* Unpublished report circulated to ATLAS members, 6th November 2003.

Hannan, D., Mc Coy, S. and Doyle, A. (2003) *Expanding Post-School Learning Opportunities: Nature and Effects of Growth in Post-School Education and Training in the 1990's*. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI).

Heagney, M. (2006) Editorial. Widening participation for some but not for others. *Online edition of Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning,* Vol. 8, No. 1, April 2006. Retrieved from: http://www.staffs.ac.uk/journal/volone.htm#vol81 on 23rd November 2008.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2004) *Review and Prioritisation of Capital Projects in the Higher Education Sector. Report of the Review Group, September 2004.* Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2006a) Who *Went to College in 2004? A National Survey of New Entrants to Higher Education*. Dublin: Higher Education Authority. Retrieved, from: http://www.hea.ie 22nd October 2008.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2006b) *What do graduates do? The class of 2004*. Dublin: Higher Education Authority. Retrieved from: http://www.hea.ie 22nd October 2008.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2008) *Strategic Plan 2008-2010*. Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2008a) *Facts and figures: Irish higher education*, Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2008b) Challenge to ensure Ireland remains land of the welcomes, *HEA Newsroom*, April 7th 2008. Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2008b) HEA Targets doubling of overseas students within a decade, *HEA Newsroom*, April 7th 2008. Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2008c) An end to the personal, social and economic loss of underachievement in education, *HEA Newsroom*, July 9th 2008. Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2008d) Message must be pushed home: Stay in education or face employment difficulties in the future, *HEA Newsroom*, August 27th 2008. Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (1995a) *Steering Committee on the Future Development of Higher Education: Interim Report of the Steering Committee's Technical Working Group, January*. Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (1995b) *Report of Steering Committee on the Future Development of Higher Education, June.* Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2000a) *Programme for Research in Higher education Institutions*. Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2000b) *Report on Symposium on Open and Distance Learning, 29th – 30 March 2000, Hudson Bay Hotel, Athlone*. Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) and Conference of Heads of Irish Universities (CHIU) (2000c) *The Financial Governance of Irish Universities: Balancing Autonomy and Accountability*. Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Higher Education Authority (National Access Office) (2004) *Achieving equity of access to higher education: Action Plan 2005-2007.* Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Higher Education Authority (National Access Office) (2005) *Progressing the Action Plan: Funding to achieve equity of access to higher education.* Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Holland, K. (2008) Students to discuss fees with Minister, *The Irish Times*, November 21st 2008.

Irish Council for Science, Technology and Innovation (ICSTI) (1999) *Technology Foresight Ireland Report.* Dublin: Forfas for ICSTI, April 1999.

Jansen, Th. C. and Dekkers, H. (2006) Social cohesion and integration: learning active citizenship, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 27, No. 2, pp.189-205.

Jary, D. and Thomas, L. (1999) Editorial. Widening participation and lifelong learning: Rhetoric or reality? The role of research and the reflexive practitioner. *Online edition of Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning,* Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1999. Retrieved from: http://www.staffs.ac.uk/journal/volone.htm#vol11 on 23rd November 2008.

Jary, D. (2008) Editorial: The continued importance of widening participation. *Online edition of Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning,* Vol. 10, No. 1, April 2008. Retrieved from: http://www.staffs.ac.uk/journal/volten.htm#vol101 on 23rd November 2008.

Jones, R. and Thomas, L. (2008) Editorial: Against the evidence – the problem of progress in widening participation. *Online edition of Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning,* Vol. 10, No. 2, August 2008. Retrieved from: http://www.staffs.ac.uk/journal/volten.htm#vol102 on 23rd November 2008.

Kelly, M. (2007) *Towards a better future for all in Europe: Lessons from Ireland.* Presentation given at the 16th European Access Network Conference, Galway, Ireland.

Krishnamurthi, M. (2003) Assessing multicultural initiatives in higher education institutions. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education,* Vol. 28, No. 3, pp 263-277.

Lynch, K. (2006) Neo-liberalism and marketisation: The implications for higher education. *European Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 1. pp. 1-17.

Mc Cauley, F. (2001) *Celebrating difference: Gender equity and lifelong learning.* Proceedings of the AONTAS Millennium conference, Limerick Inn Hotel, Ennis Road, Limerick, Friday 20th October 2000.

Mc Coy, S. and Smyth, E. (2003) Educational expenditure: Implications for equality. In Callan, T., Doris, A. and McCoy, D. (Eds.) *Budget perspectives 2004,* Dublin: Economic Social Research Institute and the Foundation for Fiscal Studies, pp. 65-97.

McKenzie, G. and Venables, A. J. (Eds.) (1991) *The economics of the Single European Act*. London: Macmillan in association with the Centre for International Economics, University of Southampton.

Melia, D.M. and Kennedy, E. (2005) *Cultural diversity: A management perspective*, Dublin: Dublin Institute of Technology.

Morey, A.I. and Kitano, M. (1997) Multicultural course transformation in higher education – A broader truth, Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon in Krishnamurthi, M. (2003) Assessing multicultural initiatives in higher education institutions. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education,* Vol. 28, No. 3, pp 263-277.

Murphy, M. and Fleming, T. (2003) Partners in participation: integrated approaches to widen access in higher education. *European Journal of Education,* Vol. 38, No. 1, pp 25-39.

National Competitiveness Council (NCC) (2003) *The Competitiveness Challenge 2003*. Dublin: Forfas for National Competitiveness Council.

National Competitiveness Council (NCC) (2005) *Annual Competitiveness Report 2005*. Dublin: Forfas for National Competitiveness Council.

National Competitiveness Council (NCC) (2006a) *Annual Competitiveness Report. Volume 1: Benchmarking Ireland's Performance.* Dublin: Forfas for National Competitiveness Council.

National Competitiveness Council (NCC) (2006b) *Annual Competitiveness Report Volume 2: Ireland's Competitiveness Challenge.* Dublin: Forfas for National Competitiveness Council.

National Development Plan (NDP) 2000-2007 (2001) *Retrieved* from: http://www.ndp.ie/docs/NDP_Homepage/1131.htm 3rd November 2008.

National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013 (2007) *Transforming Ireland – a better quality of life for all (2007).* Retrieved from: http://www.ndp.ie/docs/NDP_Homepage/1131.htm 3rd November 2008.

National Economic and Social Council (NESC) (1993) *Education and Training Policies for Economic and Social Development.* Dublin: NESC.

National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) (2003) *Labour market issues for older workers; Forum Report No. 26.* Dublin: The Stationery Office.

National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education and Higher Education Authority (2006) *Towards the best education for all: An evaluation of access programmes in higher education in Ireland.* Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2007) *Annual reports 2006 and outline plans 2007*, Dublin: National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education, Higher Education Authority.

National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2008) *National Plan for equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013*, Dublin: National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education, Higher Education Authority.

National Office of Equity to Access to Higher Education (2008) *National plan for equity of access to higher education 2008-2013.* Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) (2003) *A Framework for the development, recognition and award of qualifications in Ireland. Policies, actions and procedures for access, transfer and progression for learners.* Dublin: NQAI.

National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) (2003) *National Framework of Qualifications, December 2003.* Retrieved from: http://www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/frame_action/levels.html 3rd November 2008.

National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) (2005) *Principles and operational guidelines for the recognition of prior learning in further and higher education and training, June 2005.* Retrieved from: http://www.nfg.ie/nfg/en/public_resources/documents/PrinciplesandOperationalGuidelinesforthe RecognitionRPL.doc 3rd November 2008.

National Skills Bulletin (2007) *A study by the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) in Fas for the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs.* Dublin: Fas.

National Training Advisory Committee (2003) *Report for 2002.* Retrieved from: http://www.onestepup.ie/press/reports/doc/egfsn0307_ntac_report_2002.doc 3rd November 2008.

O'Connell, C. (2008) Scope for the science trade, *The Irish Times*, November 3rd 2008.

O'Connell, P.J., McCoy, S. and Clancy, D. (2006) Who went to college? Socio-economic inequality in entry to higher education in the Republic of Ireland in 2004, *Higher Education Quarterly, Vol. 60, No. 4, October, pp. 312-332*.

O'Connor, C. M. (2006) Implications of mass education on chemistry higher education, *Level 3,* August 2006, Issue 4.

O'Connor, M. (2007) *Looking forward to the continued expansion of higher education in Ireland: The policy context.* Presentation given at the IAUCA Report Launch, 5th November 2007, National Office for Equity of Access and the HEA.

O'Keefe, B. (TD) (2008) Foreword by Mr. Batt O'Keefe, TD, Minister for Education and Science. In National Office of Equity to Access to Higher Education (2008) *National plan for equity of access to higher education 2008-2013.* Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (1993) *Education at a Glance.* Paris: OECD.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2004*) Review of national policies for education: Review of higher education in Ireland examiners' report.* Paris: OECD.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2006*) Reviews of national policies for education: Higher education in Ireland.* Paris: OECD.

Osborne, M. (2003) Increasing or widening participation in higher education? A European overview. *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp 5-24.

Osborne, R. D.and Leith, H. (2000) *Evaluation of the targeted initiative on widening access for young people from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds.* Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Osborne, R. D. (2006) Access to and participation in higher education in Northern Ireland, *Higher Education Quarterly, Vol. 60, No. 4, pp. 333-348*.

Papatsiba, V. (2006) Making higher education more European through student mobility? Revisiting EU initiatives in the context of the Bologna Process, *Comparative Education, Vol. 42, No. 1, February 2006, pp. 93-111*.

Parry, G. (2006) Policy-participation trajectories in English higher education, *Higher Education Quarterly, Vol. 60, No. 4, pp. 392-412*.

Rees, G. and Stroud, D. (2001) Creating a mass system of higher education. In Philips, R. and Furlong, J. (Eds.) (2001) *Education reform and the state: 25 years of politics, policy and practice.* London and New York: Routledge Falmer - Taylor Francis Group, pp 72-86.

Report of the Task Force on Lifelong Learning (2002). Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Skillbeck, M. and Connell, H. (2000) *Access and equity in higher education: An international perspective on issues and strategies.* Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Skillbeck, M. (2001) *The university challenged: A review of international trends and issues with particular reference to Ireland.* Higher Education Authority, Conference of Heads of Irish Universities. Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

Sotello, C. and Turner, V. (2002) *Diversifying the faculty,* Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

The European Higher Education Area (2001) *Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education, 1999, the Bologna Declaration. Salamanca 2001*. Available from: http://147.83.2.29/salamanca2001/documents/main_texts/bologna.htm 27th October 2008.

Lisbon European Council Presidency Conclusions, March 23rd and 24th (2000). Retrieved from: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_en.htm?textMode=on 10th November 2008.

The Treaty of Rome (1957) *Establishing the European Economic Community*. Rome. Retrieved from http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/treaties/index.htm#founding 27th October 2008.

Thornhill D. (2001) *Address to the Higher Education Authority at the National Conference on the Bologna Declaration.* Stillorgan Park Hotel Dublin. 9th May 2001.

Thornhill, D. (2002) *Widening access to higher education in Ireland.* Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Tonks, D. and Farr, M. (2003) Widening access and participation in UK higher education, *International Journal of Educational Management*, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp 26-36.

Tully, M. (2008) How Ireland has increased the relevance of mathematics and science on second level, third level and state training programmes through the use of the Infinity Project©, *Paper presented at the International Conference of Education, Research and Innovation,* 17th- 20th November 2008, Madrid. www.iated.org/iceri2008

Webber, G. C. (2000) U.K. higher education: competitive forces in the 21st century. *Higher Education Management. Vol.12. No. 1. pp. 55-56.*

Zgaga, P. (2003) Reforming the universities of South East Europe in view of the Bologna Process, *Higher Education in Europe, Vol. XXVIII, No. 3, pp. 251-258.*

Websites

http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/index.asp?docID=265 accessed on 27/03/2008

www.hea.ie accessed on 22/10/2008

www.irlgov.ie accessed on 22/10/2008

www.cso.ie/px/des/Dialog/Saveshow.asp accessed on 22/10/2008

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/treaties/index.htm#founding accessed on 27/10/2008

http://www.treatyofrome.com/treatyofrome.htm accessed on 27/10/2008

http://www.dit.ie/study/international/erasmus/ accessed on 27/10/2008

http://drupal.hea.ie/files/files/file/statistics/2007/FTDomiciliaryofOrigin07.xls accessed on 27/10/2008

http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/bologna_declaration.pdf accessed on 27/10/2008.

http://147.83.2.29/salamanca2001/documents/main_texts/bologna.htm accessed on 27/10/2008.

http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/erasmus20_en.html accessed on 28/10/2008

www.hea.ie/ga/sif accessed on 29/10/2008

http://www.ndp.ie/docs/NDP_Homepage/1131.htm accessed on 3/11/2008

http://www.nfg.ie/nfg/en/public_resources/documents/PrinciplesandOperationalGuidelinesforthe RecognitionRPL.doc accessed on 3/11/2008.

http://www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/frame_action/levels.html accessed on 3/11/2008.

http://www.onestepup.ie/press/reports/doc/egfsn0307_ntac_report_2002.doc accessed on 3/11/2008.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_en.htm?textMode=on accessed on 10/11/2008

www.iated.org/iceri2008 accessed on the 21/11/2008; all papers from the Madrid conference are available in abstract form from this website.

http://www.staffs.ac.uk/journal/ accessed on the 23/11/2008

http://www.iua.ie/iua-acticities/widening-participation.html accessed on 23/11/2008

http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2004/en/act/pub/0030/index.html accessed on 24/11/2008

http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2006/20061031.htm accessed on 24/11/2008

http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=4338andCatID=87 accessed on 24/11/2008

http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/bills28/acts/2000/a800.pdf accessed on 24/11/2008

http://books.google.com/books?id=TPp4o2EpTK8C&printsec=frontcover&hl#PPA41,M1 accessed on 1/12/2008

http://www.budget.gov.ie/   accessed on 14/10/2008 and finally on 1/12/2008.

Appendix 1

Table 1: Full-time enrolments for higher education in Ireland in 2006-2007

Student Type	#	Impact
Undergraduate enrolments	119,361	↑ of 5.5% over previous 5 years
Postgraduate enrolments	17,789	↑ of 17.7% over previous 5 years
Mature Student Entries in Universities, Colleges of Education, National College of Art and Design and the Royal College of Surgeons Ireland	N/R*	↑ of 18% between 05/06 and 06/07
Mature Student Entries in the Institutes of Technology Sector	N/R	↑ of 14% between 05/06 and 06/07
International Student on full-time enrolments	N/R	↑ of 11% between 05/06 and 06/07
PhD output	N/R	↑ of 19% between 05/06 and 06/07

Source: Adapted from the Higher Education Authority (2008) *Facts and figures: Irish higher education*, Dublin: Higher Education Authority. *No record of numbers enrolled only percentage increase from year to year.

Table 2: 2007 Statistics of Full-time Students' Domiciliary of Origin**

The main migrant states from Europe (EU and Non EU) with the most students in colleges or universities in Ireland for the period 2006-2007 are as follows:

Germany	465
Spain	181
France	329
Italy	201
Netherlands	52
Poland	138
Great Britain	1065
Norway	115
Russian Federation	73

Source: Adapted from http://drupal.hea.ie/files/files/file/statistics/2007/FTDomiciliaryofOrigin07.xls
** Only a random sample of countries with more than 50 students in Ireland were chosen as more than 57 countries were represented some only having one or two students in Ireland at the time of the survey.

Table 3: Higher Certificate in Hospitality Services Management Class 2007 – 2008 Year 1*** (still awaiting country and age information from DIT central office at time of print)

	Surname	1st Name	Country	Age
1	Alessandro	Verdiani		
2	Bequnie	Alesandra		
3	Browne	Miread		
4	Capcarrere	Nicolas		
5	Chambraud	Nathalie		
6	Dowling	Damian		
7	Fabriani	Sara		
8	Goldsmith	Sandra		
9	Greber	Sarah		
10	Haier	Fergal		
11	Islam	Nurul		
12	Jackson	Christian		
13	Jarve	Imgmar		
14	Juhesz	Victorika		
15	Krejcarova	Sarka		
16	La Polla	Francsca		
17	Lattova	Dominika		
18	Lynskey	Marie		
19	Mahon	Lynda		
20	Misiak	Jacek		
21	Moiseja	Kristina		
22	Murasova	Ludmila		
23	Ntimane	Ernest		
24	O'Donnell	Sharon		
25	O'Dowd	David		
26	Olukoya	Atinuke		
27	Pavel	Pechacek		
28	Pekarikova	Miriama		
29	Reilly	Clare		
30	Rodrigues Bispo	Janaina		
31	Sabado	Baby Josie		
32	Seeven Cottacoopen	Sadha		
33	Simon	Irina		
34	Tichy	Jan		
35	Tsikhelashvili	Khatuna		
36	Vogt	Maria		
37	Wei	Wei		
38	Zavroska	Parlina		

Table 4: Higher Certificate in Hospitality Services Management Class 2008-2009 Year 1***

	Surname	**First Name**
1	Adamska	Anna
2	Boileau	Trevor
3	Buckley	Shane
4	Cetinkaya	Adnan
5	Chebli	Adlan
6	Dera	Natalia
7	Dornan	Annette
8	Golubeva	Jelena
9	Henrink	Milan
10	Hoary-Smails	Imelda
11	Iatan	Ioan
12	Istvan-Foldes	Zsolt
13	Khan	Abdus
14	Kroitor	Jekateeina
15	Lebiedziewica	Magdalena
16	McCormack	Frank
17	Moore	Colette
18	Newman	Emma
19	Nursiah	Herman
20	Orechova	Diana
21	Uzulniece	Iveta
22	Plosenko	Timur
23	Redmond	Karen
24	Servan	Laura Augustina
25	Yushkevich	Halina
26	Zmilovska	Anna

***All of the above students in tables 3 and 4 gain entry to Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) through progression from the Short Courses (DIT 12 week modules taken individually), through application through the central admissions office within DIT, or via their work place (e.g. through industry partnership with DIT Faculty of Tourism and Food there is a system in place called MagicTouch). They do not use the traditional route of the point's route through the Central Applications Office (CAO), and some may not have a leaving certificate or equivalent and would therefore have to produce documents or reports of industry experience for at least three years. All of these students are interviewed to obtain a place on the course.

Appendix 2: Miscellaneous Policies on Higher Education

Enterprise Strategy Review Group Report – Ahead of the Curve

Another government commissioned report for research into higher education from the Enterprise Strategy Group (July 2004) outlined three critical areas of focus for higher education:

1. To be adaptive and flexible in the production of high quality graduates – for example through the use of information technology to provide wider access to higher education;
2. Upskilling of the workforce – enabling the return to education by workers;
3. The expansion of the workforce via a skills-based immigration strategy.

It was noted that the report was focussing on the 'economic role of the educational system rather than on its cultural and social roles' (Enterprise Strategy Report, 2004: 73). The Enterprise Strategy Report (2004) reiterated the importance of building upon the existing education and training systems with a renewed focus on fostering continual acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies. Upskilling and the development of appropriate world class skills to meet the needs of enterprise are deemed essential in an environment of constant change. The stable advantageous regime of personal and corporate taxation and the reputation of the Irish government as responsive to the needs of enterprise were considered as continued sources of competitive advantage in the pursuit of a sustainable enterprise culture in a global economy.

However, the report concluded that there was a significant gap in research and development, and a sales and marketing capability in the Irish economy and that these limitations present a major challenge in an increasingly competitive global marketplace. In order to regain a leadership position and competitive advantage there needed to be a focus on the development of world class capability in focused areas of technology and innovation techniques in order to drive high–value products and services together with the development of international marketing and sales expertise to secure a strong position in an emerging global competitive marketplace.

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs

Following on from the earlier Green and White Papers on higher education (1992 and 1995) the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) at the behest of the Irish government since its inception in 1997 continues to develop national strategies on skills sets, labour forecasting and education and training to sustain economic development. The EGFSN proposes a vision of Ireland in 2020 with a well educated and highly skilled population contributing to a competitive, innovative and enterprise knowledge based participative and inclusive economy (Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2003; 2001; 2000; 1998).

A number of reports have indicated the importance of generic/ transferable or 'soft skills' as being of primary importance in maintaining an adaptable and flexible workforce (National Economic and Social Forum, 2003; National Training Advisory Committee, 2003). As a consequence the reports also recommend that soft skills which include communication, leadership, team work, personal development and effectiveness, and, 'learning to learn' (see also White Paper, 2000) need to be incorporated into the national education curricula including the higher education sector (Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2003).

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs reported in 2005 (2005) on the demand and supply of foreign language skills in the Irish enterprise sector. With increased migration and therefore the increased availability of an internal supply of foreign language skills this is perceived as enhancing the attractiveness of Ireland for foreign multi-national companies. These migrant workers must also be provided with access to quality higher education programmes. Ireland is a small open economy and therefore the linguistic ability is an important asset for Irish indigenous business organsations if they are to survive in a global marketplace.

Appendix 3: Glossary

AP(E)L	Accredited Prior (Experiential) Learning
CAO	Central Applications Office
CHIU	Conference of Heads of Irish Universities
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DIT	Dublin Institute of Technology
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EU	European Union
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HETAC	Higher Education and Training Awards Council
ICSTI	Irish Council for Science, Technology and Innovation
IoTs	Institutes of Technology
LLP	Lifelong Learning Programme
NCC	National Competitiveness Council
NDP	National Development Plan
NESC	National Economic and Social Council
NQAI	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
NR	Not recorded
NVQ	National Vocational Qualifications
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate course
SEA	Single European Act
SIF	Strategic Innovation Fund