



Press Release
8th September 2009

Third Level Access Scheme extends to all secondary schools

The Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) is being extended by the seven universities, DIT and the seven colleges of education from 305 to all 730 secondary schools in Ireland. The scheme will broaden access opportunities to third level education for school leavers from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds across the country. This expansion of the scheme, which was primarily reserved for students from DEIS¹ schools, recognises that educational disadvantage affects a cross section of all communities and is not confined to clearly identifiable areas or regions.

Under the Higher Education Access Route, participating colleges are allocating a quota of places on a reduced points basis, across all academic areas. Students who secure one of these places will be offered a range of academic and personal supports while at college. Since the inception of the access admissions scheme a decade ago the number of students who have entered college through the Higher Education Access Route has grown steadily from 175 in 2000 to 682² in 2009.

For the first time, school leavers who wish to apply for the scheme can do so online as part of the CAO application process. Applications open from 1st November 2009 onwards. A dedicated website www.accesscollege.ie has also been developed to provide full details of the scheme and assist students in making their application.

¹ Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) – A Department of Education and Science Action Plan for Education Inclusion

² CAO Round 1

Widening participation is a priority for higher education institutions. Recruiting students from all walks of life who have the ability to succeed at third level will help to ensure that colleges remain diverse and vibrant places in which to study, while also becoming more representative of the society which they serve. According to Maureen Dunne, spokesperson for the Higher Education Access Route, *“In the present climate of rising unemployment Higher Education has a role to play in ensuring that society continues to focus on those who are more marginalized. The Higher Education Access Route is an important part of this focus.”* Experience to date shows that HEAR students from disadvantaged backgrounds who secure a place in college have as good a success rate as all other students .

There is an ongoing commitment in Ireland to the objective of tackling social exclusion through education. In June 2008 the HEA National Access Office launched the *National Action Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013*, setting out ambitious targets and equity of access measures for the next 5 years. One of those targets is an entry rate of at least 54% for all socio-economic groups by 2020. The extension of HEAR to all schools is one means by which this target can be achieved. The HEAR expansion has been supported by both the HEA and the Department of Education through the Strategic Innovation Fund.

Support for the Scheme:

“HEAR provides a ‘level playing pitch’ for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds accessing higher education. It helps students overcome a variety of obstacles by providing academic, personal and social supports in the participating institutions. My experience of the scheme is that it can make all the difference to getting there, competing and completing.”

Eilis Coakley, President, Institute of Guidance Counsellors

“I decided to go to college because I knew that if you wanted to get a good job and a secure future, a third level course was essential. A spokesperson from HEAR came to our school and spoke positively of college. I chose to do Medicine and having nearly finished my first year I know I made the right choice. I would highly recommend HEAR particularly for the support offered to you throughout the year like peer mentoring and the study skills programme.”

Carolyn, Medicine Student, UCD

Ends

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Notes to the Editor:

- The Higher Education Access Route was extended from
 - 305 DEIS & linked schools in 2008
 - 420 schools in 2009 (schools in BMW region added)
 - All 730 secondary schools in 2010.
- A student's background impacts on educational attainment and progression:
Completion of the Leaving Certificate:
 - 90% of students with parents in professional occupations
 - 66% from unskilled manual backgrounds (Smith and McCoy 2009)
- On average 5% of first-year places are allocated to HEAR students across all participating colleges.
- The expansion of the Higher Education Access Route has been managed on behalf of participating colleges by the Irish Universities Association (IUA) as part of a Department of Education and Science Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) project.
- Full details on the scheme, facts and figures and faq's can be found on www.accesscollege.ie

Excerpts from the HEA National Action Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013:

- All socio-economic groups will have entry rates of at least 54 per cent by 2020 ('Non-manual' group at 27 per cent and 'Semi-skilled and unskilled manual' group at 33 per cent in 2004).
- Entry Rates to Higher Education in 2004 by socio economic Group.
 - Higher Professional group = 100%
 - Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers group = 33%
 - Non-manual workers group = 27% (went down since 1998)