



## Third level scheme available to 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 DEIS[1] 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 682[2] 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](http://www.accesscollege.ie) has also been developed to provide full details of the scheme and assist students in making their application.

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."