

Where Next? Mapping and Understanding the Post First Degree Destinations of Mature Disadvantaged Students in three Higher Education Institutions

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The Seminar

- Aims of the study
- Policy & theoretical background to the study
- Methodological notes & queries
- The Findings so far. . .

The Study: Main Aims

1. Map the post-first degree destinations of those students who have entered HE via an access programme or equivalent in the past 7 years;
2. Explore the processes and experiences of these ex-students transition from HE into (or back into) workplace or other arenas;
3. Investigate the ex-students reflections on their motivations to entering HE, expectations and experiences.

The Study: Some Specific Questions

- The relationship between type of first degree and 'choice' of destination
- The relationship between experiences of being in HE institutions and destination
- The kind and form of supports offered and provided by HE institutions to help students' in their career decision making
- The identification of and relationship between non-HE factors (e.g. finance, family context, position in life-cycle, gender, ethnicity, geographical mobility etc) and destinations;
- Short and long-term expectations of career paths
- Perceived barriers to secure graduate employment and the job application process
- Expectations and experience of the type and nature of employment post first degree
- Assess the experience of being on social welfare while in HE

The Study: Background Issues

- Green Paper Lifelong Learning (2000) target 15% mature students by 2005.
- 1999 Qualifications (Education & Training) Act, recognition, access, transfer, progression.
- Towards 2016, access, support for disadvantaged.
- NDP 2007-2013, Chapter 9, Human Capital
- National Plan for Equity & Access (2008) 12.5% 23+ in 2006.
- HEA (2005) Equity & Access, 23+ 10% FT, 30% PT 2006.
- EGNFSN (2007) upskill 500,000 in the labour force by one NFQ level by 2020.
- HEA Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF II) Access, retention, progression.
- EU Lisbon agenda participation rate of 24-64 in education and training by 2010 12.5%
- OECD (2008) average participation of 23+ 19.5%

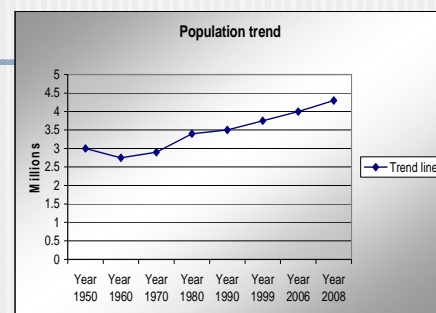


Diagram 1, Irish Population trend line, adapted from CSO figures 2008.

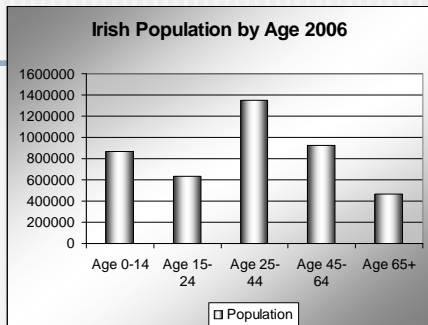


Diagram 2, Irish Population by Age 2006, adapted from CSO 2008.

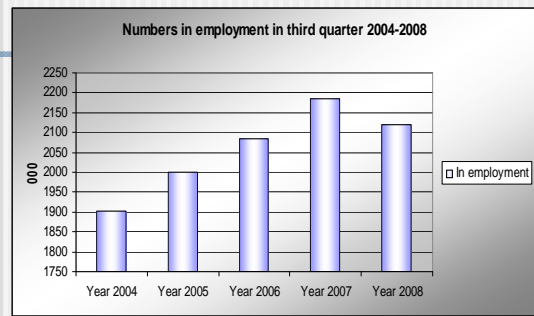


Diagram 3, Numbers in employment (adapted from CSO 2008).

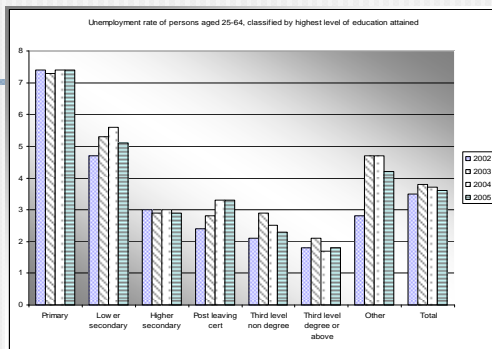


Diagram 4, Unemployment rate of persons aged 25-64, classified by highest level of education attained. Source, adapted from the CSO Quarterly National Household Survey, May 2006.

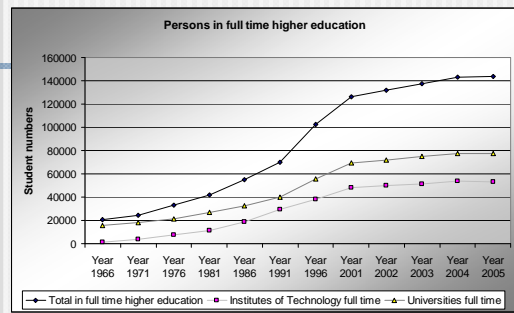


Diagram 5, Total number of Persons in Full Time Third Level Education from 1966 to 2005, and details of Universities and Institutes of Technology. Adopted from the CSO, DES and HEA figures.

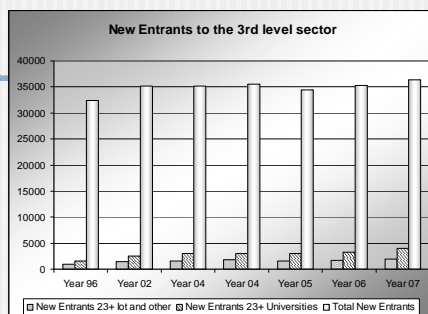


Diagram 6, Total New Entrants to 3rd Level, (adopted from CAO 2008), New Entrants 23+ IoT and other, (adopted from DES 2008), New Entrants 23+ Universities, (adopted from HEA 2008).

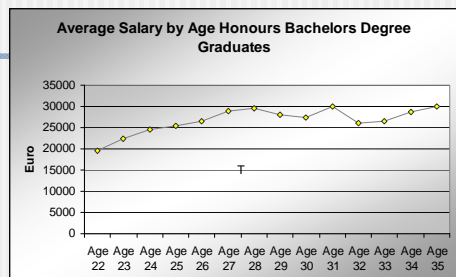


Diagram 7, Average Salary, Age, Hon. Degree Graduate, adapted from the HEA (2007, p33) What do Graduates do? The class of 2005

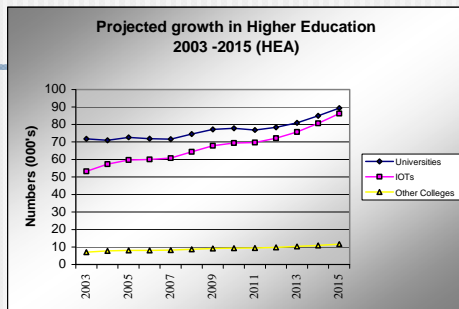


Diagram 8, projected growth in Higher Education 2003-2015, adopted from the IoTI figures.

The Institutions: Maynooth

- Started life in 1795 as St Patrick's College
- Became part of the NUI in 1997
- Currently has 6,574 registered students in 26 academic Departments which are organised into three Faculties
- 840 part-time undergraduate students

The Institutions: DIT

- Origins, 1887, DCVEC, 1992 DIT Act.
- Degree awarding power 1996, PhD 1999 Qualifications (Education & Training) Act.
- 6 Faculties, 35 Schools, 2000 staff, 85 FT programmes, 200 PT programmes.
- Multi level higher education provider: 3,000 apprentices, 11,000 FT undergraduates, 1236 FT postgraduates, 7,200 PT students.
- Access programme began 2001, Mature Student Officer appointed 2008.

The Institutions: TCD

- Founded in 1592 as the University of Dublin
- Has 24 schools & depts. across 3 faculties
- Currently (2007) has 15,492 students
- 10,193 full-time undergraduates
- 496 part-time undergraduates
- 2,824 full-time postgraduates
- 1,979 part-time postgraduates
- Access programme since 1993
- Mature student office

Methodology

- Study was of a mixed-methods design:
 - Self-administered postal questionnaire
 - One-to-one interviews
 - Focus groups

Methodology: The Sample

- Samples based on data held by each institution
- Identification of data sets initially problematic
- Sampling frames compiled with assistance of student records or alumni officers

Methodology: The Sample

Maynooth

sampling frame n = 817
sample n = 817
response rate n = 216 (26%)
interviews n = 20

(Years covered 2001 - 2007)

Methodology: The Sample

DIT

sampling frame *1 n = 470
sampling frame *2 n = 75
sample n = 75
response rate n = 45 (60%)
interviews n = 18

(Years covered as per returns 1987 - 2007)

Use of two sampling frames due to lack of specific information concerning ex-student course details in first frame.

Methodology: The Sample

TCD

sampling frame n = 631
sample n = 631
response rate n = tbc
interviews n = tbc

(years covered 2000 - 2007)

Methodology: The Questionnaire

- Questionnaire designed to work across the three colleges
- Constructed over three month period
- Piloted in each college and adjusted accordingly
- Intended to be compiled via an optical mark reader, but was not used due to technical problems

Methodology: The Questionnaire

- Questionnaire built around following sections:
 - Personal information (age, gender etc)
 - First degree (type, programme duration etc)
 - Financing of study period
 - Studying with a disability
 - Experience of college life and studying
 - Post degree work and employment
 - Post degree further study
- In total encompassed 150 separate data items
- Data compiled and analysed via SPSS

Methodology: The Interviews

- Interviews were semi-structured and based around the following themes:
 - first degree and 'choice' of destination;
 - between experiences of being in HE institutions and destination;
 - supports offered and provided by HE institutions to help students' in their career decision making;
 - relationship between non-HE factors (e.g. finance, family context, position in life-cycle, gender, ethnicity, geographical mobility etc) and destinations;
 - short and long-term expectations of career paths;
 - barriers to secure graduate employment and the job application process;
 - expectations and experience of the type and nature of employment post first degree;
 - assess the experience of being on social welfare while in HE.

Methodology: The Interviews

Interviewees selected on the basis of:

1. Volunteering via questionnaire
2. Representative of gender, age, location etc based on understanding of the sampling frame

Interviews lasted between 30 to 60 mins and organised to suit interviewees situation (face to face and telephone methods)

Methodology: The Interviews

■ Also undertook interviews with:

Key individuals in identified 'stakeholder' organisations (e.g. HEA, IBEC, EGFSN, ICTU etc)

Individuals within colleges connected to the research questions (e.g. mature students officers, access officers etc)

■ These were done to provide us with data about the wider policy and institutional contextual factors influencing students

Findings so Far: Maynooth

Some 'headline' numbers from the survey

- 68% of the survey respondents were female.
- 10% were in their 20s and 10 per cent were over 60. The remainder were spread evenly over the decades of 30s, 40s and 50s.
- Two out of every three were married (58%) or living with a partner (8%).
- One in three had no children, one in three had three children or more.

Findings so Far: Maynooth

- 10% graduated with a science degree
- 90% with a liberal arts humanities or social science degree
- 83% of graduates indicated they would choose the same course again if they had the choice
- 90% indicated a willingness to return to study
- One in three people continued to work at university and worked on average 17 hours per week.
- 56% of respondents availed of County Council grants and almost 40 per cent qualified for the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)

Findings so Far: Maynooth

- 6 per cent of the students surveyed who did not receive BTEI relied on other social welfare payments such as lone parents' allowance and disability benefits.
- Twenty-one students also received small grants from Partnership and regeneration groups, the Millennium Fund and in one or two cases from trade union or religious charities.
- None of the mature students who had gone through higher education had received financial support from their employers.

Findings so Far: DIT

Some 'headline' numbers from the survey

- 7 females, 25 males
- Age range from 33 to 61 mean = 40.1
- 13 had bachelors degrees
- 13 had masters degrees
- Motivation: employment = 19; interest = 8
- 20 studied part-time; 11 full-time
- 29 worked whilst they were studying

Findings so Far: DIT

- 14 had financial support from employers
- 2 had support from social welfare
- 2 had support from BTEI
- 11 reported incurring debt: 6 = 0-10k; 3 = 11-20k; 1 = 21-30; 1 = 31-40k
- 28 reported being in work (4 part-time)

Findings so Far: DIT

- 17 changed jobs
- 11 reported being promoted at work
- 24 reported pay increase
- 23 expected a pay increase post-degree
- 13 earned between 41-50k; 8 earned > 71k; 3 earned 0 > 30k;

Findings so Far: DIT

The Interviews

- Sample; 7 females (average age 35-40), 11 Males (average age 40-45).
- Method; Telephone interviews.
- Programmes, Spatial Planning, Engineering, Supply Change Management, Food Safety Management, Photography, Risk Management, Marketing Management, HRM, Construction Management, Tourism Management, Leisure Management, Architecture, Media Studies.
- Note while most of this sample were undertaking undergraduate programmes there were three whose first degree was at Masters level and one at MPhil, access was gained by recognition of extensive work experience in the related field.

Findings so Far: DIT

- Two participants came from a trade related background.
- Stratification, 3 skilled manual, 2 home carers, 8 mid professionals, 2 senior professionals, 2 self employed, 1 refugee.
- Nationality, 1 Germany, 1 Bosnian, 16 Irish.
- Present status, 3 self employed, 1 part time employment, mid professional 9, senior professionals 4, Post doc 1.

Findings so Far: DIT

- Motivation; mainly work orientated, promotion opportunities, career path change, two stated personal development.
- Support services; mainly positive comments, need more visibility and promotion.
- Choosing DIT; career orientated programmes, reputation, location.
- Programme relevance; content was very relevant to work, vocational in nature, could apply in the work place.
- Factors; Positive, age, family, peer group, work associates, employers, Negative, time commitment, time away from children, no crèche facility.

Findings so Far: DIT

- Career; most have a clear idea of both their short term and long term career paths (although work uncertainty was mentioned).
- Barriers; no barriers to graduate employment were mentioned.
- Career path; most went into their chosen career, although a high percentage changed to new employment and new areas, some were self employed and remained this way.
- Investment; the invest was worthwhile, benefits a mixture of economic and social.
- Recommend; all positive would advise a friend to go to HE.