



# HEA

Higher Education Authority  
An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas

## Access and Equity in Higher Education:

An International Perspective  
On Issues And Strategies

Prepared For  
The Higher Education Authority

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**Access and Equity in Higher Education**  
**An International Perspective On Issues and Strategies**

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**A**fter several decades of policy making, research and programme development in higher education, equity issues continue to be of concern internationally. There have been substantial gains which, however, serve to highlight remaining difficulties and the complex issues that arise in efforts to address them.

The higher education policy agenda is crowded: meeting rising social and individual demand for professional training; achieving greater efficiency; improving governance and decision making; monitoring and improving standards; the new communication and information technologies, and many others. Yet equity must continue to be high on the agenda of national systems, individual institutions, special interest groups and international organisations.

Mass participation has been the major factor in improving access and opportunity. But it also draws attention to the needs of those who are in some sense disadvantaged or unable to take up study opportunities increasingly available to other people. The worldwide drive toward greater democratisation, the affirmation of human rights, the actions of special interest groups, legislative reform, and the economic imperative of the knowledge-based society combine to raise expectations of 'a fair deal for all'. Higher education in its many forms is increasingly seen as crucial to that fair deal. It has already played a leading role in advancing equity policies and programmes for staff as well as students, and can and should do still more.

One of the consequences of gains made is increased awareness of the gaps, barriers and unresolved issues. Research, most of it carried out by university-based academics, has greatly increased our knowledge of the inequities that persist. Some are structural, deeply embedded in society and its educational institutions, others are attitudinal and behavioural on the part of individuals and groups. Yet others are organisational and programmatic - a function of information flows, access arrangements, admissions procedures and particular forms of provision and procedures affecting study, employment and career advancement.

Higher education is challenged to continue advancing the equity cause, not as an add on but as an integral element of its broader intellectual, cultural, social and economic purposes. Both system-wide and institutional strategies can be strengthened to build on achievements and to gain further ground. Indeed, higher education has a key role in advancing the values of justice, democratic life and their wider dissemination in society. This is not a separate, free standing, theoretically dispensable role, but a central or core value, part of the enduring concept of education as universal enlightenment, civic development, and personal fulfilment.

This report of international experience has been prepared at the invitation and request of the Higher Education Authority. Its purpose is to enlarge and deepen the consideration of policy issues, legislative requirements and institutional practice in Ireland and to assist in the development of action programmes. Necessarily and inevitably, it is highly selective even though it has a wide scope. The field is enormous, – including a large body of research literature, policy statements and legislation, official reports, institutional studies, manifestos and the anecdotal evidence of experienced practitioners. To achieve some degree of focus, there is a concentration, first, on developments in OECD member countries and, second, on a selection of mainly recent research and policy literature bearing on under-represented groups in higher education.

The report examines evidence of gains made, of continuing weaknesses and of issues which feature in the international equity debate. The final chapter constitutes an effort to map out what, across a wide spectrum of countries, have been found to be recurring difficulties, and successful or promising equity endeavours in meeting them. From a consideration of these, together with an appraisal of equity needs and achievements in Irish higher education it should be possible to chart future policy directions and strategies for consideration by system and institution authorities alike. While clear directions and conclusions emerge, there is no single, royal road. Rather, individual systems and institutions need to determine what is most appropriate for them, in light of prevailing conditions and appraisals of perceived needs. Decisions can be informed by international experience, but not determined by it.

In preparation of the report, both published materials and personal statements by policy makers, academics and officials in fifteen countries and four inter-governmental organisations have been used. . In reflecting on their own experience and first-hand knowledge of access and equity matters in higher education they have given invaluable insights. It is a pleasure to acknowledge and warmly thank these interlocutors (identified in the appendix) for their assistance and advice. Helpful comments on an earlier draft were given by Dr Don Thornhill, Mr John Hayden, Ms Mary Kerr, Ms Triona Dooney and Mr Seán Ó Foghlú of the Higher Education Authority.

Grateful acknowledgement is made of the assistance of Dr Helen Connell at every stage in preparation of this report including design, data gathering and analysis, drafting and editing.



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Following a review of the Brief in the context of Irish legislation, in [chapter 1](#), key concepts and terms in the equity debate are discussed, in [chapter 2](#). Equity does not mean that all must be treated exactly the same or that there should be precise equality of representation in all areas of higher education and institutional operations by all designated equity groups. But it does mean being systematically fair; consideration for all on equal terms requires that inequalities, when they do occur, be justified by overall benefits and gains to all concerned. Thus defined, equity encompasses: access – fair conditions in preparation for admission to higher education and full participation in its benefits; attentiveness to the factors that might or do affect performance and progress of all students; and positive steps in staff recruitment and progression to ensure that careers are equally open to all talents.

These expectations and requirements link equity in higher education to the fundamental ideals of democracy and human rights. At the same time, they connect equity with other basic values and aspirations of civilised society: high quality and efficiency in the advancement, dissemination and utilisation of knowledge and the fullest possible development of social and human capital. Equity is not a partisan affair, even if often driven by special interest groups; it is not incidental to the mission of higher education, but is integral to the intellectual and other virtues of academic life.

[Chapter 3](#) opens with a comment on the equity gains arising from the great expansion, world-wide, in the provision of higher education. The opening of new possibilities for study and for careers is a remarkable achievement. Steady, sometimes spectacular growth and a vast increase in numbers and types of institutions, study programmes and facilities for study have extended opportunities to sectors of the population with little or no history of participation in higher education. Long established practices in staff engagement and career advancement have had to yield to newer and more varied labour market requirements, recruitment and personnel procedures, for all categories of staff, academic, technological, administrative and support.

Progress there has been, for all sectors of the population, but for traditionally under-represented groups it has often been quite uneven. Barriers to opportunity and difficulties in advancement remain to be overcome, and there are some disquieting signs of stagnation or decline, for example attrition rates in upper secondary as well as tertiary education. The goals and values of continued equity improvement are reasonably well understood and reflected in many countries in legislation, policy frameworks, management thinking and action programmes. But there is not always a solid commitment to them in practice. Implementation is often patchy. As an example, gender equity has been largely achieved at the stage of initial higher degree qualifications across the OECD membership, but not at advanced levels and not across all major fields of study and professional life. Staffing profiles are often unbalanced, falling well short - especially at senior levels - of a satisfactory representation of the groups that have been defined as under-represented.

Experience over several decades of equity policies, programmes and projects in higher education across a wide range of countries has greatly increased awareness of needs and enhanced the capacity of systems, institutions and individuals to meet them. What is less well understood is why, in spite of best endeavours, some major policy goals are not being achieved. There are divergent, sometimes strongly held, views on this point indicating the need for more systematic research and programme evaluation.

A highly experienced body of policy makers and committed practitioners in the equity field have made their mark on institutional life as well as on whole systems. Nevertheless, concern continues to be expressed at the width and length of the road yet to travel – the challenges not yet met, barriers, difficulties and weaknesses of various sorts. From a survey of the literature on international policies and experience - even if it comprises only a sample of the very large volume that has been produced - key issues may be identified (Box 1):

Box 1 – Key Issues	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<p><i>Policy frameworks and legislation are often quite strong, but need to be kept under review for adequacy of coverage, continued relevance and effectiveness and basic awareness of requirements;</i></p> <p><i>Follow-through - which requires monitoring, good data, evaluation, analysis and a capacity to undertake systematic action of a supportive, remedial kind, and compliance measures - is often very uneven;</i></p> <p><i>Despite well conceived and resourced equity initiatives, there are deep-seated problems, many in the wider society, which militate against achievement of equity goals for members of under-represented groups;</i></p> <p><i>Problems that are not susceptible to action solely within the domain of higher education, require the development of broader educational policies and more cross-sectoral policy co-ordination – but this is very difficult to orchestrate;</i></p> <p><i>There is often a lack of co-ordinated action across all equity fronts within institutions; this is only partly a resource issue;</i></p> <p><i>Limitations in the scope and coverage of research and evaluative studies, and what appears to be relatively little funded support especially for longitudinal studies, mean that the knowledge base regarding what works and why (or why not) is unduly limited;</i></p> <p><i>Financial constraints are often a significant factor in advancing equity, more so for some groups than others, but resource provision cannot be treated in isolation. Difficulties in achieving equity goals may be structural, attitudinal or grounded in institutional norms and long-established institutional beliefs and practices, as much as they are financial;</i></p> <p><i>Thus attitudes, values and customary practice require sustained attention along with specific, targeted initiatives to advance particular disadvantaged groups.</i></p>

The literature is replete with evidence and viewpoints concerning the difficulties, but there is a relative dearth of evaluation and research focused on the factors making for success in equity policies and programmes. This state of affairs indicates a need for care in considering desirable next steps. The large volume of studies of legislation, policy making, institutional practice and professional activities does, however, provide many platforms from which advances can be made. Within the communities of equity scholars, researchers, policy makers, managers and advocacy groups, there are several areas of agreement and common understandings of what works or seems promising.

In [chapter 4](#) and following the more general discussion of difficulties in achieving equity goals, specific equity target groups and their needs are discussed. Five broadly defined groups feature in the international equity debate: low socio-economic status; women and girls; mature age and part-time students; ethnic and other minority groups; people with a disability. Advancement of each of these groups in higher education is set against analysis of continuing, unmet needs and the chapter concludes with some reflections on enduring problems and their social dynamics.

Building on the issues raised in [chapters 3 and 4](#), and the remarks therein on equity policies and programmes, [chapter 5](#) comprises a set of approaches, strategies and actions that hold promise for the future. A key starting point is sound information about what is happening: well grounded knowledge of the field of



action and clearly formulated agreements on what constitutes success. The most obdurate problems should be singled out and given focused attention. Step-by-step progress on specific issues is the current order of the day in most if not all areas of equity policy. Even if it is agreed that more radical and sweeping measures are needed, there seems to be little will – or capacity – to undertake them. But there are some promising strategies to consider.

At the system level, there is need for a firm, comprehensive legislative and regulatory framework. Policy making should be continuing and dynamic, not merely a reaction to crises and pressure groups – although these have at times brought about substantial changes. Performance targets, regular monitoring of progress against clear goals, financial inducements and sanctions and other measures that foster commitment and a general pro-active stance are leading to demonstrable gains in higher education systems in some countries. The continued volume growth of higher education and its diversification can be expected to yield further gains. Professional bodies, networks, self-help groups and other grass-roots activities are valuable and their encouragement and support could usefully feature in public policy initiatives. More cohesive, cross-sectoral policies, to strengthen the ‘educational chain’ from early childhood to adulthood and across the sectors of health, welfare, employment, housing and so on are likely to become more necessary as participation continues to expand. The difficulty here is lack of frameworks and policy instruments to achieve cross-sectoral, multi-level co-ordinated action. Lifelong learning as promulgated in a considerable number of national and cross-national policy proposals from the mid-nineties onwards is, however, likely to stimulate cross-sectoral thinking and further policy initiatives.

There can be considerable equity returns from closer attention to overall resource management. Well defined needs-based funding is gaining in prominence as a policy instrument. At the institutional level there could be further scope for achieving economies in what are often costly equity endeavours, including inter-institutional collaboration. For institutions there is much that can be done to develop a pervasive equity culture within existing resources or with only modest additions.

In the second part of **chapter 5**, strategies for higher education are set within an ‘educational equity chain’ extending from early childhood to postgraduate education, to career recruitment and advancement. Improving the inter-relatedness of all stages and levels of education is a longer term policy goal: there are shorter term steps that can, if taken within each stage of education, more quickly bring that goal nearer to realisation. Achieving equity in higher education cannot be a stand-alone process, but depends on effective policies and supportive measures in what goes before.

A full list of interlocutors and sources is appended, together with several statistical charts and tables and a selection of good practice guidelines.



*'Policies for equality are among the most important policies of a university. Education is one of the most effective instruments available for addressing inequality and ... higher education has a key role.'*

**Don Thornhill, Chairman of the Higher Education Authority, 1999**

*'the pursuit of quality and excellence needs to be matched by a concern for equity and equality'*

**Noel Lindsay, former Chairman of the Higher Education Authority, 1995.**

This study has been conducted at the request of the Higher Education Authority, Ireland. It has two main purposes: first, to consider trends and issues arising in international movements aimed at improving and sustaining equity in higher education; and, second, to identify strategies and procedures that show promise in meeting policy objectives of achieving greater equity in higher education. Accordingly, the report, following an introductory section, falls into two main parts: trends, issues and problems; and approaches, strategies and actions that work or show promise in promoting equity.

The point of departure, however, is the legislative framework in Ireland. **The Higher Education Authority Act, 1971**, assigns the following general functions to the Authority.

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### Section 3

- (a) *furthering the development of higher education*
- (b) *promoting the attainment of equality of opportunity in higher education*
- (c) *promoting the democratisation of the structure of higher education.*

The Higher Education Authority has drawn the following conclusions regarding the requirements falling on it and on the institutions:

- (i) *The Universities Act 1997 places powerful statutory obligations on the universities in regard to equality issues. The primary responsibility is on the institutions.*
- (ii) *The Authority has functions in regard to these issues but they are clearly secondary to the responsibilities of the institutions.*
- (iii) *While the Authority does not have specific investigative power, it can, of course be alerted by specific instances or circumstances in carrying out its review role.*

The brief for the present report recognises the position which the Higher Education Authority has already taken, namely to move towards a policy framework that encourages or requires the Irish higher education institutions to adopt a more pro-active approach than hitherto to the implementation of equity policies in higher education.

In commissioning this report, the Authority has drawn attention to recent legislation, both the Universities Act 1997 and the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999, and to the Equal Status Bill, 1999.

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### The Universities Act 1997

gives a clear and definite statement of the obligation of universities in Ireland to promote equity. One of the explicit objects is: *'to provide gender balance and equality of opportunity among students and employees of the university'*. In reinforcing the autonomous position of the universities in regard to their management, the Act states:

### Section 14 (1)

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*A university, in performing its functions shall –*

- (a) *have the right and responsibility to preserve and promote the traditional principles of academic freedom in the conduct of its internal and external affairs, and*
- (b) *be entitled to regulate its affairs in accordance with its independent ethos and traditions and the traditional principles of academic freedom, and in doing so it shall have regard to:*
  - (i) *the promotion and preservation of equality of opportunity and access,*
  - (ii) *the effective and efficient use of resources, and*
  - (iii) *its obligations to public accountability, and if in the interpretation of the Act, there is doubt regarding the meaning of any provision, a construction that would promote that ethos and those traditions and principles shall be preferred to a construction that would not so provide...'*

The principles of academic freedom and an independent ethos need to be interpreted in contemporary terms and in the overall context of the aforementioned legislative framework, including the principle of non-discriminatory access, and the equitable treatment of students and staff. Other sections of the Universities Act provide further clarification:

### Section 18 (6)

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*In performing its functions a governing authority, or a committee where appropriate, shall*

- (i) *ensure as far as it can that the university contributes to the economic, cultural and social development of the State and to respect for the diversity of values, beliefs and traditions in Irish society.*

### Section 36 (1)

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- (1) *A governing authority shall, as soon as practicable but not later than 12 months after it is established under this Act and at such other times as it thinks fit, require the chief officer to prepare a statement of the policies of the university in respect of*
  - (a) *access to the university and to university education by economically or socially disadvantaged people, by people who have a disability and by people from sections of society significantly under-represented in the student body, and*
  - (b) *equality, including gender equality, in all activities of the university,*

and the chief officer, in preparing the statement, shall have regard to such policies on those matters as may from time to time be determined by the Minister.

- (2) *A governing authority may, having regard to the resources available to the university, either approve the statement prepared under subsection (1) without modification or, after consultation with the chief officer, approve the statement with such modifications as it thinks fit.*
- (3) *A university shall implement the policies set out in the statement as approved under subsection (2).*

### Section 49

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*An tUdarás, in furtherance of its general functions under section 3 of the Higher Education Authority Act, 1971 shall assist the universities in achieving Objectives of Chapters IV, VII and VIII or Part III and may review –*

- (c) *the policies set out in the statement provided for in section 36 and their implementation*
- (d) *and may, following consultation with the universities, publish a report, in such form and manner, as it thinks fit, on the outcome of any such review.*

### **The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999**

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specifies the functions of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland. These include to 'determine the procedures to be implemented by providers of programmes of education and training for access, transfer and progression' (Section 8 (2) (d)). This requirement refers also, through consultation, to the Dublin Institute of Technology and universities established under section 9 of the Act of 1997, and to institutes of technology. The Authority shall also

*'facilitate and advise universities in implementing the procedures referred to in paragraph (d) and from time to time and in any case not less than once in five years, in consultation with An tUdarás, review the implementation of those procedures by universities, and publish the outcomes of such a review in such form and manner as it thinks fit.'*  
(Section 8 (2) (f)).

Section 40 (3) on the role of universities includes the requirement that 'A university shall provide such information as the Authority may from time to time require for the purposes of the performance of the functions of the Authority.' A university established under section 9 of the Act of 1997 shall be required to 'implement procedures for access, transfer and progression determined by the Authority under section 8 (2) (d) in so far as those procedures apply to the relevant university concerned' (section 41 (1) (b)).

Discrimination is dealt with in detail in the **Equal Status Bill, 1999**. As between any two persons, discriminatory grounds are gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race, and traveller community (section 3 (2) (a – i)). Section 7 of the Bill, dealing with educational establishments, relates directly to 'a university or any other third-level or higher-level institution, whether or not supported by public funds.'

#### **Section 7 (2) states**

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*'An educational establishment shall not discriminate in relation to:*

- (a) *the admission or the terms or conditions of admission of a person as a student to the establishment*
- (b) *the access of a student to any course, facility or benefit provided by the establishment*
- (c) *any other term or condition of participation in the establishment by a student, or*
- (d) *the expulsion of a student from the establishment or any other sanction against the student.'*

Further sections of the bill make various provision for variable fees and allocation of places to nationals of a member state of the European Union and other nationals, for sponsorships, scholarships etc., exchange student arrangements and in relation to some aspects of disability and to sporting facilities. An Equality Authority will have among its functions the promotion of equality of opportunity in relation to the matters to which the Act applies.

Taken together, this body of legislative requirements and others (e.g. the **Employment Equality Act 1998**) constitutes a broad framework for the development and implementation of higher education equity policies. It brings Ireland very much into line with those countries which have led the way in legislative reform in this field.

As is made perfectly clear in the legislation – and is readily understood by anyone with only the scantest understanding of the functioning of universities and their historical evolution – universities exist to advance, through teaching and research, knowledge of various kinds and its application to the highest levels. They perform a multiplicity of roles in so doing. The tradition, however variously interpreted and expressed in diverse ways, is, in Newman’s words essentially ‘an intellectual tradition’ of which the cultivation of thought is the central object (Newman, 1976, pp. 95-6). Thought cannot be bounded by the denial of opportunity and unfair discriminatory practices in education.

Institutions, and their governing bodies, public authorities, governments and others must actively seek to achieve a balance among the multiple functions and roles of a modern university. Equity requirements are an integral part of this balance and their importance has grown rather than diminished with the great expansion of provision of recent decades. Its integration with other objects and purposes of universities raises complex and difficult issues, notably now in such matters as affirmative action and the definition of disadvantage. The aim of this report is to assist the Authority and thereby the institutions and all who work or are involved in higher education in meeting established and emerging requirements and addressing the challenges they raise.



*'What is justice? It is to be fair in lottery, that is to give everyone a good chance to draw lots. What is the best way to treat people who are unlucky in lottery? The people who are lucky should take care of the unlucky ones.'*

**In-hoo Choi** *The Daily Life of Ku-poh, the Novelist.*

For the purposes of this report, the global, inclusive term of 'equity', used alike for students and staff, refers to (1) policies and procedures for enabling and encouraging groups in society at present under-represented as students in higher education institutions and programmes or study areas, to gain access to and demonstrate successful performance in higher education, and transition to the labour market and (2) extending opportunities for suitably qualified people, regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability or other extraneous considerations, to achieve staff positions in higher education and to advance professionally according to merit and achievement and without discrimination based on these extraneous considerations.

Terms such as 'access', 'equal opportunity', 'equality of outcomes', 'affirmative action', and 'equity' are frequently encountered in this area of higher education policy and analysis. The key umbrella or organising concept, however, is 'equity' conceived as: fairness; equality of treatment where comparable features and conditions pertain; and opportunity to participate and contribute, without hindrance through prejudice and discriminatory customary practice. Equity in this sense, need not connote equality in any precise or mathematical sense, e.g. fixed quotas for under-represented groups proportional to overall population, lotteries for admission to popular courses or institutions, etc, although as strategies these may sometimes be attempted. Nor does it imply uniformity whether of institutional provision or entry and study requirements. On the contrary, it is now widely accepted that, rather than sameness, substantial diversity and fitness to individuals and groups, and their circumstances, are appropriate if the varied needs of students are to be met.

The notion of "fitness" has its roots in Platonic and Aristotelian ideas which give prominence to ideas of distinctive differences requiring individual treatment or the recognition of categories of people for which collective action is appropriate. They have always been relevant in educational provision. Historically, in educational practice, these ideas have at times been associated with exclusion and privileged access and treatment rather than a fair chance for all. By contrast, contemporary liberal democratic and ethical theories support different ideas about 'fitness', 'fairness' and 'justice'. Most notable, perhaps, are those developed by John Rawls in his theory of justice (Rawls, 1973) and, in different ways, by a considerable body of philosophers, social theorists and economists (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993; Nussbaum and Glover, 1995), and resoundingly expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1949) and the European Convention on Human Rights. Considerateness and concern for the well-being of all people feature strongly in modern intellectual theories and declarations.

The crucial point behind the Declaration and the Convention on Human Rights and by this body of theoretical literature is that equity is put at the centre of discourse and policy: everyone in the community should be given equal consideration and the opportunity to develop human capabilities. Inequality, for example, according to Rawls' 'Difference Principle', in access to primary goods, is acceptable only when it can be conclusively shown that ultimately it gives rise to greater benefits for everyone. More precisely, inequalities above a (low) threshold can be tolerated only when they function to help more people move across it. This of course does not preclude forms of inequality reflecting 'special conditions' and there is considerable debate about the implications of these conditioning factors. Sen, for example, prefers the concept of freedom for all to achieve, or capability (Sen, 1995). Despite the differences it is clear that system-wide policies, structures and institutions and their procedures can be expected to submit to the claims of justice, fairness and equal

opportunity. Discussion of these concepts and reflective analysis of their educational implications would seem to be an important role for staff and students in higher education.

In modern political analysis, equity is often subsumed under the concept of democratisation – the recognition that all individuals have rights and needs, that these considerations require and have a central role in policies and action strategies. Through participative procedures, whereby all have a voice and an impact, more general concepts are translated into practical action. Decisions should not be pre-emptive, by one group on behalf of another, but should be shared, giving rise to a sense both of individual freedom and of a community of interests and values (Bellah et al, 1985).

Universities in several countries rather sharply experienced the impact of democratic ideas following the radical student movements of the late 1960's. They are now embedded in national policy frameworks and institutions' decision-making procedures, as well as more generally in such international conventions as those of the United Nations (on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and Against Discrimination in Education).

In higher education the challenge now is both to fully embrace the concept of equity and with determination to integrate it with the long-established traditions of excellence and merit and the more recent policy preoccupations with standards, quality, efficiency and relevance to social and economic needs. The need for this reconciliation is implicit in the legislative requirements that have been set in Ireland in recent years and in policy proposals designed to strengthen higher education and its role in national development (Higher Education Authority, 1995).

The two key terms occurring in the Brief for this study are 'access' and 'equity'. 'Access' of course is not only a matter of equity. Policy must take account of such considerations as quality and suitability of qualifications for specific study programmes, economic and socio-cultural needs, human capital needs, financial and other considerations. Practical issues include the systems of assessment and certification at secondary school level, procedures for managing alternative entry routes which include non-formal learning methods for determining specific qualities for particular higher education programmes (Kaiser and De Weert, 1994; Greaney and Kellaghan, 1995; Pascoe et al, 1997). In this regard, OECD countries, until relatively recently, could be classified into 'supply-driven' (e.g. the highly competitive selection procedures in the UK and Irish universities); demand driven (e.g. Italy, Germany, Belgium, The Netherlands) and student market driven, whereby government leaves access to market forces (U.S.). Admission procedures for students fall broadly into one of two approaches, or some combination of them: system-wide right of entry to all who are deemed qualified; institutional selection according to determinations made for particular programmes and courses. For either approach variations can be and often are made under special entry schemes for under-represented groups, for example though the ways points for entry are allocated (and supplemented) for specially targeted groups.

In practice, across the OECD membership there are now strong and reasonably consistent moves towards opening up access opportunities for tertiary education to ever wider and more diverse groups (OECD, 1998a). Taking the Irish legislative cue, the present report is focused on a subset of these trends and issues, viz. ways of improving access for traditionally under-represented groups. The equity theme in the literature, as noted above, commonly and programmatically refers to increasing opportunities for groups or categories to gain admission to and advance in higher education: fields and programmes of study; levels of study; occupations and occupational levels, including occupations in academic institutions.

In the terminology of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999,

### Section 2 (1)

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*'access' means the process by which learners may commence a programme of education and training having received recognition for knowledge, skill or competence acquired.'*

It is interesting to set this narrower and more precise definition (made for the operational purposes of moving into and within a framework of qualifications) with the policy-oriented one adopted by the Council of Europe in its study of access in higher education. According to the Council, an access policy is one *'that aims both at the widening of participation in higher education to all sectors of society, and ensuring that this participation is effective (that is, in conditions which ensure that personal effort will lead to successful completion'* (Council of Europe, 1999b, p. 3). In another gloss on access policy, Kaiser and de Weert (1994) characterise access policy as one which *'aims to mobilize the productive power of nations given the presumed role of higher education as contributor to economic growth'* (p.165).

Two other terms – 'progression' and 'transfer' – also frequently encountered in the literature, are defined in the Qualifications Act:

*'progression' means the process by which learners may transfer from one programme of education and training to another programme where each programme is of a higher level than the preceding programme.*

Often at issue in the equity debate is the adequacy of provision and treatment to enable all individuals and categories of students to progress, having gained access.

Also, of considerable importance is 'transfer', thus defined in the Act:

*'transfer' means the process by which learners may transfer from one programme of education and training to another programme having received recognition for knowledge and skill acquired.*

'Equity', with reference to these distinct but inter-related functions, refers to the nature of access opportunities or procedures and to fair or reasonable treatment including opportunities for under-represented groups not only to enter but also to progress well in higher education, to move from one programme or institution to another. Furthermore, these opportunities and procedures should not be treated in isolation from the general scholarly purposes and uses of higher education, which include enhancing employment capabilities and career advancement.



Accordingly, in this report, the emphasis is on 'equity' in the broad, inclusive senses of what is fair and reasonable for everyone, including those for whom higher education either was in the past or is now not considered relevant. More precisely, 'equity' refers comprehensively to policies, procedures, strategies and everyday actions designed to improve the higher educational, employment and advancement opportunities for those of low socio-economic status, women and girls, ethnic and other minorities, the people with a disability and others denied previous opportunity to enter higher education or discriminated against in various ways. The wish to study and the aptitude to succeed are determining factors but it cannot be assumed that there is some definite standard or level which acts as a threshold. The notion of some fixed quantum of talent, a 'pool of ability', is no longer acceptable. On the other hand, it would scarcely be equitable to offer particular kinds and levels of study opportunities in the certain knowledge that potential students would be quite unable to meet the requirements. Procedures are needed to ensure every opportunity, from early childhood onwards for students to demonstrate their aptitudes and interests rather than depending on the selection role of upper secondary education. Also required are second chance opportunities, especially for mature age students.

'Educational opportunity' refers to circumstances affecting selection and entry to programmes; conditions of study which include curricula, teaching procedures, learning resources and financial considerations; criteria for successful performance and graduation and conditions governing assessed performance; and factors affecting entry into the work force over which higher education has some control or influence.

There is of course a distinction between access for **students** and equal employment opportunities for **staff**; nevertheless they can be viewed as part of a single 'equity continuum'. Of particular relevance for present purposes, is employment in academic institutions: opportunities for underrepresented groups and those actively discriminated against not only to freely enter the academic labour market but to be promoted fairly and to advance to positions of responsibility and influence.

'Equity' in its broadest sense would refer to **all** students and staff or prospective students and staff – that opportunity and provision should be such as to sustain and advance the interests of everyone. However, such an interpretation, important as it is for overall policy making, would embrace all aspects of higher education whereas the focus here is, as indicated, on particular categories of potential and actual students and staff, traditionally and still often typically under-represented in universities and other tertiary institutions.

'Equity', thus defined, forms a significant element in the extension into many aspects of higher education of notions of justice and fairness and liberal democratic ideas, policies and practices. Although often associated with particular political movements and campaigns (notably, in recent decades, feminism and anti-racism) the range of issues arising for broad-based equity policies in education goes well beyond the concerns and actions of particular special interest groups.



*A relationship, institution, or society is inauthentic if it provides the appearance of responsiveness while the underlying condition is alienation.*

**Etzioni, 1968.**

In the first place, it is clear that great advances have been made over several decades in advancing equity in higher education, for both students and staff. For the 1981 OECD Conference on Policies for Higher Education in the 1980's, access to higher education was one of the four main themes (OECD, 1983). In many countries, in the fields of equal opportunity employment and anti-discrimination, there are now well-established legislative frameworks and often also a commission and/ or other agencies responsible for implementing legislation, monitoring and reporting on compliance and handling complaints and disputes. Their scope normally includes education at all levels.

Specifically in higher education, and throughout the OECD region, there is a continuing movement to advance equity through these and other means. Unquestionably there has been very considerable progress, through the substantial **quantitative growth of university places** that has occurred during the past three to four decades (OECD, 1998a). No less important has been the establishment of a **greater diversity** of institutions and programmes, facilities and arrangements to meet the needs of individuals and groups previously given scant attention. Success has been achieved in improving access and study opportunities for disabled students; women have made substantial career advances; and universities generally are much better able – and willing – than in the past to construct and implement broad-based equity policies. Increasing participation rates at all levels are one indicator of progress in achieving equity objectives.

**Table 1:**

*Number of full time students enrolled in public and private institutions per 100 persons in the population aged 5 – 29, all levels of education combined – Ireland and E.U. Countries*

	<b>1975</b>	<b>1985</b>	<b>1990</b>
Ireland	51.1	52.4	55.9
Mean of 15 E.U. countries	52.1	52.14	52.01

(Green et al, 1999. p.33)

Reference should also be made to the OECD data base which locates Ireland in a middling position in international statistics on participation, showing a marked upward trend since 1990 (Appendix 3).

Continuing overall volume growth will therefore be a major factor in future equity policies. As reported in a recent study drawing on Eurostat and OECD statistics (Green et al, 1999), gains made by Ireland, in this respect, have been encouraging (Table 1).

### **Forces driving the Equity Agenda**

In addition to and partly as a result of the impact of education democratisation movements, and the pressure of special interest groups extending over several decades, the current equity agenda may be said to derive from four main sources (**Box 2**):

**Box 2 - Sources of the Equity Agenda**

- *determination by governments, public agencies and a variety of policy makers and Non - Governmental Organisations and community action groups to advance the needs and interests of specific categories of under-representation, both students and staff;*
- *a large and cumulative body of legislation particularly relating to human rights, equal employment opportunities and anti-discrimination, leading to many innovative organisational practices in institutions (equal opportunity committees and officers; special support groups; new kinds of facilities and support; etc ...);*
- *a growing volume of research evidence on, amongst other things, the limited effectiveness or slow results of many of the legislative and policy measures that have been taken;*
- *sensitivity of policy makers, system managers and institutions to reports of persistent inequity, and breaches of legislation conventions, regulations, etc.;*
- *continued representations by special interest groups.*

Progress of a substantial kind cannot be gainsaid. These gains have, however, served to identify shortcomings and highlight further needs. The more widespread the experience of upper secondary and tertiary education becomes, the greater the likelihood that those who do not acquire qualifications risk being socially and economically marginalised (OECD, 1997a, 1998a).

### Evidence of Equity Shortcomings

The fundamental goals of the human rights movement, and policies formulated in many countries for improved access to higher education for under-represented groups and greater equity in academic employment, have not been fully or in many instances even adequately achieved or implemented. Strong evidence for this has been provided in the Council of Europe international study which has recently resulted in a firm and comprehensive Ministerial Recommendation (Council of Europe, 1999b). We return to this below.

For many researchers and commentators in North America and Australasia as well as across Europe, there are genuine grounds for concern, indicating amongst other things weak policies, inadequate implementation procedures and the ignoring of legislative requirements and agreed procedures. Although not possible to quantify in all respects, these weaknesses are sufficiently widespread and well documented as to be the target of continuing criticism and agitation. Even so, there is still a view that the concern in the sphere of education is exaggerated, that there is insufficient recognition of substantial gains already made, too much special pleading and not enough attention to the basic requirements of upholding standards in academic life, of the tradition of excellence. This view, which continues to prevail in some quarters, was succinctly stated in one of the reports of the large scale studies of higher education carried out in the late 1960's and 1970's by the Carnegie Commission: *"We are greatly concerned about equality of opportunity but we are also concerned that the drive for equality of opportunity not take the direction in academic life of destroying standards"* (Carnegie, 1973, p. 38). This volume of the Carnegie report also contained the statement that 'some' members of minority groups, 'some women' may have had fewer past opportunities... *"But these are transitional and marginal problems that can be handled within the academic tradition"* (ibid, p. 33).

Unfortunately, the transition is proving to be a very extended one and it is precisely aspects of 'the academic tradition' as embedded in customary practice and institutional structures that have been held up by many researchers and scholars as a cause of continuing difficulty in achieving equity objectives (Tokarczyk and Fay, 1993; Brooks, 1997; Burton, 1997; Woodrow, 1996). Academia, as perceived by critics, is characterised

as traditionally elitist, male and patriarchal in its culture, values and structures (Caplan, 1994). Men, it is claimed, are encouraged by their professors, women not (Hawkins and Schulz, 1998). The valued tradition of collegial decision-making, it has been claimed, can actually inhibit equity, causing senior administrators to hold back from enforcement (Burton, 1997).

The barriers in the eyes of some critics, are compounded by other factors than gender: *“Academia, too, has a class structure: its hierarchy of professors, assistant professors, and part-timers is not solely a ladder based on merit, but a track based on a number of gender, racial/ethnic, and socio-economic factors. The degradation many working-class women experience in academia replicates that of the larger classed society”* (Fay and Tokarczyk, 1993, p. 5).

The striking image of the ‘glass ceiling’ has been adopted by women’s groups to explain why it is that for some people in higher education there is no great problem in career progression, whereas for others there is a continuing sense of injustice (King et al, 1993). For men, looking down, there is nothing to see; but women, striving to go forward find themselves hard up against the glass ceiling. Interlocutors from fifteen countries and four intergovernmental organisations consulted in preparing this report - whether administrators and policy makers, institutional leaders, researchers or academics - provided examples of continuing problems. There were several reported instances of the strength of tacit resistance to the implementation of equity policies; reports from national equal opportunity commissions also provide many examples of breaches of regulations and laws.

There are conflicting perceptions and points of view. On the one hand, the belief that while there may be problems, procedures are in hand to manage them and, on the other, that there are barriers still to shatter, changes to be made in the academic system itself. There are also questions to raise about categorisation. ‘Social class’ for example must be defined with reference not merely to patterns of income distribution and their traditional occupational correlates, but to the changing composition of society (the shift towards service occupations, family incomes, migration, age profiles, etc) and indeed to the role of education as itself a nominator of social class (Bourdieu, 1974; Aamodt, 1999). Comparisons over time of rates of participation may not be of like with like.

The issues are complex and warrant careful elucidation. The desire to open up admission procedures must be tempered by a realistic appraisal of student capabilities and the readiness and capacity of institutions to provide suitable study environments. Very high dropout rates in some European countries where access is open are scarcely equity-positive. It is arguable, of course, that still the most effective ‘strategy’ for achieving equity objectives is expansion, the wave effect that carries all before it (Taylor, 1999). Certainly expansion has broadened opportunities, but these opportunities for higher education are still unequally distributed, even on the strictest interpretation of the traditional merit principle. Indeed a large part of the rationale for a major international study, by the Council of Europe, is precisely *“a concern that this expansion has not fully met the hope placed in it for greater equity between all potential students and for the inclusion of those belonging to social groups historically disadvantaged in respect of access to education”* (Council of Europe, 1999a, p. 2).

The Council of Europe and other sources do not confine the concerns about exclusion to certain social groups. In access to higher education institutions, lower socio-economic groups, however defined, are indeed under-represented; but women, too, having succeeded in gaining access as students and progressing well, including employment in academic institutions, have not had the success they seek and expect in climbing the

career ladder. In France, for example, the President of the Academy of Sciences (herself a woman) has stated that *“less than 10% of university professors in scientific departments or Class 1 Research Directors at the CNRS (National Centre for Scientific Research) are women. At the Academy of Science, there are only four women among the 130 members, and this institution is more open than its four sister Academies within the Institute of France, which only counts two women”* (Grunberg-Manago, 1995, p.xiv). Since women are now enrolling in many academic subjects at higher levels than men, the need is for women to accept the challenge of *“stepping out of the shadows to take over leadership responsibilities, and believe in their future”* (op.cit. p.xv).

These are not the only unfulfilled goals. There are significant barriers facing various categories of students with a disability; some ethnic minorities are very poorly represented either as students or staff; financing arrangements often confer unequal benefits or impose hardships in inequitable ways; and higher education – universities in particular – still tends to advance those already more socially, culturally and economically favoured. Prejudice and discrimination are reported in relation to sexual orientation; adolescent boys are an emerging equity category not yet fully recognised, and so on. These are generalisations, they have different force, impact and significance across and within different societies but they present a generally valid picture of unequal representation and participation across a wide spectrum of countries.

The challenge is real, but policy responses are not straightforward. There are cultural and social norms at stake, political interests and active pressure groups at work pursuing diverse ends. To be equitable, education policies and practices need to satisfy a very wide and varied set of criteria and they require to be negotiated, tradeoffs included. Moreover, they are not, of course, the only relevant criteria. Higher education must satisfy scholarly standards of excellence or quality, be financially sound and accountable, connect with major developmental needs in the economy and society, meet a variety of community and family expectations, contribute positively to the advancement of knowledge and the education of the professions, and so on.

What is not at issue, however, is the obligation, both legal and moral, that increasingly falls upon higher education institutions to demonstrate that equity features prominently and consistently in their stated policies and their practical actions.

Significant progress, like the increase in women’s participation in undergraduate education which now, in a number of countries, exceeds men’s, is welcomed as is the steady increase in women’s employment in academic positions once the exclusive preserve of males. But such changes have not been sufficient for policy makers and many members of the academic community who seek more evidence of progress in achieving goals.

Not only have explicit goals and targets not been met (or even set) in several areas, but the concept of equity has often been defined too narrowly. An obvious example is the widespread acceptance of the principle of applying the same access rules to everyone. This, on the face of it, seems equitable, but in practice it has not assisted in improving access for some poorly represented groups. Awareness of this led to what has been criticised in a Council of Europe study as a *‘symbolic model of equal opportunity’* (Woodrow, 1996, p.7). In this model, while limited numbers of students from underrepresented or ‘non-traditional’ groups have been admitted under special arrangements, the basic fabric of the rules of admission remains intact. What is perhaps more important, it is now recognised that the special arrangements, commendable in themselves, need to be part of a much broader strategy which treats ‘access’ as but one step or stage in a policy process that should start in the early years of schooling, since it is schooling that, unless reformed, reinforces unequal opportunity (see chapter 5 below). Where interpretation does not extend quite as far as this, it does embrace considerably more than ‘entry’ or ‘participation’.

In the Council of Europe project on Access to Higher Education in Europe, access was defined as:

- *greater participation in higher education of good quality;*
- *the extension of participation to include currently under-represented groups;*
- *a recognition that participation extends beyond entry to successful completion.*

(Woodrow, 1996, p. 7).

There is a growing realisation that further critical analysis and more substantial measures including closer monitoring and detailed reporting are required to achieve equity goals for both students and staff. In the area of disability, there is, as a result of persistent effort, a much better understanding than in the past of the often subtle barriers that stand in the way (Hurst, ed, 1998). Regarding women's employment in universities, several decades of experience with programmes of equal employment opportunity have resulted in a much deeper understanding than hitherto of the cultural and organisational boundaries or barriers (including academic women's self concepts and modes of action), that may militate against employment equity, reinforcing discriminatory practices and beliefs. 'Equity' needs to be further elaborated, its frame of reference extended, from specific procedures relating to fair practice in employment or study opportunities, to include the fundamental norms, values, ethos and way of life of academic institutions. Such extension can be quite problematic and is often contested, covertly if not explicitly (Burton et al, 1997).

From time to time, governments are alerted to the need for rather more strenuous measures than have flowed from equal opportunity legislation, or they are urged to take a more forceful approach to developing the implications of legislation and giving greater impetus to equity goals in higher education. As the Council of Europe recognised, the legislative approach is itself an important step in advancing equity in higher education, but not sufficient (Council of Europe, 1999b). Financial obstacles can of course be a considerable barrier, even in regimes where tuition fees are low or non-existent. Costs for supporting non-traditional students, for example, are often high both for institutions and the individuals and these can be critical when they reinforce other socio-economic factors (Hogarth et al, 1997). Tuition fees, even in schemes which are specifically designed to greatly alleviate hardship, may have a negative, discriminatory impact on enrolments (Anderson et al, 1999). Targeted initiative schemes can be highly beneficial at the tertiary level, particularly in support of labour market policies (e.g. increasing the numbers of trained computing or health specialists), but their equity significance may be in question and is in any case lessened if incentives and support for study from an early age are insufficient.

The significance of equity for governments is increased, rather than diminished by considerations, high in the current policy agenda, like quality, efficiency and human capital investment. In Australia, a country which already had in place a strong legislative and regulatory structure for overall equity purposes in society and a very strong commitment to strengthening the economic outcomes of higher education, the federal government in 1990 produced a far-sighted report (Department of Employment, Education and Training, Australia, 1990) which set a range of equity targets, and indicated procedures for meeting them. These included increased enrolment by under-represented groups in engineering, business studies, economics, science and in higher degrees; also proposed were bridging courses in mathematics and science, review and development of curricula, and more flexible course arrangements.

A key component of the current Australian approach is the use of incentives - a sum of approximately \$A 5.5 million is available annually to universities according to their attainment of agreed equity objectives which are set out as indicators for participation, academic success and retention, with a comparison made of

success and retention between an institution's performance and national benchmarks (Department of Employment, Education and Training, Australia, 1998; Karmel, 1999). This is monitored annually for each publicly funded university (considered in greater detail in chapter 5 below and in Appendix 2). These highly interventionist equity strategies run in close parallel with a policy agenda where the economic benefits and employment consequences of higher education are given high priority, and there is a continuing drive to raise overall quality.

The Australian initiatives reflect what is internationally regarded as one of the most advanced equity programmes in higher education (Wimberley, 1999). This does not mean that all equity issues have been resolved; on the contrary, research reports indicate continuing difficulties, for example for some ethnic minorities and the indigenous Australians, women in some subject areas and levels of appointment and so on. In Australia, as in other countries, policy- and decision-makers, whether at the systemic or institutional level, are likely to need in future to develop more comprehensive strategies which are at the same time subtle and responsive to a variety of viewpoints, to accord with a broad, inclusive concept of equity. This will be challenging; at times it could be controversial. Particular attention will continue to be required to implementation and follow-through. Students' perceptions of barriers are an important data source for policy makers. They cover a wide spectrum of concerns and difficulties, from the culturally loaded expectations of secondary school teachers, to the adequacy of grants, to weaknesses in information - and others (Lynch and O'Riordan, 1998).

A single institution will be responsible for only part of what might be termed a generic or developmental strategy for equity in higher education, and individual public agencies and government departments will have only partial policy responsibility. Nevertheless, there is an accumulating body of research findings and experiential evidence that supports the need for a more systemic approach in which the roles and responsibilities of various elements and agencies are brought together, into more coherent, co-ordinated policy initiatives.

Despite the many improvements that have been made and the wide range of policy instruments that have been deployed, there remains a formidable array of barriers. They are summarised in Boxes 3, 4 and 5:

**Box 3 – Summary of Barriers to Student Access and Progression**

- *Characteristics of primary and secondary schooling which favour academic advancement of some groups of students but not others; high dropout and failure rates at secondary school level; lack of transparency in educational provision, of guidance and orientation, and of suitable ways of recording, acknowledging and enhancing achievement and progression for students with learning difficulties or 'school resistance';*
- *Socio-economic – financial and cultural factors in family and community; growing income disparities and 'poverty pools'; unequal cultural capital across social groups; inadequate forms of liaison and communication;*
- *Geographic factors that militate against knowledge of availability of programmes and ready participation in them;*
- *Financial constraints on family and prospective/ actual students; inadequate incentives to continue studying;*
- *Difficulties facing public authorities and institutions in meeting additional costs for equity purposes in era of declining per capita budgets;*
- *Legislative gaps; weak policy approaches including procedures for monitoring, evaluation and follow-up; inadequate research-based knowledge of 'what works';*
- *Rigid application of merit principle and one-sided pursuit of narrow concept of excellence in education including particularist concepts of 'the idea of a university';*
- *Weaknesses in teacher preparation, supervision and professional development;*
- *Amongst staff in higher education, a continuing prejudice towards, lack of understanding and willingness or ability to provide support for, the study needs of particular disadvantaged groups;*
- *Community hostility to consequences of affirmative action, e.g. quotas, heavy subsidies;*
- *Poor data on performance and inadequate procedures for identifying 'at risk' students;*
- *Bafflement over/ lack of clear research findings about and understanding of why policy measures have not worked, notably in seeking to improve the ratio of low socio-economic groups in upper secondary and higher education.*

**Box 4 – Summary of Barriers to Staff Recruitment and Career Advancement**

- *Cultural assumptions, values, institutional structures and procedures favouring traditional patterns of staff recruitment and advancement;*
- *Lack of knowledge by potential and actual staff of opportunities for careers in higher education;*
- *Over zealous and confrontationist prosecution of affirmative action programmes;*
- *Lack of or failure by individuals from under-represented groups to participate in support structures, networks etc. that assist in developing knowledge of opportunities, self esteem and confidence.*
- *Difficulties, especially for women, of multiple socio-cultural-personal role expectations and requirements;*
- *Tacit or explicit discrimination against candidates with a disability, members of particular ethnic and minority groups, etc;*
- *Weak or non-existent policies, structures and procedures designed to overcome inequities in all aspects of staffing at the institutional level;*
- *Inadequate system-wide policy frameworks including inadequacies in incentives and sanctions;*
- *Lack of institutional policies and procedures focused on career advancement.*

**Box 5 – Other Barriers to Staff and Student Advancement**

- *Displacement or dilution of the equity agenda by other policy preoccupations e.g. quality bench-marking, economic performance, globalisation and internationalism;*
- *Deja-vu: a sense that much having been achieved, equity issues are being over-emphasised;*
- *Ignorance, lack of information about both deficiencies in the present situation and opportunities for improvement;*
- *Macro-features or changes in society which militate against the pursuit of equity as a major objective. (A most interesting example, in some central and east European countries, is the association of equity in the minds of politicians and in society more generally, with the now discredited communist ideology (Cerych, 1999));*
- *Financial difficulties and resource allocation procedures.*

We take up many of these problems and barriers in greater detail in the following chapter and address ways of overcoming them in chapter 5.



*Democracy means paying attention.*  
Robert Bellah, 1991.

In the previous chapters concerns about overall directions and rates of progress in and barriers to achieving equity goals for students and staff were discussed. It is time to identify specific groups and in charting more precisely directions of change, to examine the main barriers, group by group. We will then consider ways in which they are being or might be more effectively addressed.

This chapter addresses the five main equity groups which have been the subject of considerable attention in the policy arena and research literature in many countries in recent decades: low socio-economic status; women and girls; mature age and part-time students; ethnic and other minority groups; persons with a disability. These are not the only under-represented groups in higher education, nor the only groups subject to discrimination in society – for example members of the gay and lesbian communities, members of rural and isolated communities. Also, relevant equity categories may well shift over time as targets for some groups are achieved or nearly so, and as new categories become relevant (for example mounting concern in some countries with poor achievement in secondary schools by adolescent boys). A further point is that it is not uncommon for individuals to belong to two or more equity categories at the same time, thus compounding disadvantage. There are good reasons, in this changing situation, for improving data and information flows and for maintaining observatories on trends. No country, for example, in the survey carried out by the OECD in its study of the first years of tertiary education, maintains good system-wide records on the numbers and kinds of students who fail or drop-out of study (OECD, 1998a).

#### 4.1 Low socio-economic status

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Granting a degree of uncertainty in defining and enumerating membership of the category as mentioned in the previous chapter, under-representation of **low socio-economic status groups** is a continuing problem. A picture similar to that presented by the *Direction de la Programmation et du Développement* of the French Ministry of National Education, Research and Technology (1998) is common across the OECD membership: students enrolled at universities and the elite *Grandes Ecoles* come disproportionately from the upper socio-economic groups, senior civil servants and managers in industry, the teaching profession (whose members understand selection processes) or middle range professions; they tend to be over-represented in programmes of study which are of longer duration and higher prestige.

Socio-economic factors affecting educational access and progression have been a policy preoccupation in OECD member countries for decades. In the concern over educational equity arising from the international democratisation movements of the 1960's, there were several strands. In the post war period, and into the 1970's, a major concern was the under-representation of low socio-economic groups in higher education (Robbins, 1963; Anderson, 1990; Halsey, 1993). The economic rebuilding of Europe under the Marshall Plan extended to embrace social reconstruction, with a prominent role for policies aimed at reducing inequality of opportunity. In the USA, there was a revival of the 1920's and 1930's movements to redress social and economic deprivation, strongly reinforced by the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's (Jencks et al, 1972; Hout et al, 1993; Papadopoulos, 1994; Fischer et al, 1996; Teichler, 1999;).

Rates of attrition from formal schooling and low standards of attainment in secondary school examinations have been the subject of decades of research, advocacy and policy initiatives. What must be borne in mind, however, is that while there was a common concern over under-representation of low socio-economic groups across OECD countries, there were significant variations according to local circumstances. In Belgium, for example, economically and socially disadvantaged students were the target of policy initiatives, but, equally, so were girls. In practice, regional disparities were marked and this, as in some other countries, led to regionalisation of institutional provision with an emphasis on first cycle (short) programmes. Region and socio-economic status in this instance were to an extent overlapping categories. Despite multiple policies in Flanders, including financial support, the less well-off groups have continued to be (relatively) disadvantaged (Hostens et al, 1999). Much of the critical literature has been directed at schools' response to socio-cultural factors influencing student performance, and the class bias of schooling ( Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Bernstein, 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Kivinen and Rinne, 1995).

Both national governments and international bodies in the immediate post World War decades gave a prominent place to socio-economic factors in policy making and analysis (Papadopoulos, 1994) While this has continued, the oil shocks of the 1970's, recession and then the international drive towards liberalisation of markets, the rapid development of new communication and information technologies, economic globalisation and persistent high unemployment levels especially among youth have given rise to other policy preoccupations. The educational agenda has become very crowded, public funding is subject to heavy constraints and the needs of those whom opportunity appeared to pass by have come into competition with many other concerns.

These considerations on the one hand, and the deeply embedded, complex structural factors in society on the other must largely explain the apparent inability of countries to make significant progress in increasing the proportion of people from low socio-economic groups in higher education (Coleman, 1990). However, the issue is not as straightforward as it might seem at first glance. First, it would be a mistake to assume that the category 'low socio-economic' is static, as already mentioned. Note should also be taken of the hopeful trend of inter-generational changes in relative incomes – a function of increased participation rates in upper secondary and higher education. A second, related point is that, while the proportion of students from the lowest socio-economic categories are not in general improving, the overall numbers are, as a consequence of the great increase in numbers of students enrolled (OECD, 1998a; Taylor, 1999). Third, there is need for considerable caution in interpreting figures – not all countries or institutions record socio-economic status and those that do use different definitions and procedures.

Allowing for all this, and drawing on Eurostat and OECD data, Green et al state categorically that: *"A constant factor in all Member States [of the European Union] for which data are available, is that while absolute participation rates may have increased for all socio-economic levels, the relative rates have barely changed. The likelihood of attending a university or pursuing tertiary studies remains far higher for those from higher socio-economic levels"* (Green et al, 199., p. 204). This concern has provided a basis for significant current equity policies at least in some countries (Ramsay et al, 1990). In most countries inequalities feature in relations between socio-economic groups (Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993). Despite continuing economic support to underprivileged groups, the development towards equal access is believed to be stagnating. Aamodt (1999) thinks this has more to do with 'cultural capital' (to use Bourdieu's term) than with 'economy in a narrow sense'.

That there is need to strengthen equity policies is evident, although just how best to do so is a moot point. In the responses to the E.C. **Memorandum on Higher Education**, every country and several representative organisations agreed the need to do more in improving access opportunities. It was accepted, as stated in the **Memorandum**, that “*increasing participation is a necessary consequence of realising the stated aim of ‘achieving equality of opportunity for access to all forms of education’*” (Commission of the European Communities, 1993, p.16). Similar conclusions have been reached by the Council of Europe, OECD and UNESCO. Schooling can serve both as a conduit and a barrier: increasing enrolment rates and diversified routes provide a conduit but, at the same time, can act as a barrier for some families and students.

Important data sets from Germany, a country which after World War 2 set itself firmly on a path of democratic reconstruction, are worth examining in some detail. Extending over nearly half a century and systematically analysed and interpreted in the context of the structure of the educational system, they provide valuable insights into structural and other impediments.

The *differentiated secondary school system* is seen to present a series of four thresholds for students gaining access to higher education in Germany: the first is the transition from a common primary school to one of three secondary school systems, only one of which (*Gymnasium*) provides a standard route to higher education. Transitions within the secondary school and qualifications for higher education further whittle down the pool of students whose qualifications will enable them to enter higher education. The most recent study of university student life in Germany shows that, in 1996, of 100 children from the ‘lower social background group’ (based on a combination of parental occupational position and educational qualification), 33 reached the upper secondary school, but only 8 managed to pass the fourth threshold into higher education. By contrast, figures for the ‘upper social background group’ show 84 at upper secondary school and 72 entering higher education. The survey notes that:

*The fact that 33% of the children from the lower background group after all prove to be suitable for attending upper secondary school evidences the substantial potential which is to be found in the lower social background group, but also shows that this potential remains largely untapped on account of the socially-specific effect of the threshold to higher education access. It may be assumed for this part of the lower social background group, at least, that the socio-political instruments of mobilisation and support are insufficiently developed. (Schnitzer et al, 1999, p. 9)*

This survey, the fifteenth in a series which began in 1951, also observes that its findings “*reveal that the objective of achieving equal opportunity of access to higher education study, regardless of parental income and educational tradition, continues to be unfulfilled*” (Schnitzer et al, 1999, Preface).

While well constructed alternative (second chance) routes to higher education do exist in Germany, they currently service only small numbers. The German experience is particularly stark on account of the institutional differentiation, but its story speaks to the broader experience, that the disappointing number of students in higher education from lower SES groups has its origins in a complex of structures, decisions and orientations throughout the primary and secondary school years. It is for this reason that higher education equity policies must be part of a broader equity strategy, as outlined in chapter 5.

Cost is frequently adduced as a factor which inhibits less well-off students from proceeding with study. But to minimise costs of study is not necessarily to overcome barriers to access. In Germany, for example, once students are in higher education, all German universities and *Fachhochschulen* have, since the 1960s, been free of charge, although some other post-secondary institutions charge substantial fees. Federal law

which has established a system of student loans and grants, is bolstered by a civil law obligation on parents to support their children during the time they spend in any form of schooling or training unless the children are able to support themselves. A major current political issue in Germany is tuition fees for universities and *Fachhochschulen*. Yet, the German experience indicates that however beneficial (if nevertheless regressive in the eyes of its economist critics) a free tuition regime may be, unless much better opportunities exist at the school level, higher education will remain socially selective.

Efforts to improve access in Germany have at times run counter to a strongly entrenched academic tradition. In a personal communication, Ingeborg Berggreen-Merkel notes political factors in Germany underlying policy responses to the under-representation issue: *“Keeping up the academic standards of schools and higher education institutions vs open access and equity – this seemed to have been the political question in the past decades in Germany”* (Berggreen-Merkel, 1999). However, the trend is upwards, assisted by the diversification of higher education with universities striving to maintain their distinctive academic role. In Bavaria, when numbers of young people in the 18 – 22 age group were decreasing due to demographic factors, the number of those qualifying for entry into higher education increased as a proportion of that age group. Thus, demand both social and individual has remained strong.

Upward enrolment trends, common across the OECD countries (OECD/CERI, 1998a) must ultimately bring about greater representation of low socio-economic groups. As this happens, policy interest will be more sharply focused on the barriers lower down in the school system and on the performance of institutions in relation to student progression and career advancement. In Germany as elsewhere, controversies still centre around the most appropriate ways to enhance opportunity for access - whether to retain the traditional stratified systems of secondary schooling or opt for comprehensive schools; fees in higher education (‘free or fee’); support schemes for the financially needy; affirmative action and so on. However, there has been relatively little change to the basic premise, that there continues to be a social class bias in the academic structures (*Gymnasium*) and procedures (*Abitur*) leading to university entry.

The picture of under-representation seems to be consistent across countries regardless of educational structures and vigorous policy initiatives. As noted above, in Belgium (Flanders), economically and socially disadvantaged groups, especially youths from working class families, continue to be seriously under-represented (Hostens et al, 1999). In Denmark, despite a strong egalitarian tradition, and the government’s access and equity policies, the share of higher education students with a working class background has not changed in 40 years (Nexelmann, 1999).

As mentioned above, finance continues to be an issue in the debate over participation levels by low SES groups. In the US, the year-by-year rise in tuition fees has pushed students of low SES disproportionately into two year community colleges. Recent research in Australia suggests that a policy enabling universities to derive more income from fees (for non-research, professional postgraduate courses) and from employed people (who can afford them) has, as an unintended consequence, meant that a number of academically qualified people who cannot afford the fees are unable to enrol, thereby effectively debarring them from entry into certain professions (Anderson et al, forthcoming).

Historically in Australia, as in other countries, access to higher education remains low for low SES groups, particular for those over 25 years of age. Yet Australian governments have for long encouraged and provided opportunities for part-time study, distance education and mature age entry, in part for equity purposes and there now exists a strong, comprehensive equity policy framework in higher education (see Appendix 2). For the low SES group (defined as the lowest 25% of the population of a given region), overall access to Australian universities stands at 14.5% (1997), but with considerable variation by institution (from a low of 5.4% to a high of 40%). Once enrolled, however, the success and retention of this group closely resembles the rest of the student body. Low SES students are over-represented in agriculture, education, engineering and nursing, and under-represented in the higher status fields of law, architecture, dentistry and medicine. They are also underrepresented in higher degree work, and overrepresented in sub-degree and enabling courses. Although the total number of students in Australian higher education rose between 1991 – 97, the proportion of students from a low SES background declined slightly from 15% to 14.5% over that period (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Australia, 1999). As Anderson wryly remarked following a study of historical trends, *“With ... intervention in higher education and all the changes in Australian society and education since 1945 – migration, enormous growth in the provision for education, population shifts to cities where there is easier access to university, the shift from a resource-based to an industrial economy – a more socially representative body of school leavers might have been expected in higher education. It is hard to find the evidence.”* (Anderson, 1990, p. 42)

Dooney has noted the slow rate of increase in the number of disadvantaged secondary school students coming through to higher education from various link schemes in Ireland (Higher Education Authority, 1998, App. 2). The issue is not simply access to higher education, but differential opportunities associated with particular programmes and institutions. In Japan, while the distribution of participation rates across income classes has become more equal, *“admission to selective institutions has become a focal point in distributing social opportunities”* (Kaneko, 1997, p.179). Kaneko makes the interesting suggestion that the greater equality in overall access that has been achieved (reflecting increasing demand), has raised admission standards even at less selective institutions. ‘Academically marginal’ males from high income classes may be losing ground to males from lower income classes especially in rural areas and to females. This observation neatly underlines the interplay of multiple factors in shaping distribution patterns. In a mixed public-private system such as Japan, and where demographic trends are downward, there should not be a great problem for those well-off males, although they may not get to the institution of their choice.

In the international research literature, socio-economic conditions affecting student access to higher education have been a strong concern for several decades, greater in some countries than others, muted at times, but persistent. Research and policy measures have centred on: **the disparity of opportunity among social classes, with a recurring emphasis on low socio-economic status family background, the concept of cultural as well as economic capital, rural areas and economically disadvantaged regions or areas, and the interactions among these factors**. Sometimes, attention has focused on the ‘second chance’ principle, i.e. increasing opportunities for mature age students but this is quite variable across national higher education systems. But, access once gained, not all problems are solved. As Sowinska (1993, p.155) remarks, *“Much of what students from middle – or upper – class backgrounds take for granted or expect to be part of college life is quite outside the experience of those of us who were the first in our families to attend college”*.

In a paper for OECD, Halsey (1992) drew similar conclusions to Anderson for student attainment in the U.K.: *“For social classes the general tendency for inequality of educational attainment to persist in relative terms is well documented ... In the post-Robbins period there is little evidence of advances towards less inequality”*. Halsey has been among a group of social scientists, internationally, who have studied the phenomenon of disproportionate representation in higher education of manual working class students. What is more, in Hirsch’s terminology, education is a ‘positional good’ (Hirsch, 1975). Massive quantitative growth notwithstanding, education was and is an arena of competitive struggle for desirable jobs, sustaining and strengthening income differentials, and leading to implicit and explicit ranking of institutions and programmes. The struggle, its outcomes and the ranking are conditioned by socio-economic class considerations.

Anderson described a situation which in his words *“is universal ...in ... countries of the West and in the former socialist countries, universities are inhabited in disproportionate numbers by children of the educated, the wealthy and the powerful”* (Anderson, 1990, p. 46). The former communist countries, with their proclaimed egalitarianism, provide yet another example of the problem. A series of studies of the East and Central European socialist countries conducted by Dutch researchers documents the intergenerational transmission of inequalities – a counterbalance to the argument already referred to, that participation in higher education can effect a shift in the social balance. The Dutch studies have been carried out in the conceptual framework of ‘New Class’ theories which aim to show how political resources (party membership) displace traditional resource distribution (owners vs non-owners) (Djilas, 1983; Nieuwbeerta, G. and Ganzeboom, H.B.G. (eds), 1998). Significantly, university participation rates in the former East Germany were, at the time of unification, much lower than in the former West Germany. It seems that Gramsci’s hope of a new intellectual class, with an advanced technical education, fostering a new social organisation of knowledge rooted in the world of production, was progressively displaced by an apparatus favouring political elites and their families. Alike in East and West, despite the very great differences, was a situation favouring the more socially, economically and culturally powerful groups.

Returning to the Anderson study, one bright light he detected in the Australian environment is the great expansion of enrolments by mature age students (evening classes; distance education). There is a ‘modest correlation’ in the student population between greater age and low socio-economic status. Distance education, wherever it has been seriously promoted, has as one of its platforms increased opportunities for mature age entry to higher education including those who lack formal qualifications and from lower socio economic groups. In practice, however, distance education institutions generally attract fewer second chance students and more who are upgrading or extending qualifications already gained, as discussed further below. Distance education and mature age study in universities are still to take hold in many countries.

Both in the processes leading to selection for entry and in the high degree of screening out in the initial year of study (for example in the French *diplome d’etudes universitaires generales – DEUG*) students from working class backgrounds tend to lose out (Kallen, 1992). The more inclusive and diverse system of higher education in the United States has shown similar effects in that less advantaged social groups tend to be disproportionately represented in less prestigious institutions.

In a report on access in Spain, Masa (1997) draws on human capital theory to argue that families there with higher educational levels are more likely to invest in higher education, reflecting their understanding of the advantages and returns. Family education levels correlate with occupational categories, thus families whose main householders are unskilled industrial or agricultural workers are under-represented in higher education. As in other countries for which research findings are available on factors entering into higher education access rates, family education is highly important in Spain in the decision to enter higher education.

The enduring, pervasive nature of the problem of under-representation of lower socio-economic groups in higher education is presented starkly in a recent research review carried out for the Dearing Committee on Higher Education in the U.K. Even though there has been substantial growth of numbers, and *'a greater diversity of provision than would have been imaginable at the time of the Robbins Report ... the social composition of higher education in the U.K. continues to reflect the advantages which accrue to people from higher socio-economic groups by reason of wealth, culture and prior educational success. For these social groups, entry to higher education has become an expectation and a 'natural' preparation for entry to positions of relative advantage in the labour market'* (Robertson and Hilman, 1997, Foreword). There has even been a relative decline, as in Australia in that representation from lower socio-economic groups has not kept pace with that from higher groups. These authors, in common with many other researchers, find the basic cause in the underlying social and cultural conditions which are stronger than the many educational policy interventions supporting greater equity. This should be of concern since the public cost of higher education is considerable and private rates of return are significant. Disproportionate representation highlights the issue of the equitable distribution of social resources and opportunities in a democracy.

But Robertson cautions against mono-causal explanations and notes the impoverished nature of much of the data on the socio-economic profile of higher education students. For example, there is very little system-wide knowledge about part-time and mature age students. These caveats notwithstanding, the Dearing research confirms the widely held view in the equity literature that access is distorted, favouring those who enjoy relative advantage: *'to him (and her) that hath.'* Even contributions made by the (former) polytechnics, for example in improving access in working class areas of large cities, have not significantly influenced national patterns of under-representation. What is true of the U.K. seems to be true also across a wide spectrum of countries including those which, over many years, have adopted and striven to implement comprehensive equity policies in higher education.

### Box 6 - An Unchanging Balance

*Expansion and diversification have indeed increased numbers in all socio-economic categories but overall the balance remains much the same even in those countries that have tried very hard, through government intervention, to create a more equal society. The very quest for greater social equality may now be in jeopardy as income differentials increase. A question inevitably arises, therefore, about the credibility and effectiveness of measures taken in many countries and sometimes over several decades in the educational drive for equity in social class terms. Powerful forces in the wider socio-economic setting must be more directly addressed if educational policies are to have the desired effect. What is true of education seems to be true also of other 'welfare' fields including health and social services, that resources made available to the underprivileged are also taken up by the middle classes, leaving the relativities unaffected.*

The socio-economic issue is fundamental since it goes to the heart of basic aspirations of the democratic society and the role of education in advancing the interests of all people. But its significance is all the greater in that often clustered around social class are issues to do with disparities between rural and urban areas, ethnic and minority discrimination, inadequate housing, health problems, family difficulties and others.

Single issue policies, like direct measures to improve access to higher education are clearly insufficient, although they remain necessary. If, as often declared, the educational objective has been to change the balance, to achieve greater equality of access across the spectrum of socio-economic classes, as distinct from a numerical increase as part of a general wave of expansion, the overall conclusion is that the policies have either failed or had only a quite marginal impact.

## 4.2 Women and Girls

Following hard on the heels of the 1960's movement to extend access to low socio-economic groups, although with historical roots reaching back to the nineteenth century, was the drive to increase opportunities for women and girls. From the 1960's onwards and with growing momentum internationally, is a very well-informed perception that women have been discriminated against in many different ways in higher education as in society at large. The feminist movement has played a key role in developing broad community awareness of these issues but for policy makers perhaps of greater direct interest have been, on the one hand, the legislative changes over a wide array of equity issues, including employment discrimination, and, on the other, a by now substantial body of research and interpretative literature on all aspects of women's participation in higher education, from conditions affecting undergraduate entry to the occupancy of senior administrative and academic management positions in universities.

First are the **students**, where amongst OECD countries, gender difference in educational attainment varies markedly by generation. Differences between men and women are much more pronounced among older age groups - for example, the proportion of women with only primary or lower secondary education is much greater amongst 55-64 year old women than among 25-34 year old women. There is, however, no significant difference between the proportion of men and the proportion of women in the present generation graduating from the secondary schools of OECD countries (OECD/CERI, 1998a, pp.167-9).

There have been similarly dramatic changes in gender ratios in tertiary access. In ten out of thirteen OECD countries, women are the majority of first-time university level entrants (Turkey remains a striking exception to this pattern). High upper-secondary school completion rates, particularly from general streams, which are more likely to lead to tertiary education, are seen to have stimulated this growth in women's access (OECD/CERI, 1998a). Many countries report that more than 50% of students enrolling in higher education are female, some as high as 60% (eg Denmark) (Buchter, 1999). There are, however, variations. In Ireland, for example, although in the early 1990's females outnumbered males at the Leaving Certificate stage and tended to have higher achievement levels, males were in the majority among tertiary education entrants. In part, according to Clancy (1995, 1997) this anomaly was accounted for by policies favouring growth in the technological sector. Such an explanation points up several dimensions of the issue, including the part played by supply side policies in influencing women's continuing education and career choices.

### Box 7 – Gender Tracking

*Sheer enrolment statistics do not adequately portray the reality of women's participation in higher education. By the end of the 1980's, women's enrolment in higher education in Japan exceeded men's. But 'gender tracking' remains a feature of Japanese higher education. Typically, men congregate in four year colleges, women in two year junior colleges and in particular courses deemed to be appropriate for women. General education for women was predicated on the notion of good wife/good mother, 'aimed not at internalising universal values, but rather at obtaining knowledge and attitudes pertinent to the gender role assigned to women'(Amano, 1997). Hence a concentration in home sciences, humanities, child care, health and welfare, school teaching, etc.*



Significant gender differences across the OECD membership exist in the programmes studied at university, with women more likely to enrol in fields related to the health professions, education and the social and behavioural sciences, and less in the natural sciences and industrial and engineering fields (OECD/CERI, 1997). By contrast, in some Arab countries, e.g. Libya, women are in a majority in engineering courses – but fail to gain appropriate professional employment on graduation. Time series data for the years 1990 – 1996, for each of the five OECD countries in which such data are collected, indicate that there has been an increase in the enrolment of women in first degree tertiary education programmes in each of the sciences, engineering and business. But there is still a long way to go.

Concerning graduation, among those OECD countries providing relevant data, more women than men achieve university level qualifications in the humanities and medical sciences; fewer in mathematics, computer science, engineering and architecture; and about the same in law, business and the natural sciences. Engineering and architecture are also uncommon areas for women at the non-university tertiary level (OECD/CERI, 1997).

Attention amongst policy makers has now shifted to what women study, and the level at which they study. This can be regarded as an indicator of the success of what might be termed first stage policies, aimed at increasing female access both numerically and proportionately. Gender differences tend to be higher in advanced tertiary programmes, with men forming the majority among those enrolled in second or higher degree programmes in four out of five countries (most starkly, amongst OECD countries, in the Czech Republic and Korea with less than one third of second stage university students being women).

In Flanders, there is an imbalance between, civil engineering and other technological fields (male dominated) and language and general medicine (females). At the doctoral level, in common with other countries, males tend to predominate (Hostens et al, 1999). The key, according to the Flemish authorities, is choice of study programme in secondary education and even lower down in the primary and pre-school systems, where stereotyping in school, family and community continue, often in subtle ways. As we saw in the case of low SES students, women have tended to be broadly concentrated in lower status studies (particularly certain ‘female’ fields) and not at higher degree level. Recent policy has focused on encouraging women into ‘non-traditional’ studies (with some, usually modest, reciprocal effort to attract men to ‘non-traditional’ areas).

Such policies can be influenced not only by equity considerations but by labour market demands for specialised expertise which may not be adequately met under a *laissez-faire* approach. In the opinion of many commentators, firm target-setting needs to be set in a context of free choice: *“all students, irrespective of gender [should] have a choice of field of study in higher education, which is only limited by ability and inclinations, and not stereotyped views and institutional constraints”* (Watts, 1997, p.60). The official French government policy is clear: *‘L’article 14 de la Loi d’Orientation dit que tout étudiant titulaire du Baccalauréat a droit a une place dans l’enseignement supérieur, dans la filière de son choix’* (Halimi, 1999) [Article 14 of the law on guidance says that any student who has a *baccalauréat* has the right to a higher education place, in the course of his/ her choice]. This policy in practice is affected by opportunities at the *bac* stage - which have been greatly widened – and the ability and readiness of institutions to meet student demand for specific programmes of their choice. The relationship between ‘free choice’ and ‘equity targets’ is not straightforward and policies increasingly seek to ‘shepherd’ women into traditional male courses of study.

Some countries are much more interventionist than others in this regard. By 1997, earlier Australian targets of 40% female enrolment in agriculture, architecture, business/ economics and science, and 15% in engineering had been largely met, and federal authorities suggested universities proceed to set specific targets, such as – within science – more females into computer science (currently at 18%) (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Australia, 1999). Once women have gained access to non-traditional areas, their success and retention rates are high.

Over the 1990s, Australian women's participation in higher degrees – both by coursework and by research – has risen significantly, and is close to parity with men (52.6% and 46.2% respectively). There have been many changes in fee liability during the past decade, and some of the gains made could be jeopardised by future changes unless the equity implications are kept to the fore. Finance is perceived as a barrier to women's participation in high fee courses, in the context where many women are, as workers or parents or both, returning to study. In the U.S.A., a country with a great variety and very large scale of provision of higher education, satisfaction with the increases in women's enrolment is warranted, but in a recent study attention is drawn to the reality of the (often uncomfortable) actual situations in which women find themselves as they embark upon or return to study (DGY Inc/ Larry Snell Perry and Associates, 1999).

Major concern has focused on gender balance in **university staff**, ranging over such issues as occupational segregation including the interplay between gender and ethnicity, the incidence of casualised, low level posts, the role of senior members of the (academic) profession in judging the intellectual output of aspirants and thereby careers (Hakim, 1979; Stiver and O'Leary, eds, 1990; Halsey, 1992; Heward et al, 1997). Women academics have an important role to perform in developing women students' *'notions of identity and autonomy'* (Dex and Dewell, 1994), but this is not easily accomplished when, as employees, they are predominantly in low status, low paid, temporary, part-time jobs (Aisenberg and Harrington, 1988; Brooks, 1997; Court, 1994; Tulle-Winton, 1994).

#### Box 8 – Staff Positions for Women

*Internationally comparable data are difficult to find, but studies on individual countries point in the same direction – women are less numerous than men in both academic and administrative positions; they are predominantly at the more junior levels, and their employment is on a less secure basis. Women disproportionately hold short term contracts, and part-time posts. When they succeed to senior positions, there is a risk that they will find themselves in stereotyped career paths – as professors of women's studies, deans of faculties where equity is a hall-mark, pro vice chancellors for foreign students, student welfare and equal opportunity – sometimes characterised as 'the outer rim of academia'. Access should mean opportunities to move into positions of power and influence (Grunberg-Manago, 1995; El Khawas, 1997).*

In Finland, and typically in many countries, despite women having been in a slight majority among university graduates since 1970, a 1996 study reported that almost 90% of professorial chairs were occupied by men. Only 2 out of 21 rectors were women in the mid 1990s. In the view of the researchers, Kivinen and Rinne (1996), *'together with the policy aiming at gender equality, the expansion of education has served to prolong and broaden women's educational paths, even though they have not always kept their promises in terms of status, pay or positions in the hierarchies of power'*. (p. 303)

By contrast with the debates over levels of participation especially by lower socio-economic groups and to some extent ethnic minorities and the disabled, the question of women's advancement has been addressed in policy moves as much for the sake of women's post study/academic careers as for their enrolment and participation in courses leading to qualifications. The explanation for this may lie in the relatively rapid erection

in many countries of a substantial and complex legal apparatus supporting equal employment opportunities. However, the apparatus itself reflects deeper social, cultural and economic change. Although the laws, regulations etc, usually apply to all areas of possible discrimination: ethnicity, socio-economic status, religion, age and so on, and in all areas of employment, the women's movement (whose academic members include specialists in higher education research), has organised itself to achieve changes in ways that no other group seems to have managed. This, at least, is the impression given in the literature, of which a large volume is devoted to research, analysis, advocacy and practical examples of steps being taken to achieve women's equity objectives in academic careers.

There is a definite sense of campaigns to be waged and victories won, in this literature. The more equitable representation of women is being sought in different ways and by different means: one Irish group has recently summarised this as "*either by confrontation or by consultative collaboration towards a change agenda*" (Sunrise Group, 1999, p. 4). Behind these – and other – strategies is a growing body of research evidence on the status of women in the academic, technological and administrative career lines in higher education. There are, moreover, the by now numerous posts and offices of equal employment opportunity that have been established in institutions and organisations, and the meetings, conferences, publications and pressure politics through which the case for equal employment opportunity is being advanced. Information and its publication, whether research-based or more anecdotal, features more strongly in the issue of women's participation than with any other under-represented group. The research findings often demonstrate a slow rate of progress, and analysts search ever deeper into cultural and structural factors within academic institutions that militate against full achievement of the goals and targets that are being pursued (Burton, 1997).

In a study drawing on the Carnegie Foundation's International Survey of the Academic Professions, Poole et al (1997) painted a picture similar to that in much of the within-country literature on academic women. Academic work is gendered: although academia sees itself as having a fundamentally meritocratic and collegial ethos, where rewards follow scholarly performance, the academic labour market is segregated and sex-stereotyped. The work undertaken by men and women academics is similar if not identical in content and working conditions and patterns have much in common. But there are important differences – in self perception, in the way roles are performed, in motivation and above all in certain subject areas in the nature of women's under-representation – (e.g. physical sciences, business, engineering (Rosser, 1995)) and over-representation (e.g. education, health studies) and in the hierarchical pecking order. Women may be present in significant numbers in universities and other higher education institutions, but they are disproportionately represented in more junior posts and in temporary or contract and part-time positions (Poole et al, 1997; Husbands, 1998).

Even the 'significant numbers' point needs to be qualified. Kogan et al (1994) in an OECD study, observed that, in most countries, women occupy less than 15% of academic positions. The number of female university teachers in Germany does not reach 5% of the total (Berggreen- Merkel, 1999) although almost half of the students are women. In only a few countries, and only recently, does the figure of women academics rise to 25 or 30% and then it is uneven across subject field. Ruijs (1993), in a study of eight European countries and Turkey, pointed to the rarity of women in senior administrative positions, although there were variations across countries.

In a number of most carefully detailed and documented studies of women in academic life, Burton has explored the impact of equal employment and anti-discrimination legislation, identifying what she considers to be intransigent factors in institutional culture and organisations. In her view, the locus of concern has shifted –

and needs to shift further - from formal compliance with equal employment opportunity laws and regulations 'to the degree to which the underlying spirit of the legislation has taken hold institutionally'. Neither the mere passage of time, nor the pipeline effect of increasing female enrolment in degrees would, in her view, remove the structural and institutional impediments to women's access to and advancement in employment in higher education. Women, for example, are disproportionately represented in positions more vulnerable to funding cuts, are poorly represented on key decision-making committees and suffer from prevailing 'habits of thought' (Burton, 1997). In her view, as in that of a number of other commentators (Dudovitz, 1984; Devlin, 1999; Levin, 1999) it is ready identification with the spirit of legislation and equity goals that is lacking. The issue is the pervasiveness of the masculinity of organisational cultures or, in the words of Dudovitz (1984) "*learning how to survive in a basically hostile environment*" (p.vii), or "*there is no second sex in academe. There is only one sex: male*" (Adams, 1984, p.135).

Such strongly worded views, characteristic of the feminist movement's determined entry into higher education from the 1960's to the 1980's, continue to be expressed, although in some recent studies writers have distanced themselves from overtly political feminism and have focused both on micro-analysis of organisational and cultural features that they find inhibiting to the advance of women in academic careers, and on the efforts women's groups are making to overcome them (Brooks, 1997; Eggins, 1997). Burton, with associates, has undertaken fine-grained analyses of the equity reports that all Australian public universities are required to make as part of annual negotiations with the Commonwealth Government for purposes of funding against agreed performance targets. One of her perhaps unexpected conclusions, is echoed in other studies, "*Collegiality tends to recreate the status quo*" (Powney, 1997, p. 60). Less collegiality or rather modified versions of it, and more managerialism are called for even if, in other respects, managerialist models are criticised for asserting corporative values and sharpening hierarchical divisions. Similarly, the increased devolution of responsibility to departments and faculties, combined with the traditions of internal autonomy at the subject level within the institution has not, in Burton's view, led to department heads and deans being held sufficiently accountable for employment equity.

These points raise more general questions about the nature of academic structures, management and decision-making and the assumptions and attitudes underlying them. Equity concerns are caught up in other aspects of institutional life, thus indicating a need to consider a balance of interests and values in forming and implementing interventionist policies.

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### 4.3 Mature age and part-time students

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The traditional pattern of university studies being 'end-on' to secondary schooling is still the most common within most OECD countries and is very conspicuous in Ireland (Clancy, 1999). However, there has been a strong growth in adult enrolment in a number of countries in recent years. In New Zealand, Sweden, Norway and Denmark, more than 20% of first time entrants are 28 years or older. By contrast, in France, Ireland and Greece, less than 5% of first time entrants are over 25 (OECD, 1997b). International comparative statistics may not tell the whole story, not least because the sponsoring and financing bodies have separate data collection systems in countries (Parry, 1997). Probably in all countries, there are categories of students who, because not formally enrolled in award bearing courses, may not be counted (Franchi, 1999, pp. 38 – 46). The University of the Third Age, for example, active in Japan, France and other countries, provides significant (if under-researched) opportunities for mature age students who, because not enrolled in formal, assessable courses are usually uncounted even though they may be studying within higher education institutions and using

their facilities. Statistics do not always take account of what may be large volume enrolment in professional enhancement programmes which universities increasingly conduct in partnership with industry, government departments and professional bodies; data on private providers are often lacking. More and better data collection and evaluative research are badly needed if mature age participation in higher education or access to its facilities is to be well understood.

There is a spread between countries of the so-called 'traditional' entry age because of variations in length of secondary schooling and the practice of 'stop-out' between school and university or college. This is very evident in the Scandinavian countries, for example where a combination of age of completion of secondary education, deferred entry and prolonged periods of study, punctuated by 'stop-out', means that it is common for adults to be in their late 20s or older before completion of initial tertiary qualifications (OECD/CERI, 1998b). Mature age entry, however, usually refers not to these circumstances but to those where, after a prolonged absence from the formal education system, students embark as adults on tertiary level studies, often through special entry schemes, with access and bridging courses, recognition of work experience and so on.

The prevalence in many continental European countries of extensive vocational education and apprenticeships has been seen as reducing the perceived need to enrol in formal tertiary-level studies at a later date, as mature age students. Current policies fostering lifelong learning are likely, however, to modify such perceptions (OECD/CERI, 1998b, ch. 1). In Norway, Denmark, New Zealand, United Kingdom and Canada, there are significant new enrolments of students of all age categories over 30, whereas in the United States, those who are 40 years and over stand as a noticeable new entry group. Mature age students in some countries cannot be regarded as an incidental element in enrolment statistics. In the U.K., for example, by 1990 there were more mature age students (defined as of older age than the norm, i.e. first degree and sub-degree students aged 21 or over and post graduates aged 25 and over) entering higher education than young students (Department for Education, England and Wales, 1992). Australia, too, maintains high levels of mature age enrolment thanks to a long tradition of evening courses and distance education provision.

In addition, but possibly more difficult to capture in statistics, are those students who, having gained entry at the end of secondary schooling, choose to defer planned studies for a period, or others who interrupt their studies en route to graduation. A pattern is emerging, also, of graduates returning to university for further periods of study at different times during their adult life and working career. Thus tertiary level study (including first time enrolment) has, in a significant number of countries, become a feature of the life of all age groups: an important step on the way towards achieving a lifelong learning orientation (OECD, 1996a).

Adult enrolment reflects both 'second chance' studies and upgrading of qualifications after a period of work. Sweden's policy of '25:4', which reserve tertiary education places for 25+ year olds with four years of work experience, is seen to have boosted adult enrolment from the 1980s. Also, in Sweden, as in Finland, financial conditions are favourable for adults attending higher education institutions, including no fees and grants payable for those who have been in employment or working full-time at home. This compares with a number of countries where mature age students may be at a financial disadvantage in respect of higher education costs compared with school leavers, a point made by Clancy in a recent paper on Irish adult education (Clancy, 1999).

Well developed special admissions schemes for mature students exist, for example in the United Kingdom and Australia. These countries, along with Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Germany and others, have open university programmes oriented towards older students. New Zealand has a long-standing 'open admissions' route for adults.

Although data are limited, the movement towards lifelong learning, strongly encouraged by the international education organisations (UNESCO, OECD, European Union) is, on the one hand, producing better statistics and, on the other, a great deal of renewed policy interest in adult learners. The OECD's **Education Policy Analysis 1998** gives details of national policy documents bearing on lifelong learning from eleven member countries several dating from the mid-nineties onwards and more might be cited (OECD/CERI, 1998b, pp.11-13).

Despite the limited and often misleading data on international trends in mature age participation in some form of higher education, adult education literature indicates some directions which raise questions about equity. Rinne and Kivinen (1993) cite studies which suggest that those most likely to embark on study as mature age students have successfully completed secondary education, may also have tertiary level qualifications, are established in a career and seek professional advancement. These authors conclude that adult education in common with other forms of education 'emerges as a mode of cumulative cultural capital' (p.126). Increased provision for mature age students does not of itself provide extra places for the socially and economically disadvantaged. The issue of advantages accruing to those who already have a high level of education is being recognised by policy makers: *"the accumulation of education can also promote inequality"* (Ministry of Education, Finland, 1998, p.53). Additional measures targeted at specific equity groups are needed (Gallagher et al, 1993).

Successful completion of formal schooling is a key consideration in extending opportunity for mature age learning. For those with a sound initial education, there is clearly a role for undergraduate higher education to play as part of its commitment to the lifelong learning movement (Candy, 1994). On the other hand, mature age entry to study is often supported on the principle of providing a second chance, for those who did not complete secondary schooling, to undertake tertiary studies.

Perhaps the most significant development in the 'second chance' area is the work of open or distance education providers. These include well known open universities in the U.K., U.S.A, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Netherlands, South Africa, not to mention large scale Asian providers in Thailand, India, Japan, China, and professional networks like the Norway-based International Council for Distance Education and those fostered by the Canada-based Commonwealth of Learning.

Provision of better access opportunities must be matched by appropriate study conditions. Institutions with a strong mature age profile report the need for systematic help in enabling students – especially those from less privileged backgrounds – in learning how to study at the tertiary level (Taylor, 1999). Dropout rates tend to be higher, there is need for access and sub-degree programmes, guidance and tutorial support and specialist staff. Articulation of courses across levels, procedures for credit recognition and course transfer and other flexible arrangements have slowly emerged but tend to be patchy – a weak link in the chain of educational opportunity for adults (National Board of Employment, Education and Training, 1994). The physical location of facilities is not to be overlooked: higher participation rates of mature age students in rural areas, for example, reflect patterns of campus provision or lack thereof (Dept of Education, Victoria, 1998).

#### **Box 9 – Improving Opportunities for Mature Age Students –**

*To improve opportunities for mature age students, needed developments include better procedures for recognition of prior learning and credit transfer, access courses, alternative entry arrangements, new forms of assessment to cover experiential learning, improved status and recognition of vocational courses, linkages between public and private providers, and involvement of the employment sector, franchising, financial incentives and support for part-time students, and the establishment of partnerships among providers as in distance education consortia.*

Mature age students are often part-timers, combining study with employment, family responsibilities and other commitments in the community. Success and completion rates tend to be lower although they vary with type and level of programmes. Consider the profile of a student, who, while not typical, is a real presence in tertiary institutions in many countries: female, living in a small rural town, in low or moderately paid employment, with family and domestic responsibilities, an early school leaver, and now a mature age student by distance education. Study in such circumstances is difficult and challenging; progress is likely to be slow and interrupted.

While individual institutions and staff members often devote considerable care and attention to meeting the needs of such students, system-wide policies may be another story. The authors of a recent Scottish study are in no doubt about the status of part-time higher education: *“marginal in terms of its location within the system, concentrated at sub-degree level and in the post-1992 universities and the Cinderella sector of further education. Above all it has been marginal in public debates and ... official reports.”* (Schuller et al, 1999, p.37).

It seems evident that, in those countries with very low rates of mature age participation in higher education, there are significant equity issues to address. Indeed, even where rates are relatively high, there is concern that the equity objective of ‘second chance’ is not being achieved and that insufficient efforts are being made to provide the flexible arrangements and supportive conditions that would increase enrolments and improve success rates. The ambitious lifelong learning policies many countries have adopted cannot be expected to succeed unless the needs of mature age, part-time students are better and more comprehensively attended to. There are large numbers of adults for whom improved opportunities - and incentives - for embarking on pathways leading to and through higher education are needed.

Policy implications were drawn from a recent OECD study of adult education in six member countries. Although not directed at the tertiary sector, they are nevertheless of interest in pointing to directions for action. For example, well resourced, managed, targeted and demand driven programmes; local leadership and an emphasis on empowerment; and programmes that aim to strengthen social capital i.e. *‘policies to support networks, communities and structures that positively support learning’* (OECD/CERI, 1999, p.10).

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### 4.4 Ethnic and other minority groups

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The fourth of the broadly defined categories of the under-represented, excluded or discriminated against is that of ethnic and other minorities that have endured substantial discrimination.

#### Box 10 - Three main minority groups targeted in equity programmes

- *Indigenous populations (e.g. the Inuit of the Northlands of Europe, Asia and Canada, Native Americans, Australian Aboriginals);*
- *Migrant groups in societies where they constitute a minority of the overall population (e.g. Turkish community in Germany, Portuguese and North Africans in France, Surinam and Antillean communities in the Netherlands, West Indians and Asians in the United Kingdom);*
- *Minority populations who have elected a different way of life from the majority (e.g. Travellers in Ireland, Amish in the USA).*

Although different conditions obtain for each of three identified minority groups, resulting in different requirements in equity policies and strategies, a common element is that they are in some measure aliens in or alienated from mainstream culture (even if this is their choice). This is reflected, at least in the Indigenous and

Minority groups, in extremely low levels of participation in stages of formal education beyond minimum legal requirements (and often at that stage, too).

Historically, minority groups have frequently not simply been excluded – or have excluded themselves – from higher education but have been actively persecuted, denied basic human rights. Race hate, harassment and discrimination in society at large are all-too-common, creating conditions which militate against tertiary education participation and success. These circumstances provide a spur to mainstream policy makers to take highly affirmative action to try to counterbalance not only the legacy of discrimination but also its continuing expression in present day society. Universities are not exempt: the British Commission for Racial Equality, for example, has recently publicised the incidence of racial harassment of black academics, negative stereotyping and their poor promotion prospects. The need for more open discussion and awareness of the reality of discriminatory practices, and for more higher education study programmes on racism featured in the Irish Higher Education Equality Unit Conference in 1996 (Egan, 1997).

Although not belonging to any of the above three Minority groups, special mention may be made of the Afro-American population in the United States. Historically exploited over centuries and enslaved, the deprivations suffered by Afro-Americans were a prime source of dissent, leading to a wide repertoire of equity measures in the 1960s in the USA. These have had an impact in many policy initiatives around the world. The American Civil Rights Movement was highly generative, not only in advancing the cause of Afro-Americans and broadening the democratic base of American higher education, but in giving momentum and direction to several dimensions of equitable education. Although the broader goals of that movement have not yet been fully realised, there has been a move forward, from more global concerns (desegregation, overall participation rates and so on – an acknowledgement that participation rates of Black Americans are too low) to highly specific programmes focused on particular target groups – such as under-representation in science, mathematics and engineering, the provision of pre-tertiary enrichment courses, and the enhancement of the work of the historically Black colleges (Bagayoko, 1997; OECD, 1998c). For staff, the representation of minority faculty members has been bluntly described as *'appalling'*: 1:4 college students are *'people of color, but only one out of every 30 faculty members at predominantly white institutions is a person of color'*. Progress in enrolment of minority students and recruitment of support staff has not been matched by numbers of academic staff (Southern Regional Education Board, 1999).

While it is not possible at present to get reliable and comprehensive international statistics on ethnic representation in tertiary education, many countries report that particular ethnic minorities are seriously under-represented at the tertiary level. Very often, this represents a compound disadvantage with, for example, low SES, a rural or isolated or a poor urban location, and weak mastery of the language of tertiary teaching, where the ethnic group speaks a different language.

Because ethnic political arithmetic has often been unjust and explosive alike during this century, collecting ethnic data is necessarily a delicate – and potentially hazardous – undertaking in modern democracies. Privacy laws may make it impossible and 'ethnicity' is differently defined and categorized in different countries. While ethnicity is an overriding element in the personal identity of some individuals, for others it rates as relatively incidental to their overall self-perception. For this last group, the growth of politicisation of ethnicity poses a certain dilemma, and, as with disability, individuals may – whether for fear of discrimination or for privacy concerns – prefer not to identify publicly as belonging to particular ethnic groups. Indigenous groups may also reject the official view of them as 'ethnic' or 'disadvantaged', claiming recognition as 'sovereign peoples' (Anderson, 1998).



In earlier OECD work on ethnic and cultural minorities at the school level, Papadopoulos notes that

*'[e]ven finding a title for the ... project on this subject acceptable to all Member countries proved difficult... Countries like Australia, Canada and the United States could readily accept multiculturalism as a feature of their societies. Most of the European countries and Japan were more reticent; and some of them, with indigenous groups or regions claiming distinct identities, were downright hostile. To the majority of European countries, the only such minorities they could recognise were the immigrants and their children, the legacy of the large influx of foreign workers during the earlier period of labour shortages in Northern Europe.... The one common denominator in all this was general recognition that it was among these ethnic and cultural minorities that educational disadvantages were most concentrated.'*

(Papadopoulos, 1994, p.167)

However, not all ethnic minorities are, in gross terms, under-represented. As one of the briefing papers for the Dearing committee on higher education in Britain pointed out, they may be, and indeed in some instances are, better represented than whites (using the UK race category term) – but this statistics is 'tempered by low participation rates by particular groups, e.g. Bangladeshi, Black-Caribbean (Coffield and Vignoles, 1997). Another recent UK study noted that *"those whose ethnic origin is from the Indian sub-continent have a higher probability of being in higher education compared to either the black or white ethnic groups"* (Hogarth et al, 1997, p. 5). Statistical averages unrelated to time series can also be misleading when used as a basis for comparison. For example, while first wave immigrants from certain Asian countries may be poorly represented, once settled, and in work they, and especially their children, may outperform the national norms.

Nowadays, in Australia, one of the world's most multicultural countries, students with non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) are over-represented in new tertiary enrolments (5.2% of new students; 4.8% population) with success and retention rates comparable to the overall student population. Federal education authorities caution, however, that a very strong performance by students from some countries in Asia and in Eastern Europe may be masking under-representation of students from other backgrounds, notably the Middle East and Southern Europe (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Australia, 1999). Thus, the 'NESB' equity category used for gathering statistics may, in this instance, need further refinement to provide useful information – information which could nonetheless prove sensitive in the political arena.

Tertiary participation of Indigenous Australians (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders) has been the focus of policy for many years. Data are available on students who self-identify on enrolment forms (the boundaries are rather fluid – for example, at what point does 'Aboriginality' begin or cease with inter-marriage?). Access rates for Indigenous Australians are now close to their population share, but academic success and retention rates in higher education remain very low. From detailed institutional studies, there appears to be a negative relationship between access on the one hand, and success and retention on the other (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Australia, 1997). The overall poor rates of success and retention of Australian Indigenous students continues to cause concern in a country where, as in New Zealand and indeed all countries of colonial origin, there are legal and constitutional issues, a legacy of discriminatory policies and practices, uncertain relationships and attitudes of suspicion or worse. Low retention and success rates combined with high per capita costs have been a reason for criticism of tertiary level affirmative action programmes in the USA.

Ethnic or cultural under-representation can be a potent force for change in the wider society. In Belgium in the 1960's the Flemish community was under-represented in the university compared with the French community and this was a factor in institutional regionalisation drives: ultimately they formed part of a wider

movement towards Flemish autonomy (Hostens et al, 1999). Reference has already been made to the U.S.A. in the 1960's.

Improved educational access and opportunity are signally important steps towards creating greater social justice and social solidarity, not only in multi-ethnic and migrant societies. There is a recognised need for a wider range of innovatory, well-targeted and community linked programmes and activities at both school and tertiary education levels to meet the specific and varying needs of minorities, including those who have been largely 'socially invisible' until quite recently.

#### 4.5 People with a disability

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Although still under-represented, the past decade has seen a marked increase in participation in higher education by students with a disability. A significant factor in at least some countries, is seen to be a flow-on from earlier integration or 'mainstreaming' policies at school level, whereby greater numbers of students with a disability are completing secondary schooling and aspiring to university education as a 'normal' continuation. This is a specific instance of the more general situation whereby tertiary education is modifying its practices as a consequence of flow on from primary and secondary levels, as well as experiencing the impact of legislative changes and changing social norms. A further encouragement to tertiary study has been better provision in many countries of financial support and special facilities and equipment for students with a disability.

There is considerable variation in the way in which disability is defined in different countries, and no international standard, as such, exists. The Americans with Disabilities Act 1990, and the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 in Australia both define disability very broadly to include physical, intellectual, psychiatric, sensory, neurological and learning disabilities. While severe mental disability does, of course, preclude some individuals from being potential higher education students, the intellectual capacity of those with other disabilities mirrors that within the population as a whole. Thus, with appropriate support and conditions for study, a good success rate can be expected from those students with a disability who qualify for university entry.

Disability can strike at any time: for some, disabilities have existed since birth (cerebral palsy, some blind and deaf people); for others, disabilities result from accident in childhood or adulthood (blindness, deafness); for yet others, disabling conditions or illnesses develop with age (psychiatric conditions, cancer). Some conditions are constantly disabling (paraplegia, amputation); others can become disabling from time to time (asthma, allergies, multiple sclerosis); others are temporarily disabling (broken limbs). Also, not all disabling conditions are 'visible' (some medical conditions). Disability is increasingly coming to be understood as a condition of life, which may affect many, if not most, during their lifespan.

Danermark (1999) also makes the point that disability needs to be understood from a cultural contextual point of view. He describes how, in Sweden, dyslexia has come to be diagnosed as a disability in recent years as the result of the need – in a time of tight public finances – to seek additional classroom resources to help support children who have problems learning to read and write. Shaw (1999a) supports the view that the number of students reporting with a disability reflects the perception of the assistance they are able to receive for their condition. In Australia, where students with a learning disability have not been eligible for funding in the school-level integration programmes, this disability currently presents only some 2% of registered students at higher education level. In the United States, however, some 50% of all students registering with a disability

have a learning disability (Shaw, 1999b). Thus, it is difficult to know what the real numbers are in each country. Robertson indicated that while 2% of UK higher education students reported a disability, approximately 7 per cent of the 18-30 age group reported a longstanding disability, according to Labour Force Survey figures (Robertson and Hilman, 1997, section 4).

*“Disability in its diverse forms... is a highly personalised matter which carries human and compassionate resonances in society; and this has added force to the push for change in public attitudes and policies towards the disabled..”* (Papadopoulos, 1994, p.169).

Two important features distinguish students with a disability from other equity groups. The first is that disability can affect individuals from families throughout the social structure, and at any time with a certain randomness; second, the ‘disabled’, by and large, are not a tightly knit or easily identifiable group. Only the deaf appear to have developed a particular identity and culture, centred on their common use of sign language (Danermark, 1999).

A key difficulty for universities, is knowing how many ‘disabled’ students there are. Some countries

### Box 11 – The Rights of Disabled Persons

*There has, in some countries, been a significant reorientation towards disabled students – a move away from the traditional ‘medical’ model defining disability as a deficit within the individual, towards an ‘interactional or civil rights’ model which sees the major difficulties for the disabled to the exercise of full citizenship rights as being the barriers constructed by society (Aune, 1998). This paradigm shift implies that resolving disability should focus not on ‘fixing’ the disabled learner, but rather on redesigning learning tasks and teaching approaches in the light of learner characteristics and curricular goals. Thus, the equity challenge has become the need to provide an inclusive approach within an accessible environment (O’Connor et al, 1998). This is a principle which could well be extended to embrace*

enable but do not obligate students to register their disability on enrolment forms. Students need to register their disability only if and when they request assistance from the institution with their course (such as special facilities, or additional time at exams). There are various reasons why students with a disability would choose not to register. For example, with the general move towards more accessible university environments in many countries, students may find their special needs are already met. Other reasons for not registering can relate to fear of discrimination, and privacy concerns. Fear of public disclosure of a disability is seen as a particular problem for staff in a time of retrenchments - particularly when it concerns an ‘invisible’ medical condition, such as multiple sclerosis (Shaw, 1999). Privacy issues, it may be said in passing, are not only of importance for the disabled: categorization by ethnicity, social class or sexual orientation is not always acceptable and may be illegal. Statistics and definitions in this category and area are therefore to be treated with considerable caution.

In Germany, the 15<sup>th</sup> social survey of student life reports the proportion of students with a disability as 2%. For only a small proportion of these students does their condition significantly hinder their studies (one tenth). Students with a disability or chronic illness, however, more frequently change discipline, degree or higher education institution. Of those whose studies have been strongly impaired by health difficulties, there is an above average change of higher education institution (25%), and of study drop out rate (34%) (Schnitzer et al, 1999).

The Australian federal education authorities estimate that some 4% of the Australian population has a

disability which does not disbar them from tertiary study. This figure is used as the benchmark for participation in tertiary education. While in 1997, only 2.4% of tertiary students identified themselves as having a disability, this was a considerable increase on the 1.8% of the previous year. Success and retention rates of enrolled students are close to those for the general student body (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Australia, 1999).

Providing the support necessary for students with a disability can be a considerable cost for institutions, although in percentage terms it is likely to be a very small part of the overall budget. Costs must nevertheless be met, and two lines of thinking have emerged: first whether certain higher education institutions should be specially designated and funded to cater for the needs of this group; and second, whether there should be mainstreaming. In the USA and Australia, the answer is clear – all higher education institutions are bound by anti-discrimination legislation to provide support for any academically qualified student with a disability enrolling in any institution. In some countries, particular institutions have emerged with concentrations of disabled students. The Open University in Britain, as with equivalent institutions in other countries, has proved particularly attractive to disabled students, many of whom tend to be older than other students, and frequently study part-time, or take slightly longer to complete their courses.

In Sweden, an informal concentration of disabled students has emerged at certain universities, giving rise to a debate over a policy of concentration versus freedom of choice. In favour of concentration is that it would enable a select number of institutions to provide a particularly high quality support service for all kinds of functional impairment, also that it could reduce isolation for disabled students and encourage social integration. Against these arguments, however, are that concentration limits the freedom of choice for disabled students, risking stigmatisation if forced to go to a special university. Second, those who, despite a concentration policy, still choose a different institution (for family, economic, or academic reasons), would be poorly resourced. Third, concentration means segregation, and limits full integration into the broader student community (Danermark, 1999).

Where universities are not specially resourced to provide support for disabled students but have, within their normal budgets, done so, their success in attracting growing numbers of disabled students (disproportionately to other local universities) is currently putting their budgets under strain, as exemplified by the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium (Van Acker, 1998) In Australia, however, where all universities must fund appropriate support from within their existing allocations, Shaw (1999) indicates that ways have been found to do this, with the consequent financial pressure and budgetary reappraisal moving institutions towards accepting an integration of costs within mainstream budgets. It is clear, then, that the decision should be made on a system-wide basis. Whether this should be for 'concentration' or 'mainstreaming and free-choice' would have to be determined according to the circumstances of each country.

Providing suitable conditions for students with a disability is increasingly seen as the responsibility of higher education institutions. This means providing **an accessible physical environment**, and providing **inclusive pedagogic and social environments**. Making buildings, grounds and student residences accessible to mobility - and sight - impaired students can be expensive (particularly renovating older buildings), but it is essentially a one-off cost. A policy of making all new buildings accessible from the beginning does not require undue cost, and has been shown to have benefits for other students (such as parents with children in pushchairs), disabled staff and elderly visitors to the campus.

### Box 12 – Support for Students with a Disability

*Making the pedagogic environment accessible requires varied support at different times for students with different types of disability. The range of support in Canadian universities includes:*

- *for students who have a hearing impairment - sign language and oral interpreters, notetakers, amplified phones, 'phonic ear' systems on loan;*
- *for students with a visual impairment – books on tape, enlarged print material and exams, large print software, scanners and screen readers, large print and voice access to library data bases, talking calculators and dictionaries, braille printer, display keyboard and materials for classroom use, extra time for exams, use of campus bus;*
- *for students who have a mobility and/or co-ordination impairment – scribes for and use of computers for exams, voice recognition software, alternative keyboards and input devices, use of campus bus, preferential parking spaces and rates, extended time for exams, adapted residence rooms, orthopaedic chairs;*
- *for students who have chronic medical conditions – special exam arrangements, use of campus bus, preferential parking places and rates, assistance with time planning for courses;*
- *for students who have a learning disability – taped reading material and exams, computers with spell checkers and voice, talking dictionaries and calculators, proofreading essays and exams, extended time for exams, notetakers in class. (Wolforth, 1998).*

It is clear that developments in technology have made tremendous differences to the independence with which certain categories of disabled students can pursue their studies. For many students with a disability, educational support can be simple and straightforward with relatively little cost attached (allowing longer time in exams, allowing alternative formats for assignments, provision of learning materials in different formats). The major recurrent costs are for sign interpreters and notetakers - Danermark (1999) noted that in Sweden, deaf students requiring interpretation comprise 8% of all disabled students, but their share of disability funding is 70%.

Universities must also think beyond physical and educational/ pedagogical accessibility, increasingly to social accessibility, to enable students to participate in the full life of the institution (e.g. student union outings providing appropriate transport). Isolation is a common experience of students with a disability in higher education, and social inclusion, not surprisingly, is linked with success in studies. These considerations call for an imaginative approach for part-time and distance education students with a disability, including a readiness to liaise with families and local support networks.

Two key challenges in making these changes in universities are, first, to develop a **positive attitude** towards students with a disability among both staff and the broader student population and, second, for staff **to develop knowledge and understanding of the needs** of students with a disability and how to make appropriate accommodations for them. As in all equity domains, systematic attention to attitude formation, information and knowledge, and positive institutional leadership are crucial.

Ignorance and prejudice regarding disabilities are reportedly still rife in many institutions. The University of Central Lancashire is an example of an institution which has taken an institution-wide approach to staff training and continuing professional development concerning the needs of students with disabilities. It has also introduced specialist courses and qualifications of interest to holders of the considerable number of specialist posts which have been created in tertiary education over the past decade (Hurst, 1999).

The legal requirements for higher education institutions with regard to provision for disabled students

varies considerably between countries. Both the United States and Australia have specific legislation on disability discrimination which places requirements on higher education institutions. In the United Kingdom, higher education institutions are not bound by the disability legislation, but there is a move for them to follow it in a voluntary fashion. In Canada, disability discrimination is covered within a broad human rights legislation (which Wolforth (1998) notes, makes it less likely to be repealed or modified, as there are more groups to lobby). Increasingly there is a move in Europe towards recommendations and regulations concerning persons with a disability (Sweden, UK, Germany, France). The European Union, OECD and UNESCO have all sponsored activities during the 1990's focused on students with a disability in higher education (Van Acker, 1999).

Legislation does not specify internal structures for universities to establish to fulfil their obligations to students with a disability, thus a variety of patterns exists. The most common models in the U.S.A. have been identified by Saucier and Gagliano (1998) as:

- *informal services model - no co-ordinated services provided;*
- *centralised services model - all needs for students with disabilities provided within one department;*
- *centrally co-ordinated services - only direct disability-related services supplied centrally (e.g. testing, reader and scribe services, sign language interpreters); for needs such as housing, financial aid, career counselling, students are directed to appropriate university departments which are obligated to provide accessible services to all students;*
- *decentralised services – the only central service provided is to verify disability; university departments are educated to provide required services.*

The centralised services model, with its 'caretaker' connotations, is not seen to be in tune with the new philosophy of student empowerment, independence and inclusion, and, as a consequence, is becoming less prevalent and acceptable within the USA. The most widespread model is the centrally co-ordinated services, based on a Disabled Student Services office. The movement towards decentralised services has grown over the past decade, but for it to work, all university staff must be knowledgeable about disability-related issues, as well as willing and able to participate in the provision of support. This requirement poses significant difficulties, not least because of the increasing pressures on academic staff to demonstrate research performance, and to speed up student course completion rates. The financially-driven move to leaner, more efficiency-driven administrative and technical services poses another set of challenges – not only for students with disabilities but all equity groups in need of special assistance and support.

Despite the philosophical appeal of the full devolutionary trend, in an environment where the institutions are ultimately (legally) responsible for provision, it seems likely that a level of central services will need to remain, certainly for policy and accountability purposes, although the balance of implementation measures may well move in the direction of more dispersed responsibility. This is an approach which has relevance to all equity groups and was raised quite specifically by Burton in her remarks on the collegial model (see section 4.2 above). Weak, excessively diffused structures and policies and their application – or disregard – are increasingly the target of litigation.

The key point remains that universities in many countries are coming to accept a fundamental responsibility for the education and the employment of disabled people who, until quite recently, would have had little or no opportunity for study or for jobs in higher education. This is a source of satisfaction, but the cause of equity will be even better served in future as institutions shoulder further responsibilities. Greater interest is needed and likely to be taken in the monitoring and evaluation of procedures. Inter-institutional co-

operation and sharing of responsibilities whose exercise can be very costly are becoming more common for both professional and financial reasons. Two Australian government initiatives fostering co-operation between higher education institutions in the provision of services for students with a disability were judged, in recent evaluation studies, to have made valuable contributions (Redway and Heath, 1997; Kable and Heath, 1999).

### 4.6 Enduring Problems

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The foregoing sections of this chapter, together with chapter 3, indicate both progress and just how much needs to be done in further advancing equity in higher education, building on advances already achieved, charting new directions and constructing stronger data and evaluative bases. Major changes in system-wide policies and institutional practice have occurred and are continuing. Legislative changes and new policy frameworks reflect new commitments and a clear recognition of action that has needed to be taken and what is still required. For the European Union, the OECD Membership and in many other countries, it is evident that equity is firmly established as one of the key directions for future higher education policy, with a sharper focus on implementation, monitoring and follow-through.

For the deep-seated problems, difficulties and barriers that are proving quite obdurate, special efforts, some of them long term, will be needed. They are variously described as **structural, legal, attitudinal, organisational, financial** or, more often, a complex mix of these and other factors for which the term **'cultural'** is a convenient, if rather vague, blanket. Since educational policies and educational institutions form an integral part of modern society, drawing their goals, beliefs, practices and structures from society at large as much as from their own distinctive histories and modalities, it is necessary to take these broader social trends and values fully into account. Equity issues most intimately connect higher education with its wider social and cultural environment. Policies need to be both **intensive** and **extensive**.

If success in equity policies in higher education in countries of quite diverse political ideologies has been moderate or quite limited in some areas, and if rates of progress in achieving clearly defined – and sometimes well resourced – policy objectives is slow, it is necessary to reflect on underlying social dynamics which may not be susceptible to voluntaristic policy intervention. As Etzione remarked, *'The realization of a societal goal requires introducing a change into societal relations, ... and, as a rule, attempts to introduce change encounter some resistance. Unless this resistance is reduced, a course of action set will not be a course of action followed.'* (Etzione, 1968, p. 314).

To minimise resistance, policies need to be well thought out, responsive to a variety of expressed preferences by groups and interested parties, clearly explained and justified, targeted, and resourced. Their implementation should be monitored and evaluated and adjusted if necessary to meet changing circumstances.

Equity objectives directed at the advancement of particular groups - and procedures adopted in pursuit of these objectives - have been the most visible witnesses of the drive for greater equity in higher education. However, there have been two general developments which have had positive equity outcomes: (1) the massive increase in student enrolments and (2) the introduction or extension of institutional and programmatic differentiation in higher education (diversification). These developments, in addition to driving forward the equity movement, are in part an outcome of the broader community interest in a more equitable society.

The **quantitative expansion** of higher education in OECD countries formed the background to the ten

country thematic review published under the title **Redefining Tertiary Education** (OECD, 1998a). That review documented a remarkable numerical expansion. Parallel or greater rates of growth throughout the world are documented in the UNESCO/OECD **World Education Indicators** (OECD/CERI, 1998a; UNESCO, 1998a). Continued growth was seen in the European Community Memorandum on Higher Education as necessary, with measures required to stimulate demand and increase participation by under-represented groups. The 1998 World Conference on Higher Education extensively documented the scale and nature of growth worldwide (Unesco 1998b). Impressive as these growth figures are, participation rates vary widely across countries, and behind both national and international statistics there remain significant quantitative and qualitative inequalities in opportunity.

**Diversification** in the province of higher education is the result of several factors of which efforts to equalize opportunity is but one – the separate, historical origins of more ‘academic’ and more ‘vocational’ institutions (often with a strong socio-economic class basis), demands of the industrial and service economy, finance (universities are usually more expensive), among them. However, inasmuch as differentiation not only of institutional type but also of programmes and ways of teaching and learning is a recognition of the different characteristics and needs of students and a determination to make higher education in some form more widely available, diversification can be an important factor in advancing equity policies. It ceases to be so when the channeling of students into different kinds of institutions is negatively discriminatory, when it reinforces existing inequalities. It then has the opposite, if unintended, effect of undermining the goals and values of equity.



*'Socrates, is it your desire to seem to have persuaded us or really to persuade us that it is without exception better to be just than unjust?'*

**Plato** *The Republic*.

The gains already made in achieving greater equity provide platforms for further progress. The different aspects and dimensions of equity, and the varied national and local settings in which policies are formulated and implemented indicate that a variety of approaches is required. While international experience and viewpoints among policy makers, researchers and commentators converge on a number of key considerations, caution is needed when transforming these into strategies of wider general applicability. The circumstances and needs of the several major under-represented groups obviously differ: what may be suitable for increasing participation in higher education by ethnic minority students may not be the same as the requirements for improving study career opportunities for people with a disability. Moreover, in the higher education community within as well as between countries there are different expectations, structures and value orientations, and at times divergent views about appropriate policy mixes.

A significant limitation in drawing general conclusions for future action on the basis of 'international good practice' is the dearth of evaluative research on the impact of established policies and programme initiatives. Such research, to be valid and carry conviction, would need to be long term and comprehensive, taking account of the multiplicity of factors which, over time, bear on access, performance and professional advancement. There appears to be little interest in or ready support at present for such research, which means that for many of the interventions and particularly the recommendations for policy change, explanations and expectations regarding effect must be to a degree provisional.

We turn now to a brief account of those approaches which nonetheless seem to have general applicability. This will be followed by an overview of the kinds of interventions that have proved successful or show promise at different stages and levels of the educational process.

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## 5.1 Towards a comprehensive and coherent approach

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### 5.1.1 State actions: legislation, monitoring, compliance

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In those OECD countries with robust equity policies and programmes there has been strong state intervention: comprehensive, coherent policy making; equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation; and an effective regulatory and monitoring structure. The establishment of monitoring and compliance authorities (Sweden, UK), and of agencies to support innovations (Australia, Denmark), and of commissions or quality agencies to review and evaluate the performance of higher education (Australia, France, Norway, UK among many others) testify to the importance of strong central initiatives. Standing commissions and Ministry divisions to fund institutions and overview policy (Australia, Denmark, Ireland, New Zealand, Sweden, UK, US states), are coming to use financial inducements, incentives and sanctions. Firm, well-focused policies at the state and regional levels are proving their value. Details of established and new financial levers (Australia and Scotland respectively) are in Appendix 2. Clear goals and priority setting, targeting, monitoring and adherence to international conventions are encouraged by European Education Ministers (Council of Europe, 1998). Continuing state action, mainly of a policy-strategy – monitoring kind is a key instrument which can be put to good effect. Its further development especially as regards follow-through will be necessary.

### 5.1.2 Expanding provision

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The huge growth of the tertiary education sector world-wide has extended opportunities in varying degrees to all of the under-represented groups, including opportunities for careers in higher education. Equity goals are not the only driving force; moreover, gains have been uneven with some groups left behind. Large enrolment increases can be accompanied by poor retention and success rates (Commission of the European Communities, 1993). Continued overall volume growth of the sector remains, however, one of the most effective ways to achieve inclusiveness. It needs to incorporate targeted growth, e.g. of mature age entry, ethnic minorities, low SES students.

### 5.1.3 Achieving diversity and flexibility: the acceptance and valuing of difference

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A greater diversity of institutions and flexibility of provision are seen by the OECD and the European Community among other bodies as necessary as demand for and participation in tertiary education increase (OECD, 1991, 1998a; Commission of the European Communities, 1991, 1993). This means broadening the concept of higher education to make it more inclusive (one reason for the use by the OECD of the term 'tertiary') and the adoption of more flexible forms of teaching and learning, recognition of prior learning, credit transfer, etc.. Diversification policies can be used to improve access and study opportunities, for example for part-time and mature age students, those who do not meet normal entry criteria, for students with strong practical interests, those on low incomes and so on.

A great strength of tertiary education in the United States is its diversity. The community colleges for example are valued – by students who work, have children, are of modest means - for their affordability, flexible scheduling, convenience and personal attention (DYG Inc/ Larry Snell Perry and Associates, 1999). Many structural reforms across Europe since the 1960's have resulted in a wide variety of post-secondary institutions either within or providing access to higher education. In Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK where existing vocational institutions have been transformed into non-university higher education institutions (the former polytechnics, higher education colleges, *Fachhochschulen*, HOBUs, HBOs) and new institutions established. In Ireland the establishment of a network of former Regional Technical Colleges, Dublin Institute of Technology and the (former) National Institutes of Higher Education has widened opportunity. Open universities are another example of structural diversity. Access gains have risen due to institutional diversity, but there has been a cost in a kind of *de facto* segregation. As Taylor remarked in an OECD review of higher education in member countries, "*The tendency for a higher proportion of students in non-university institutions to come from working class backgrounds is virtually universal in OECD countries*" (Taylor, 1987).

This cost notwithstanding, structural diversity has greatly contributed to increased equity through numerical increases of places, access policies and the range of programmes on offer. Responsiveness to equity requirements is being shown right across the higher education sector in more course options, greater support and guidance for students with special needs, flexible scheduling, part-time and distance education, and so on – a growing readiness to adapt the educational system to the characteristics and circumstance of non-traditional students. In some instances – for example with minority groups – there is beginning to be an acceptance that distinctive cultural features including valued symbols and rituals should feature rather than be suppressed under blanket, system-wide policies and conventional institutional procedures. The customs of particular groups can, for example, enliven graduation ceremonies – as when Australian Aboriginal graduate students are 'danced' by their communities to receive their diplomas at graduation ceremonies, a visible symbol of the community's 'ownership' of success.

Locating institutions in geographical areas where there is relatively poor participation and establishing new kinds of institutions can go hand in hand. The University College of South Stockholm, for example, has recently been established in a part of the city where participation is low. Amalgamating small institutions and enhancing the equity mission as at the University of Western Sydney has increased opportunity in a low-participation region. A specialist centre with funded projects to advance career opportunities is another equity achievement - the Timbuktu Academy in Louisiana. Yet another route is building new structures and qualifications within existing universities (e.g. the French university institutes and the two year 'mid-way' qualification, the *DEUG*, the bachelor degree in Sweden, etc.). Diversification remains a very potent tool for addressing the distinctive needs of different equity groups, provided tendencies to equate 'different' with 'superior – inferior' can be constrained. Formal 'league tables' based on performance indicators with no concern for value added can be counter productive in this respect.

### **5.1.4 Moving toward policy coherence and integration across the education levels**

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Policy, structural and vertical programme coherence across the levels of education from early childhood to tertiary education is still often weak. It is extremely difficult to achieve across the major social sectors of education, health, welfare, housing, employment, etc. There is growing recognition that equity problems in higher education cannot be solved only at that stage or by an exclusive focus on educational opportunities. Early identification and intervention are necessary and at the school level, if progress is to be made in increasing the proportion of under-represented groups seeking and eligible for access at the tertiary level (The Educational Equity Chain, see below). The importance of policy coherence across sectors is shown, for example, in the kinds of support that need to be mobilised when people with a disability or women with family responsibilities with a low income and living in isolated areas seek access to tertiary education.

### **5.1.5 Networks, self help, mutual advancement**

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Especially in the areas of women's education, opportunities for people with disabilities and mature age study in distance education institutions, experience has demonstrated the value of self help groups, and of networks which draw upon pooled experience, provide support and encouragement, and monitor the performance of the education system against their own goals and expectations (Eggins, 1997; O'Rourke, 1999). Advances have been made as a result of well-organised lobby and pressure groups which, while they may be uncomfortable at times for institutions and governments, have been instrumental in identifying shortcomings and mobilising support in overcoming them. The women's movement has been most active and successful both in pressing for changes in course content, teaching and learning and in pursuing career advancement for women, including confidence building and leadership training events. Encouragement can be given to self-defined under-represented groups to provide mutual support and organise their own projects for advancement.

### **5.1.6 Focus on institutions and their culture**

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National policies, legislation, monitoring and compliance agencies, networks and self-help groups are crucial, but the equity heartland in higher education remains the institution (section 5.2 below). Measures which are having an effect include the annual reports on equity performance which all Australian public universities make to the national ministry. Policies, procedures, values and ethos and the way of life of the institution are decisive in determining whether equity is achieved in practice. Equity is the province of the whole institution (Cobbin et al, 1993). An illustration of this is admission policy. It is now common for institutions in many

countries to accept professional experience in lieu of some (sometimes all) formal qualifications, and to provide bridging courses – which may be by distance education, for example, for adults (Schonherr, 1995). Assessment practices can vary, to take into account special needs, such as the language of indigenous people, disability and off-campus study: cultural biases can be reduced in assessment practices, course materials and teaching procedures.

The spirit of the equity enterprise (Burton 1991; 1997) and the day-to-day reality of enhanced (or diminished) opportunity (Johansson, 1999; Levin, 1999) are experienced by students and staff as members of institutions. Hence the pay-off from those systems where the policy framework provides for – or requires – a clear demonstration by institutions of their actual performance in developing and implementing comprehensive equity programmes (e.g. Australia, US states). Institutions can achieve much by examining their own structures to identify specific needs and establish mechanisms to address them; such as appointing a special adviser to the rector or women's affairs (University of Leuven, Belgium); setting up a committee to review and report on progress in advancing its own equity mission (Universities of Western Australia and South Australia); establishing a diagnostic and tutorial support centre for students (Faculty of Science, Free University of Brussels); allocating a tranche of new post doctorate positions to women (University of Oslo); establishing a centre for research and promotion which provides a national service (Higher Education Equality Unit, University of Cork). Mainstream support, if broadly developed, can provide for many equity needs, avoiding wasteful duplication of specialist services. The role of institution leaders and governing bodies is crucial: in providing direction and support for equity policies, prominence in launching them and in follow through (Chapman, 1999; Moses, 1999). The regular administrative reporting of progress to academic and faculty boards and governing bodies, against clearly stated equity objectives is an important contribution to institutional awareness and solidarity. Institutional leaders need to be publicly identified with equity policies.

It is, as has often been remarked, the pattern of life that the student experiences at the institution that can make the difference between success and failure. In a Canadian retention study, Grayson (1998) identified factors explaining retention of racial minority students. Among them were:

- (a) *Pre-entry characteristics: test score; gender; level of parent education;*
- (b) *University-social experiences: involvement in clubs, sports; new friendships and time spent with friends; total hours on campus;*
- (c) *University- academic experience: involvement in informal academic activities; attendance at lectures, tutorials, labs; relevance of class topics to career perceptions; satisfaction with teaching and broad range of perspectives in courses.*

This research is a reminder that active involvement in the social and academic life mean a lot. It provokes a question, in larger, often amorphous institutions: can effective procedures be designed to strengthen these sources of success particularly for 'at risk' students, without undue cost and intrusiveness? Where retention rates for minorities are low, knowledge of success factors is a crucial policy instrument.

#### **5.1.7 Improving overall performance**

Where equity is identified as an important element in the overall quality, efficiency and performance of systems and institutions, it can be incorporated within a broader set of strategies, not seen as something special, separate from the institutional mainstream of teaching and research – and potentially contentious. This is partly a matter of definition; partly of goal-setting and resolution in execution; partly of monitoring, reporting and evaluative procedures. Benchmarking - in the more precise form of quantitative comparisons among

institutions or across systems or more loosely as the use of a variety of instruments and procedures to appraise performance against some kind of comparative standard - is gaining ground in higher education in the quest for improved quality and efficiency (Commonwealth Higher Education Management Service, 1998). Performance against equity criteria and goals can form part of benchmarking as of the many other evaluation procedures now commonly used in higher education systems. Drawbacks in highly targeted, specialist programmes, such as the problem of self-identification by some disabled and ethnic groups, or apparent unfairness in affirmative action, could be lessened with greater emphasis on a broad concept of quality and delivery to include equity (Goodbody, 1999). Incentives for improved performance measured against the institution's own goals are likely to achieve more than sanctions (Karmel, 1999).

More attention needs to be given to implementation and follow-up when conducting reviews whether institutional, national or international. The OECD has introduced these, for example, for its national education policy reviews: countries willingly report back on progress two or three years after the review findings have been debated in the Education Committee. Assessment of policy implementation and follow-through is, however, often a weak point in institutional reviews. It can be fostered by financial incentives as in the Australian annual cycle of performance-funding review and encouraged more widely e.g. by international organisations. The Council of Europe aims to hold a follow-up conference in 2001 to assess progress in implementing its 1992-96 project on Access to Higher Education in Europe and the Ministerial recommendations.

### **5.1.8 Financing, resourcing, managing**

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One of the challenges for effective implementation of equity policies is to meet the call for additional resources – for facilities and materials for students with a disability, for aid to needy students, for additional tutorial, technical and administrative resources, for mentoring, staff development, and for monitoring, evaluation and compliance. Some of these costs can be streamlined, for example, by inter-institutional co-operation in the design and provision of facilities, by consolidation into regional or national bases, and by more flexible use of specialist staff including sharing among institutions. Recent evaluations of two Australian government funded initiatives based on co-operation between higher education institutions have been positive: appointment of Regional Disability Liaison Officers whose brief is to work with several higher education institutions and complement work of institutionally based colleagues; and the Co-operative Projects in which a variety of equity projects are undertaken co-operatively within individual states (Kable and Heath, 1999; Redway and Heath, 1997). As mentioned above, there is scope to interrelate and mainstream the different equity structures and programmes.

Conversely, institutions can avoid costly litigation (whose incidence is growing) by adhering to anti-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation, and can attract additional funding (or avoid penalties) by meeting performance targets – as in the Danish taximeter and the Australian performance funding formulae (OECD, 1998a, ch.8). There are also substantial financial benefits to systems as well as institutions where courses are not unduly protracted, completion targets are met and dropout and failure rates are kept to a minimum. Financial incentives are becoming more common. In Australia, as in other countries, these are directed both at institutions (for meeting equity performance targets) and students. In 1997, a system of Merit-Based Equity Scholarships was introduced to encourage participation of equity groups in higher education: recipients were to be financially and educationally disadvantaged; determinants of merit and selection was devolved to institutions. Although short-lived, the relatively low cost programme was widely supported by

institutions, and valued among the minority communities. It appears probable a similar scheme may relatively soon be re-established.

It is important for equity purposes to ensure that, in strict performance regimes, low performing students – and staff – are not excluded, but provided with opportunities to do well. The maintenance of high standards and the quest for excellence need not stand in the way of a rethinking of performance in acknowledgement of the greater diversity of the higher education population. While there are financial implications, it is poor economy to admit large numbers of students and then to accept high failure and dropout rates.

### **5.1.9 Towards a broad, inclusive policy framework and knowledge base**

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Much of the work on advancing equity has been piecemeal, of necessity as some see it. The target groups are different, they have their own networks, financial sources, professional associations, and links with different parts of government. While retaining their distinctiveness, they could make further gains by exploring synergies. Governments, policy-makers and institutions have an interest in achieving more effective, mutually reinforcing and streamlined programmes. There may be difficulties in balancing these moves with the very assertively defined distinctiveness of some under-represented groups, but there are gains to be made.

The further development and refinement of frameworks for legislative changes, policy formulation, appeals and redress procedures, system-level monitoring, evaluation and follow through and other system-wide strategies can be expected to continue in respect of all under-represented groups. As well, a growing repertoire and pool of tested and evaluated ‘hands-on’ procedures will be used by practitioners in the field whether named equity officers, individual staff or institutional leaders and managers. There should develop, as a result, more comprehensive and systematic knowledge bases than exist at present, hence greater confidence in the effectiveness and results of specific interventions.

Table 2 and the explanatory details in the following pages bring together both systemic and institutional perspectives, in an overview of how opportunity can be and is being extended in all the stages of education from early childhood learning to postgraduate study and staff career development – the ‘educational equity chain’. The rationale for this approach is simply that, for tertiary education to be equitable, early childhood, primary and secondary education, too, must be equitable – otherwise, the pool of students is not available.

Many different agencies and actors are involved and there is no single authority, in any country, which is charged with responsibility for the kind of policy co-ordination and follow-through that would be required. However, a higher education co-ordinating and funding agency could play a major role in increasing awareness of the kinds of action that are needed – and may indeed be taking place – and, in conjunction with other responsible authorities, in vigorously pursuing all elements of a broad equity agenda.

## **5.2 The Educational Equity Chain**

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For further equity gains to be made in higher education, different kinds of actions will be required at all levels of the education system and in the wider society. Partnerships and coalitions will be required together with legislative changes and more comprehensive policies. Obviously higher education agencies and institutions can have only part of the responsibility for all this but they need to address their roles and responsibilities in a wider framework. Moreover, higher education needs to work more directly beyond its own

immediate boundaries – with secondary schools, community groups, the professions (many of whose members it educates), employers and government. To illustrate the scale and the scope of action needed in the education system and leading up to and including higher education, there follows a table of needs, tasks and responsibilities. The challenge to higher education is to show initiative and leadership and to demonstrate commitment and success. Its role, for example in teacher education (but not only there) extends beyond its own immediate boundaries and in one way or another to all levels of the education system. Thus, the tertiary sector, in addition to attending to its own territory, needs to enlarge its role through a wide array of ‘equity partnerships and extensions’.

**TABLE 2: Framework of Objectives for Promoting Equity in Higher Education – The Institutional Level**

**Basic schooling: pre-school, primary and lower secondary: to**

- Foster consciousness of discrimination and inequitable practice among all who have a responsibility for young children’s well being, and develop competence to deal with them;
- Identify and provide support to ‘at risk’ or ‘academically disadvantaged’ students (actual and potential) and assess progress regularly;
- Take all possible steps to ensure successful learning by all students (education for all);
- Provide teachers with opportunities and incentives for inservice education and professional development.

**Upper secondary education – general and vocational: to**

- Foster consciousness of discrimination and inequitable practice and develop competence to deal with them among teachers and administrators;
- Actively foster capacity and interest of all students to continue learning;
- Provide all teachers with opportunities and incentives for inservice education and professional development;
- Achieve a better integration of programmes and requirements arising in different parts of the transition process to ensure a smooth passage; bring tertiary level academics and students/school teachers/ administrators closer together;
- Actively encourage inclusive practice for equity groups at the pre-tertiary stage.

**The first years of tertiary education and academic progression: to**

- Foster consciousness of discrimination and inequitable practice and develop understanding and competence to deal with them, through: academic fields of study, professional development opportunities for academics and university administrators, and research programmes;
- Ensure appropriate access arrangements for under-represented groups, and bridging courses, study programmes, tuition, guidance, flexible assessment practices, welcoming entry arrangements, financial and other support to meet the needs of members of under-represented groups who may be ‘at risk’;
- Provide an inclusive and accessible physical environment, supportive higher education community, inclusive curricula, teaching and learning practices and institutional ethos;
- Reduce dropout and failure rates to a minimum and foster a capacity and willingness in all students to continue study;
- Establish appropriate staffing structure, roles and responsibilities to ensure equity objectives are met, including support services, monitoring and evaluation;
- Integrate policy relating to under-represented groups into all aspects of the institution; ensure their views are represented in planning and decision-making;
- Include in teacher education courses and courses for other relevant professions, specific attention to the needs of groups under-represented in higher education

**Careers in higher education: recruitment and advancement: to**

- Improve recruitment procedures to draw in more applicants from under-represented groups;
- Provide an accessible physical environment and inclusive institutional ethos;
- Facilitate career progression and advancement for under-represented groups;
- Develop an ‘inclusive climate’ in staffing policies; build equity performance into staff appraisal;
- Establish appropriate staffing structures and define roles and responsibilities to ensure equity objectives are met, including monitoring and evaluation;
- Provide leadership, support and publicity to develop an equity-positive environment.

### 5.2.1 Basic schooling: pre-school, primary and lower secondary

#### Objectives:

- *Foster consciousness of discrimination and inequitable practice among all who have a responsibility for young children's well being, and develop competence to deal with them;*
- *Identify and provide support to 'at risk' or 'academically disadvantaged' students (actual and potential) and assess progress regularly;*
- *Take all possible steps to ensure successful learning by all students;*
- *Provide teachers with opportunities and incentives for inservice education and professional development.*

The **significance of the early years** of the educational equity chain is well expressed in a World Bank report: *"The distribution of enrolments and the quality of instruction at the lower levels of education are the major determinants of representation in higher education"* (World Bank, 1993). This view is echoed in many studies and policy statements (National Commission on Education, 1993; Delors et al, 1996).

In countries providing **universal pre-school education** or parental care (e.g. Belgium, France, Sweden), success is reported in laying foundations for subsequent progress in learning (e.g. Jarousse et al, 1992). Equity gaps can however emerge (urban – rural; advantages of culturally rich, well-off homes).

Work in several countries designed to bring about **qualitative measurable improvements** in children's learning skills and attitudes is reported by Mortimore and Mortimore (1999): U.S. Cognitive Orientated Curriculum, the MEM Curriculum (Movimento da Escola Moderna) in Portugal, the Reggio Emilia pedagogical reform in early childhood pedagogy, the Te Whariki (The Woven Mat) curriculum frameworks for Maori children in New Zealand, the Baltimore (US) Success for All elementary school programme, the internationally popular Reading Recovery schemes devised by New Zealander Marie Clay, and the numerous US compensatory education projects, are among a very large number of efforts in many countries to lay the foundations of school learning for all. In France, as in other countries, priority education areas have been declared for primary and secondary schools and provided with additional resources to improve student performance (OECD, 1996b). Such schemes have often not enjoyed the success anticipated for them and are being refined to better define 'disadvantage' and extend the range of policy instruments to cover the multiplicity of socio-economic-educational difficulties.

A successful community-based Canadian multicultural educational policy in Ontario, which recognises the needs of equity groups involves the Human Rights Commission, special interest groups and education authorities, and results in and numerous local projects (Connelly, 1999). Progress in the decade since the UNESCO Jomtien conference, Education for All, is being monitored and will be reported with international examples of successful approaches in Dakar in April 2000 (Skilbeck, 2000). Several consortia and networks of American institutions target improvements in the quality and relevance of teacher education. Through their major role in the initial and continuing education of teacher higher education institutions are able to have a very significant impact on the performance of schools at all levels.

The 1998 National Forum on Early Childhood Education in Ireland provides a comprehensive overview with reference to policies and programmes in several countries designed to strengthen basic learning skills, cognitive and social development (e.g. France, Netherlands, UK, USA). Membership of the Forum by high level academics is a visible demonstration of the contribution higher education expertise can make to policy



directions and programmes for the pre-school and early childhood years. There is a particularly strong emphasis on the role of early childhood education in meeting the needs of disadvantaged and minority groups and children with special needs (Coolahan (ed), 1998). Bearing in mind that the 'educational chain' is only as strong as its weakest link (Cochinaux and de Woot, 1995), strengthening the traditionally weak link of pre-school learning does bring benefits (Sylva and Moss, 1992).

In the words of the director of secondary education in Belgium (Flanders), it is not as if policy makers and educators are unaware *"of the specific needs of under-represented groups"* (Hostens et al, 1999). What is needed is the **spirit of innovation** to inspire and guide pupil-centred teaching and, the development of tools for learning. The long term reform policies of the 1990's, to raise overall educational quality and standards in countries like Australia, France, New Zealand, the UK and the USA among others, have focused on: clearly defined performance criteria in setting standards for students, teachers and schools; improved teacher education; well structured content in a core curriculum; inclusiveness, with adaptations to learner capabilities; student motivation and active learning; the expectation that all students will succeed and continue in education; wider use of the new technologies; monitoring, evaluating and reporting of results; extra support including funding for disadvantaged groups; and improved school management working plans.

### 5.2.2 Upper secondary education – general and vocational: continuing growth and development of learning opportunities for all

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#### Objectives:

- *Foster consciousness of discrimination and inequitable practice and develop competence to deal with them among teachers and administrators;*
- *Actively foster capacity and interest of all students to continue learning;*
- *Provide all teachers with opportunities and incentives for inservice education and professional development;*
- *Achieve a better integration of programmes and requirements arising in different parts of the transition process to ensure a smooth passage; bring tertiary level academics and students/ school teachers/ administrators closer together;*
- *Actively encourage inclusive practice for equity groups at the pre-tertiary stage.*

Improved curricula, teaching methods and classroom organisation were the target of major reform initiatives in the 1960's and 1970's (OECD, 1989; Papadopoulos, 1994). More recently, attention has turned to the overall performance of schools – the effective schools and quality schools movements (Caldwell and Hayward, 1998). Disadvantaged and 'at risk' students are the target of **'inclusive'** policies and programmes.

Increasing school retention rates in many countries mean that much longer and more diverse bodies of students are completing upper secondary and/or vocational preparation. At the same time, significant numbers are under-performing – failing and dropping out. They tend to come disproportionately from lower socio-economic groups and to be male. Since it is at this stage that access to tertiary education looms large as a potential next step, particular attention must be given to transition: successfully completing appropriate courses; development of positive attitudes towards continuing study; counselling and educational guidance and financial support for the needy; and close school-higher education links. Several countries have taken steps to improve the school-university interface through visits, open days, access courses and so on.

Increasing and/or clearing the **pathways in school that lead to tertiary education**, including closer links between academic and vocational paths and recognition of vocational qualifications for tertiary entry, are facilitating access (Grubb, 1999).

Several countries have **reformed upper secondary schooling, providing multiple routes into tertiary education**. *“Most important in this connection [in addition to general expansion] is... the general development and structure in upper secondary education, in the sense that all youth [in Norway] now has the right to have three years’ upper secondary education, this level no longer representing a barrier seen from geographic or social points of view. The path for all students having chosen vocational alternatives in secondary school has been broadened. Our experience up to now (which relates only to two age groups) shows ... more pupils in the vocational courses and an increased rate of them preparing for further studies”* (Levy, 1999). There is similar experience in Sweden. France has increased the range of *baccalaureats* and study lines giving access to universities; in several countries vocational pathways now lead into higher education.

**Liaison programmes** as in Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the USA, help to give tertiary teachers and administrators a better understanding of practice in secondary education and improve secondary teachers’ specific knowledge of the requirements of tertiary education. The need for institutions to market themselves in a competitive environment has, as one effect, greatly improved information and outreach policies. Policy makers can set directions. The State of Georgia in the US sets as a policy target: *“deep, rich partnerships with elementary and secondary schools by initiating and supporting ... dynamic and sustained pre-college programs, and other projects throughout the institutions...”* (Board of Regents, Georgia, 1995).

**Innovatory programmes and types of institutions** are provided in many countries to address the universal problems of attrition: at the upper secondary school stage, beyond the compulsory years. The Danish Production Schools, of which there are 108, are an example. Although designed primarily to capture the interest and develop the capabilities of low performing students, and to facilitate entry to the labour market, they also serve to steer students who otherwise most likely would fail or dropout, towards continuing education (Moeller and Ljung, 1999).

Although **higher education** has some direct **roles** in ‘strengthening the educational chain’ in the early years including pre-school and especially in teacher education, training health professionals, social workers and others, its more obvious and direct relations are with secondary, and especially upper secondary, schools. It has a very definite interest and commonly a quite direct role in shaping or influencing upper secondary curricula, in examinations, in the education of secondary school teachers, in school-higher education liaison including career guidance, and in a variety of special access and transition programmes including those for under-represented groups. While it is not evident that equity has generally been a major feature in the performance of these liaison roles some institutions, for example the post 1992 universities in the United Kingdom, have been very active.

**‘Good practice’ at the institutional level** includes: the appointment of school liaison officers; open days that don’t only advertise the wares on offer, but demonstrate joint projects; readiness to participate in developing more flexible examination and assessment requirements relative to entry into higher education and provide access courses and special tutoring; the participation by tertiary level students in mentoring programmes in secondary schools for under-represented groups; and the joint development with schools of courses designed to achieve more balanced participation at the tertiary stage. Liaison between tertiary and upper secondary education is also being achieved by tertiary level courses in upper secondary schools (France, New Zealand), by innovative cross-sectoral universities teaching technical and further education sub-degree courses (Victoria, Australia) and by the establishment in universities of special units for running partnerships with schools (UK).

Structural, curricular and pedagogical reforms, for example in France, Sweden, and other Scandinavian countries demonstrate the practical possibility of **diversifying pathways into higher education beyond the traditional academic route**. The combination of work and study – as in the Australian work experience programme in years 10–12 – the recognition of experiential learning for assessment purposes and the collaboration effected among high schools, technical colleges, employers and unions, is proving a valuable means both to increase retention rates and link school and employment.

The **reform of end of school examinations** – which have been used as much to screen out as to help students and tertiary institutions make sound course choices – is a necessary part of policies aimed to facilitate transition to tertiary studies by under-represented groups (Ferrer, 1998; Greaney and Kellaghan, 1995; Pascoe et al, 1997). Since the two alternative basic principles governing entry to higher education (access by right to holders of specified qualifications and selection of entrants by institutions) are ‘deeply anchored in national traditions’ – and not readily susceptible to change (Commission of the European Communities, 1991) – and the reforms of secondary school examinations has often proved extremely difficult – the ‘gateway’ to higher education requires close and careful attention. In the UK, decades of attempts to reform university entrance through modifications or alternatives to ‘A’ levels illustrate the difficulty, although recent reports suggest that the General National Vocational Qualification and National Vocational Qualification routes will be increasingly popular. How examination results are handled for access purposes is also important and a good case can be made for weighting results in favour of particular equity groups. The Irish Higher Education Authority has made such a case in proposing reform of the points system (Higher Education Authority, 1999).

**Mentoring** programmes for under-represented groups are being developed whereby tertiary students help upper secondary school students to prepare for tertiary studies, as in the Historic Black colleges in the USA. In a South Australian Study of special access schemes for disadvantaged students, the development of long term relationships between university and schools with a high concentration of disadvantaged students was seen as a key factor (Ramsay et al, 1998).

**Adaptations and support** - Learning targets for under-represented groups aimed at fostering an interest in and readiness for tertiary level education will continue to be set. But it is not only specific targeted programmes that can be of value to under-represented groups. Overall, the literature in highly developed countries supports democratic, participatory, community-linked decision-making, more localisation of curriculum and pedagogical decisions to adapt to the specific attributes and needs of individuals and groups of students, and support for all students to improve educational standards and quality through curriculum reform and a variety of measures to enhance teacher professionalism.

Large scale reforms over several decades in France have resulted in **more inclusive forms of upper secondary education** that have greatly increased opportunities to continue in secondary education (*Ministère de l'éducation nationale, de la recherche et de la technologie, 1999 Juin*). The diversity of tertiary level programmes in France and many other countries is extremely important in providing avenues for students who might typically regard tertiary education as ‘not for me’. Hence the importance of upgrading institutions that, historically have been ‘post secondary’/ ‘technical’/ ‘vocational’ – yet are actually or potentially operating at quite advanced levels - so that they become part of the tertiary education pathway system.

**Admission policies and procedures** are being modified to give recognition to prior learning. Practices include adding points to test and exam scores for under-represented groups, and modifying tests and exams to cover a broader range of knowledge and competence. These are assisting in access but their implications

for continuing progress in studies are not always thought through. Conditions which enhance and foster progress in studies are just as important.

Following its study of access and equity, the **Council of Europe** (1993) **recommended**, *inter alia*: (1) that admission procedures should recognise the different starting points and cultural backgrounds of applicants; (2) that access routes be widened, with acceptance by universities of alternatives to conventional secondary school leaving certificates; (3) credit for experiential learning; (4) provision of bridging courses; (5) greater transparency, simplicity and efficiency of admissions criteria and their application; (6) positive measures to encourage applicants from diverse cultural and social backgrounds.

Success in improving overall access to tertiary education has been accompanied by numerous measures directed at under-represented groups. However, universities generally have been reluctant to pursue innovative ways of selecting and recruiting students. Continuing relatively lower levels of access by traditionally under-represented groups indicate the need to pursue better focused access strategies including those for the strengthening and further development of pathways in upper secondary education (OECD, 1997c, 1998a). Further strengthening of vocational education and training can enhance equity for under-represented groups, by opening up more access routes (Lamb et al, 1998). Alternatives to over-reliance on traditional exams might include greater use of school principals' recommendations (Moses, 1999), and the provision of flexible enrichment programmes aimed to increase interest in study and raise the competence levels of under-represented groups (the origin of the US Magnet Schools aimed at blacks to build up cultural capital, but now popular with middle class whites). Although manipulating entry criteria for under-represented groups is widely practised (quotas, bonus points etc), some commentators object to the quality and efficiency trade-off that is involved, and prefer to see resources devoted to improving competence (Barker, 1999). This criticism raises the more general issue of affirmative action and the importance in policy making of insisting that public institutions in a democracy play a role in advancing diversity and striving for fairness in the face of disadvantage (Tierney, 1997). Innovations in recruitment are a feature of American higher education. They include for example delegating to certain alumni the right to make pre-offers on behalf of the university in certain regions or districts and dyadic offers, that is to both mothers and daughters as a way of increasing their chances of success (Pascoe, 1999).

Recognising that administrative arrangements and institutional complexities can be, albeit unintentionally, intimidating and negatively discriminatory, many countries are paying closer attention to **enrolment procedures**. They are being made far more user friendly and transparent, less culturally biased. Strengthening procedures and orientation programmes for students with special attention to 'non-traditional' students is a role that institutional administrators can readily play. Reviewing all arrangements and documents for stereotyping/negative discrimination is another.

Strengthening **girls' interests and capabilities in non-traditional male domains** has for several decades been the subject of policy making and projects and there has been a considerable degree of success in several countries. A short list of 'strategies that work' for girls' education was prepared by UNICEF in 1992. Drawn from the needs in developing countries where – by contrast with, for example, the OECD and European Union countries, girls are still severely under-represented at the school level - these strategies have wider interest. At the school level, as discussed in chapter 4 above, it is not the issues of enrolment and overall success, but the opportunities and encouragement to progress in fields where they are under-represented in tertiary education that are now the major targets especially among OECD countries. The UNICEF strategies, *mutatis mutandis*,

can be teased out and elaborated to focus on the specific issue of the cultures of school, family and community that continue to sustain negative stereotyping of girls' and women's roles, education and career paths: 'Nine strategies that work in advancing girls' education: (1) Local schools closer to communities; (2) Promote hiring of female teachers; (3) Lower costs to parents (make school attendance more affordable); (4) Develop relevant curricula; (5) Increase community participation; (6) Promote localisation and decentralisation; (7) Promote advocacy and social mobilisation; (8) Design systems that accommodate the needs of female students; (9) Support multiple delivery systems' (UNICEF, 1992).

Students entering higher education cannot be assumed to be 'ready'; **attrition rates** being very high **during and at the end of first year**, there are benefits to be gained from **concentrating support services** at this stage: smaller (rather than larger) classes, tutoring, more individualised study programmes, greater use of assessment for feedback, and provision of well-equipped centres. Hence the importance of 'the first years' (OECD, 1998a).

### 5.2.3 The first years of tertiary education and academic progression

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#### Objectives:

- *Foster consciousness of discrimination and inequitable practice and develop understanding and competence to deal with them, through: academic fields of study, professional development opportunities for academics and university administrators, and research programmes;*
- *Ensure appropriate access arrangements for under-represented groups, and bridging courses, study programmes, tuition guidance, flexible assessment practices, welcoming entry arrangements, financial and other support to meet the needs of members of under-represented groups who may be 'at risk';*
- *Provide an inclusive and accessible physical environment, supportive higher education community, inclusive curricula, teaching and learning practices and institutional ethos;*
- *Reduce dropout and failure rates to a minimum and foster a capacity and willingness in all students to continue study;*
- *Establish appropriate staffing structure, roles and responsibilities to ensure equity objectives are met, including support services, monitoring and evaluation;*
- *Integrate policy relating to under-represented groups into all aspects of the institution; ensure their views are represented in planning and decision-making;*
- *Include in teacher education courses and courses for other relevant professions, specific attention to the needs of groups under-represented in higher education*

The **transition period**, extending from upper secondary and into the initial experience of tertiary education, provides higher education with many opportunities to increase participation by under-represented groups and their likelihood of success in studies.

Study and learning clinics e.g. on a faculty-by-faculty basis to strengthen and enrich learning, are recommended (Webb, 1993). The Free University in Brussels provides one example of a thriving, well-supported and used student tutorial and resource centre, in its science faculty.

**Strengthening prejudice-free and equity conscious education** is happening in the re-development of general education programmes in American colleges and universities. Changes are being made in curricula to include women's studies, ethnicity and social class studies, human rights and democracy studies, to raise consciousness and reduce prejudice. These developments are now common in American, Australian and Canadian universities. Girls are being assisted to make positive choices for traditional male subjects, and boys for traditional female subjects, as in computer and engineering programmes targeted at girls ('Girls and Data' programme at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim exemplifies this trend) and nursing and primary school teaching at boys.

**Non-university higher education institutions** across Europe are playing a major role in providing a wide array of practical programmes picking up on the vocational pathways in upper secondary education (e.g. Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway, Scotland and Sweden). The great diversity of institutions and providers in the US ensures a multiplicity of pathways in the tertiary sector. Providing a wider range of qualifications, more flexible curricula and more experimental and technical courses are seen as strategies e.g. in Spain, France, UK, as ways to assist students for whom long, expensive study regimes are inappropriate.

Universities are making **special provision for students with a disability** and have demonstrated that most disabilities are no barrier to higher education success (USA, Australia). In the wake of the Australian government's Disability Discrimination Act 1992, Australian universities are being encouraged to develop institutional action plans (e.g. McCracken and Murfitt, 1999). Producing and publicising regular reports on progress towards achieving equity-related teaching and learning goals helps to produce an institution-wide commitment to equity.

Providing **good services for orientation, subject choice and career guidance** and improving linkages between academic-guidance-and service personnel are widely recognised as helpful in providing successful study conditions. The difficulties facing many students in making a successful transition from secondary to tertiary education, or re-entering education after a long absence are well known. They have caused system and institutional authorities to devise numerous and varied programmes to ease the transition, assist students in making sound study choices and provide guidance and support to ensure, as far as possible, successful continuance of studies (OECD, 1998a). However, continuing very high dropout and failure rates indicate that many of these measures are still not working well enough: indicating a need for institutions to pay still more attention to identifying and meeting the needs of particular groups of 'at risk' students (Moortgart, 1996).

**Financial issues** arise in moves to improve under-representation (see section 5.1.8 above). Many, but not all, equity measures entail additional costs. In a period of heavily constrained public resources, there is a premium on high quality management and financial acumen (Skilbeck and Connell, 1998). It is proving difficult, due to the growing prevalence of performance criteria based on research output and academic excellence, to **redistribute resources** in favour of 'non traditional' students who often require intensive tutoring. This means individualised and small group work, frequency of contact and specialist teachers and learning resources – all costly items. Equity considerations are at stake when needy students are deprived of these while other students with already strong cultural and educational backgrounds are further supported. The resource balance between honours year/postgraduate study and the first years raises issues that are quite difficult. Strong public policies help in ensuring that such balances are being addressed, e.g. the Australian national equity programme (DETYA, 1999).

There is increasing interest in direct financial support to meritorious but needy students, as an effective instrument for increasing their participation and success in higher education. Loans, by contrast, have been strongly criticized for high default rates, heavily subsidised interest rates and higher administration costs (Eiseman and Salmi, 1995). The Council of Europe has recommended financial targeting on the basis of need (instead of academic performance) and many countries have either adopted or are moving in this direction (Kivinen and Hedman, forthcoming). Subsidies of various kinds are extensively used, notably in Continental Europe, to assist students: student health services, discounted travel, tax benefits, meals and canteen and so on. These all assist needy students but do so indiscriminately when not means tested. The Australian Government policy has moved increasingly towards a system that targets the needy (see also section 5.1.8

above). On the one hand there is the income-contingent Higher Education Contribution Scheme whereby tuition fees are not charged until employment earnings reach a certain level and then through the tax system, with different levels of repayment according to course costs and putative earning capacity; on the other hand, there is income support for those on very low incomes and a substantial programme of Indigenous peoples' support funding. All are treated as financial equity strategies by government (Karmel, 1999).

Governments are coming to accept the argument that there is a marked prospective pay-off to a degree for the individual in a highly subsidised higher education system (Williams, 1996, 1997) but it is politically easier to provide incentives for equity performance than to reduce blanket subsidies. High levels of subsidy where there can be private sources of funds without hardship (e.g. families) have been consistently criticised by OECD, the World Bank and others as inequitable and inefficient.

The **increase in private provision** is raising interesting equity questions, notably in Eastern Europe where students enter publicly funded institutions on academic criteria, or private institutions on financial criteria. Criticised by experts in the course of the Council of Europe study (Wimberley, 1999) this is a feature of other systems, too, where academic merit may be rather nominal whereas ability to pay may be the real factor in gaining entry – at least to an institution of choice: a double disadvantage to equity groups. Nonetheless, private providers are increasing the number of available places in higher education and volume growth is a contributory equity factor.

This is not the place to go deeply into the details of the international debate on **funding – distribution of costs**. The field is replete with devices and strategies: in the Compendium of Examples of the Council of Europe study is a story about Chelyabinsk University in Russia, which runs a crammer for students preparing for entrance examinations, the profits from which go to assist disabled and rural students. In the words of Council of Europe official, James Wimberley, *“Chelyabinsk is heart-warming because if you can do something on access in a post-Soviet industrial slum, you can do it anywhere.”*

There are in the history of higher education other, perhaps less idiosyncratic, trade-offs. The public universities in the American states, founded a century and more ago, under Land Grant national legislation, accepted an obligation to give wider access in exchange for the grant of land (El-Khawas, 1999), i.e. a financial incentive that worked.

**Financial arrangements play a crucial role in advancing or inhibiting equity** – not least for mature age, part-time students who, under arrangements common at present, are frequently disadvantaged – and their impact must be fully considered in determining specific equity policies and evaluating their effects. It is not at all easy to ensure that subsidies, however well intentioned and indeed necessary, will succeed in their purpose of advancing the most needy. Tax credits, assisted housing, free tuition, subsidised services and other devices have been habitually put to best effect by those well endowed with cultural – and economic – capital, thus widening the equity gap. This criticism has been directed at what is potentially a major step towards greater equity, namely tax credits as part of the US proposal for universal public education beyond high school to years 13 and 14. But, well targeted financing (e.g. facilities for the people with a disability; funded equal opportunity units and programmes; scholarships for indigenous peoples; additional per capita funding for demonstrated equity gains) will continue to play an important role in equity strategies.

#### 5.2.4 Careers in higher education: recruitment and advancement

##### Objectives:

- *Improve recruitment procedures to draw in more applicants from under-represented groups;*
- *Provide an accessible physical environment and inclusive institutional ethos;*
- *Facilitate career progression and advancement for under-represented groups;*
- *Develop an 'inclusive climate' in staffing policies; build equity performance into staff appraisal;*
- *Establish appropriate staffing structures and define roles and responsibilities to ensure equity objectives are met, including monitoring and evaluation;*
- *Provide leadership, support and publicity to develop an equity-positive environment.*

**Successful and promising actions** in the recruitment and career advancement of under-represented groups reported in the Australian government equity documents and in the literature more generally include:

- *Establishing targets to improve recruitment of under-represented groups and their career advancement;*
- *Ensuring full compliance with legislative and policy requirements regarding equal employment opportunity, with a regular reporting procedure on success rates against recruitment targets;*
- *Establishing and supporting equal employment officers and offices;*
- *Reducing the tendency to cluster women, particularly in short term, limited time- contract posts at the most junior levels.*
- *Encouraging women and other under-represented groups to consider career advancement to the highest levels as a normal aspiration; drawing on existing women's networks and support groups and helping establish new ones;*
- *Ensuring fair distribution of academic duties to overcome tendency to weigh teaching unduly heavily in allocation of duties to women;*
- *Fostering and developing networks, study circles and staff groups, whereby various under-represented groups (e.g. ethnic minorities, disabled) can gain encouragement and develop competence and opportunities through mutual support;*
- *Setting goals or specific targets to improve the balance of under-represented groups in particular categories and levels of staff and monitoring rate of achievement;*
- *Paying particular attention in staffing committees on tenure and promotion to conditions affecting performance of all groups under-represented in higher levels of appointment;*
- *Providing for flexible employment arrangements: part-time appointments; shared jobs; flexitime;*
- *Ensuring adequate provision of facilities e.g. creches for infants, special arrangements for disabled/ handicapped staff to perform their duties;*
- *Giving greater weight to teaching and community focused responsibilities in promotions and job appointments for academic staff.*

In those countries where there have now been several decades of active campaigning by women's groups in education, a **strong legislative programme and active policy-making by public authorities**, together with institutional provision of facilities, there have been good results. Women – although much less so other equity groups – are coming to occupy a wide range of responsible and senior positions. The stage is set to move forward through more effective monitoring and evaluation and more finely tuned methods of getting results. There is no shortage of policy frameworks, ideas, recommendations and there are very active movements to advance causes; these are well reported in the literature. Other under-represented groups can be targeted to receive the encouragement and support now advocated and increasingly given to women.

It is useful, perhaps necessary, **to extrapolate from the career experience of women and the research** on this topic, to other groups. Indeed, there is very little documented research, analysis, policy discussion or even reported anecdotal evidence on the career advancement of other equity groups by comparison with the large volume on women. Several studies attempt to draw together the categories of women, socio-economic



class and, to some extent, ethnicity; there is a separate and growing literature on disability which may be expected to develop further as the number of staff members and career aspirants with disabilities increases.

Burton (1991; 1997), whose career embraced policy making, administration and research, proposed a **set of actions** which from her experience and studies offer most promise. These can be applied to other equity groups:

- (a) *Set specific employment equity goals and monitor performance accordingly;*
- (b) *Continue to build and strengthen institutional equal opportunity programmes;*
- (c) *Redeploy resources to include provision for continuing professional development of targeted groups;*
- (d) *Actively engage women in decision-making, at all levels;*
- (e) *Redesign jobs to ensure gender neutrality in specifications and performance expectations and requirements;*
- (f) *Redesign (or design) evaluation procedures to capture sex stereotyping, discrimination etc.*
- (g) *Alter traditions and habits of thought. (Burton, 1991; 1997)*

Burton called for ‘a radical **restructuring of our perceptions**, let alone our practices’ [emphasis not in original]. Her argument was that the weight of established structures and customary attitudes was such that a new wave, beyond legislative reform and the by-now familiar framework of institutional devices, is needed. But as to how this might best be achieved, Burton left an open question. There appears to be little research evidence on this in the equity literature, but there are anecdotal reports which suggest that these follow rather than precede structural and operational changes for which strong leadership is needed.

In England, Powney (1997) spoke from the perspective of a successful and prominent woman academic, in setting forth ways women themselves can participate in actions to **improve career entry and development**:

- (a) *Strengthen women’s preparation and training;*
- (b) *Set about eliminating systemic bias in the culture and language of the institution;*
- (c) *Accept a step-by-step method of progress moving from one target to the next;*
- (d) *Work hard, persist;*
- (e) *Learn from others, seek mentors;*
- (f) *Learn the rules of the game; play them;*
- (g) *Promote oneself and seek out opportunities;*
- (h) *Be aware of sexism – and keep a sense of humour.*

These can be **extrapolated to other equity groups**, under-represented in higher education career pathways. Many writers have emphasised the value of networks in providing role models and support, team work, sharing and delegating as ways of nourishing a **more inclusive culture** (King, 1997). Strategies for institutions include transparency over recruitment, precision in job specification, and objective criteria in selection, awareness of and response to the requirements of sex discrimination and race relations legislation, appointment of an equal employment officer, introduction of flexible working arrangements, equal opportunity audits and regular reporting procedures, providing guidance to institutions in developing equal opportunity policies, monitoring and target setting (The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals in England and Wales, 1991; the Hansard Society, 1990). A number of specific provisions have been proposed; several with industrial and terms of contract implications; Sweden has been one of the leading countries in their implementation. They include non-discriminatory career breaks in recognition of personal and family needs, workplace nurseries, parental leave and enhanced maternity leave, job sharing and working at home. Many of these recommendations and procedures have been widely albeit unevenly adopted across OECD countries in the 1990’s. As indicated above (chapter 4), there is a sense that more subtle barriers and influences have now emerged to take over from the more obvious ones.

In the United States, a high status **national body** has played a role in spearheading change and providing information and advice – the Office of Women in Higher Education of the American Council of Education. A representative, professional organisation, the Office has helped institutions interpret legislation and regulations, and run programmes for aspiring women leaders (the National Identification Program for the Advancement of Women in Higher Education Administration). Now titled the National Network for Women Leaders in Higher Education, this body operates in each state with state planning committees, and organises panels and fora, conducts seminars, mentors, publishes and links with other bodies. The increasing percentage of women leaders (heads) especially in public colleges and universities testifies to the success of such endeavours as these: 1975 – 5%; 1996 – 16% (cited by Eggins, 1997).

Many commentators stress the importance of **understanding power relations**. In an interview-based study of senior women at the University of Costa Rica ('an oasis in a machista society' [male dominated]) Twombly (1998) drew attention to the electoral system for deans and department heads which, in faculties where women were in the majority (even if in lowly posts), there were excellent prospects of success for them. Moreover, where departments were strong and faculties weak, women might gain advantage in parts of an otherwise male-dominated faculty. Note was also made of the designation of some posts as 'for women' e.g. vice-rector for academic affairs. Other strategies available for either systems or institutions or both is to establish professorships in women's studies (Kaipainen et al, 1999) and to earmark post doctoral fellowships and similar career enhancing programmes for women. There are many innovations under way to help build a base of appointees and increase the visibility and influence of senior women while at the same time contributing to curriculum development and the institution's research profile. Promotion of policies, being seen, taking a very active part in the management and the day-to-day operation of the institution, and keeping up a flow of information including monitoring, are all stock-in-trade of equal employment officers (Levin, 1999).

While the actions directed at women staff are comprehensive and have enjoyed both publicity and success, serious disparities remain. Institutions seem to have given far less attention to other under-represented groups in their recruitment and personnel policies and, as already noted, this is an under-developed research and policy field. It would be a real contribution to equity were the lessons from the women's movement to be applied to other groups with the necessary modifications, monitored, evaluated and reported. Care is required over **possible backlash**: equity means fairness for all and policies and programmes which are directed at under-represented groups do run a risk of over-statement and over-zealous application, leading to negative backlash. There are lessons to learn here from the women's movement.

### 5.3 Future Equity Directions for Higher Education

At its simplest, most basic level, achieving greater equity in higher education is a matter of **extending opportunity to participate and progress and using all possible, ethically sound means to do so**. Widening opportunity for and in higher education has many benefits in strengthening democracy, achieving economic and social progress, advancing human rights, and improving the efficiency, quality and performance of the educational system. These matters are no longer in serious dispute. The task is to concentrate on ways and means, on improving data, evaluation and follow-through.

The expansion, broadening and diversification of higher education is one path to follow. The other is the hands-on encouraging, assisting and enabling of all who can benefit and contribute, whether as students, staff or both. A stronger, better evaluated knowledge base, greater clarity of purpose, and an increased readiness to consult and negotiate, are needed in policy making and implementation, alike.

A fair chance for all is a continuing goal which is realisable progressively, provided the different characteristics, needs, aspirations and circumstances of all the under-represented groups are well understood and well responded to. No less important, members of these groups have a responsibility to define their needs and interests and assist in their realisation in practice. Partnerships, collaborative measures, a sense of shared interests and common effort, and a readiness to reflect critically but constructively on progress achieved and gains yet to be made will continue to yield results. Although higher education alone cannot achieve all this, its roles can be strengthened to include a closer integration with the education system as a whole and partnerships with other social sectors.

The intellectual tradition to which higher education proudly adheres is the source of ideals, standards and procedures which are as pertinent to the quest for equity as the pursuit of academic excellence. The challenge is to bind them inextricably together as the enterprise of higher education inexorably expands and develops.

**All must contribute if policies are to be effective: individuals, institutions, governments, policy makers, special interest groups and those sections of government departments and specialist agencies that have a direct interest in or responsibility for equity in education in all its forms.** The leadership role of institutional executives has been mentioned, but what of politicians, especially ministers and education and equity committee chairs, and what of the intermediary bodies responsible for funding, quality appraisal and steering? Since the various equity movements are still well short of achieving their stated educational objectives – and this means, *inter alia*, that the objectives of national educational policies both general and sectoral are not being fully met – there must continue to be initiatives from several different quarters.

Monitoring and ensuring compliance – and doing so with full effect – is a necessary and important role for agencies but compliance is not just a matter of bureaucratic efforts to enforce rules and regulations. A more inspirational, encouraging, challenging and supporting role needs to be performed. These are leadership responsibilities which fall within the competence and remit of the system-wide, policy making, regulating, compliance environment.

**Better monitoring, more evaluative, analytical and transparent studies of the conditions affecting performance and the results of interventions, and greater visibility** to the ways in which different areas of higher education policy are intermeshed will all help. They are valuable instruments and procedures to mobilise in order to provide public policy makers, agency officials and staff in institutions with the means to take a stronger leadership role and show initiative. They can thereby contribute to producing a more equitable higher education environment than exists now.

There are consolidated lessons on good practice to be drawn from the literature and experience surveyed in this report. Allowing for the limitations of data, the controversies and the distinctive requirements of particular groups and specific settings, we conclude with a set of propositions of wide, general applicability across the broad field of equity in higher education.

Construct and implement comprehensive, coherent policies addressing the full range of higher education equity issues; Set these higher education policies in the context of the lifelong learning chain, from early childhood to mature adulthood;

- *Ensure that there is appropriate and adequate legislation and regulatory procedures with firm compliance measures;*
- *Have well developed procedures for setting targets, implementing, regularly monitoring and evaluating equity performance;*
- *Use financial instruments both system-wide and within institutions to recognise and encourage good practice;*
- *Work closely with the school system, community and professional bodies in well co-ordinated and targeted strategies to improve opportunities for under-represented groups;*
- *Ensure staff, physical resources and finance are adequate for the task, appropriately deployed to meet the targets that are set and comply with legal and regulatory requirements;*
- *Develop curricula and procedures for teaching and learning, assessment and student progress that meet equity goals including specific 'at risk' groups;*
- *Make full use of incentives, staff training and other forms of encouragement and recognition to bring about a strong institution-wide commitment to equity;*
- *Have observatories and procedures to identify and work systematically on major barriers, bottlenecks and problem areas;*
- *Mobilise staff and students to raise consciousness, improve knowledge and understanding, counter prejudice and gain publicity for equity achievements;*
- *Strengthen research, data and information capabilities, and resources, and use them in regular reports;*
- *Ensure that equity policies, programmes and issues regularly feature in strategic planning and the exercise of institutional governance, management and leadership;*
- *Be creative, thoughtful and energetic in developing and supporting inclusive cultures in higher education institutions;*
- *Periodically review and evaluate equity strategies at all levels, and establish mechanisms to modify approaches appropriately in light of experience.*

But who is to do all this? Individual teachers and researchers will need to look beyond their disciplines to the moral purposes of education. Institutional administrators and leaders will need to provide encouragement and support for a wider vision than research outputs and specialised scientific and professional training. It is for public authorities and governments to provide the resources and ensure that the necessary policies and frameworks are in place. It is only through shared responsibility and concerted action that there can be further progress towards a more equitable system of higher education.

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## Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs

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### Educational Profiles

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During annual educational profiles discussions between the Department and Australian institutions, an assessment of higher education institutions for the purpose of allocating Commonwealth funding is undertaken. Operating grants are determined on the basis of the total number of Commonwealth-funded student places that an institution is expected to deliver in a given year, taking into account the discipline and level mix of an institution's provision. Institutions are also expected to meet a minimum undergraduate student load.

#### Educational profiles comprise

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- a statistical return covering teaching activities and student load;
- a quality improvement plan;
- an equity plan;
- an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education strategy; and
- a capital management plan.

The information provided allows a review of an institution's performance in achieving previously agreed objectives and forms a basis for assessing the resources needed by the institution. Funding provided to institutions is based on this process and allocations are published in an annual funding report. This report is an important element in the public accountability of the higher education programme.

#### Higher Education Equity Programme

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Commonwealth policy on equity in higher education was spelt out in 1990 in the document *A Fair Chance For All: Higher Education That's Within Everyone's Reach*. To give effect to this policy, the Higher Education Equity Program promotes equity objectives in higher education as an integral part of institutional planning and provision.

#### Equity Plans

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An equity plan forms part of each institution's educational profile on which Commonwealth funding is based. In these plans, institutions set targets and strategies for increasing the participation of, and achieving successful outcomes for, disadvantaged groups. Since 1995, institutions have used standard definitions and equity performance indicators to report progress in achieving targets for access, participation, success and retention for each equity group. Equity funding is determined by the Commonwealth on the basis of performance against equity targets.

#### Funding

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Funding for equity is provided to publicly funded higher education institutions.



Institutions are expected to use their equity grants to improve access and participation for the following disadvantaged groups:

- *people with a disability;*
- *people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds;*
- *women (in postgraduate courses and non-traditional areas of study);*
- *people from non-English speaking backgrounds; and*
- *people from rural and isolated areas.*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are also an identified equity target group. Separate funding arrangements exist to support participation by this group.

As part of the **Higher Education Equity Programme**, funds are provided on a submission basis under the **Disability Initiatives Programme** (DIP) for projects that will enhance opportunities for students with disabilities in higher education.

Year 2000 Funding - A\$5,047,000 – Higher Education Equity Programme;  
A\$ 594,000 - Disability Initiatives Programme (see below).

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#### **Merit-based Equity Scholarships Scheme**

In 1997, a system of merit scholarships was introduced to encourage the participation of equity groups, however, the scheme failed to meet the programme objectives, and will be phased out from 2000. No new scholarships will be awarded but a number of existing scholarship holders will continue in the system.

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#### **Disability Initiatives Programme-Guidelines 2000**

Since 1991, funds have been provided by the Commonwealth through the Higher Education Equity Programme (HEEP) to assist in the development of projects to benefit Higher Education students with disabilities. HEEP funding is determined under the Higher Education Funding Act 1998 and the Act, therefore, is the legislative authority that allows for these guidelines. Such funds were formerly used to fund the Cooperative Projects for Higher Education Students with Disabilities (CPHESD) scheme. From 1999 funds for projects have been allocated directly to universities through the Disability Initiatives Programme (DIP) on a submission basis.

The Programme is administered by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. The total amount available for allocation in 2000 is \$594,000.

### Purposes of funding

Funds are provided to assist the development of cooperative projects that encourage cross-institutional arrangements and projects involving cooperation at the State and national levels. Priority will be given to projects of national significance, that is, those that are likely to provide useful outcomes for, or inform, the sector as a whole, and to projects involving more than one university or education sector. Each project must be conducted under the auspices of a higher education institution.

Funds are not provided as an adjunct to the general operating grant for the provision of support services for individual students at particular institutions.

- *Some examples of appropriate projects which could be considered for funding under DIPare:*
- *research projects on issues of common concern e.g assessment of students with specific learning disabilities, support needs of students with psychiatric disabilities;*
- *development of a national clearing house or website to enable the sharing of information and resources concerning the education of students with disabilities;*
- *production of promotional materials such as videos, brochures and seminar materials to enhance the disability awareness of students, parents, school counsellors etc;*
- *production of professional development seminar materials and training packages for staff involved in teaching students with disabilities;*
- *establishment of central information agencies to supply advice to students, parents, support providers, employers;*
- *development of resource materials such as:*
- *guidelines for alternative examination arrangements;*
- *guidelines for modification of particular facilities such as science laboratories or libraries to enhance access;*
- *advice on enhancing job seeking skills for graduates;*
- *guidelines on presenting assignments in alternative formats;*
- *manuals of technological aids available and their use;*
- *employment of an Regional Disability Liaison Officers (RDLO)s (see below for duty statement).*

### Regional Disability Liaison Officer duty statement

In consultation with disability officers in each institution, RDLOs may undertake the following duties:

- *a liaison with TAFE (Technical and Further Education) and higher education institutions within the region to form a central information source on courses and support services available for students with disabilities;*
- *participate with State/regional level tertiary education disability networks;*
- *consult with secondary school liaison officers;*
- *provide information to non-school leavers with disabilities via other providers of disability programmes such as the Department of Family and Community Services;*
- *liaise with community organisations and other bodies as appropriate.*



14 April 1999

Circular Letter 21/99 [edited extracts]

To Principals/Directors of Higher Education Institutions funded by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council

### Interpretation of Wider Access and Key Principles

The Council regards the widening of access to HE by under represented groups as a key priority for the higher education sector in Scotland, and is committed to providing long term support to help institutions achieve this, aim. In promoting the widening of access, the Council seeks to combat social exclusion and promote an inclusive higher education system which will meet the needs of the economy for a highly skilled workforce.

The aim of widening access should be to increase the participation of all groups that are currently under represented in higher education. Socio-economic disadvantage is a major cause of under representation in Scottish higher education, and it is therefore appropriate that one of the main uses of wider access development funding should be to increase the participation of people from Social Classes III, IV and V. Nevertheless, the Council wishes to promote a fully inclusive and integrated approach to widening access. For this reason, the Council is also keen that development funding should be allocated to support institutions in taking forward initiatives such as those intended to increase the participation of people with disabilities, as well as the participation of women in science, engineering and technology and the participation of black and ethnic minority people in teacher education. (Cf. Section A 1.6 of the Council's Corporate Plan which identifies the need to take account a range of factors, including economic status, age, gender, ethnicity, disability, and geographical location when promoting equality of access to higher education). Whilst it will be appropriate for initiatives to focus upon particular aspects of widening access, it should be recognised that people from one disadvantaged group may also be part of another group and so experience multiple disadvantage. Care should therefore be taken to avoid the compartmentalisation of people into discrete or mutually exclusive groups. Additionally, in developing an initiative targeted at one particular group, care should also be taken to ensure that that it does not militate against the participation of other under represented groups.

The Council's key principles in supporting the widening of access are summarised below.

- **Added value and co-ordination** - The Council's aim in widening access is to add value and promote co-ordination at institutional, regional and national levels.
- **Inclusion and integration** - In supporting wider access, the Council wishes to promote an inclusive approach to higher education which is characterised by the complementary development of institutional strategies and specific initiatives.
- **Progression and support** - Widening access should be about more than simply increasing the number of students from under represented groups going into higher education. It should also be concerned with ensuring appropriate student support and progression.

- **Partnership** - Widening access in higher education should involve the establishment of effective partnerships with other sectors and agencies, including further education colleges, schools, community-based organisations and local authorities.

## Wider Access Development Funding

### Section A: Wider Access Development Grant

**Overall aim:** To promote co-ordination and add value to institutional, regional and national strategies to increase the participation of people from under represented groups. The three priority areas for development are a) the development of the FE [Further Education]- HE [Higher Education] interface to facilitate the smooth transition of students between the two sectors, b) the development of links between HEIs [Higher Education Institutions] and schools and c) the development of links between HEIs, FE colleges and community based organisations (including local authorities). The grant comprises four main strands (FE-HE Interface, Institutional Development and Co-ordination, Regional Fora and Selective Funding).

**Total Funding:** £1.6M pa.

#### Strand 1: Development of FE-HE Interface

It is widely recognised that the further education sector has a pivotal role to play in widening participation in post- compulsory education. It is also well established that the social **profile** of the student body in further education is much broader than that in higher education. For these reasons, the Council considers the removal of barriers at the interface of the two sectors to be an important means of widening access in higher education institutions. Across Scotland, there are numerous examples of good practice in enabling the smooth transition of students between the further and higher education sectors. However, it is also apparent that such practice is not uniform, and that there are a number of barriers (eg curriculum fit and student support issues) which currently inhibit progression.

- **Objective:** To identify factors which impede the smooth transfer of students from FE to HE and to identify and implement solutions.
- **Content:** Two phases, with first phase comprising secondment of two individuals to form a small consultancy team; one from FE, one from HE. The remit of the consultancy team will be to undertake an analysis of provision which is at the interface of both sectors with a view to identifying barriers currently inhibiting the smooth transfer of students to HEIs and identifying a series of measures to remove these barriers. Phase Two will be concerned with implementing the recommendations of the first phase.
- **Funding:** Up to two years; approximate funding of £70k in AY 1999-00, £180k in AY 2000-01.

## Strand 2: Institutional Development and Co-ordination

### Institutional Policy Development

The Council takes the view that widening access is an issue which should be addressed by all institutions, although it recognises that some institutions will perceive this to be closer to their core mission than others. The Council wishes to encourage institutions to take a strategic approach to widening access. Although particular departments within an institution may be particularly active in developing wider access initiatives, the Council wishes to encourage senior management to consider the role of the institution as a whole in widening access.

The Council has agreed that all institutions should have a clear policy statement which sets out how the institution intends to increase the participation of under represented groups in higher education. In order to avoid duplication of process, it is considered appropriate for the strategic planning process to be the vehicle by which such statements are produced. **It should therefore be noted that the strategic plans to be produced for AY 1999-00 and subsequent years should incorporate a section which meets this requirement and which details general institutional progress in the development of strategies to widen access.**

- **Objective:** To support co-ordination of access development at an institutional level
- **Content:** Institutions are invited to submit bids to enable the appointment of a development officer to take forward initiatives which correspond to SHEFC priority areas.
- **Funding:** Up to four years; approximate funding of £500k pa.

## Strand 3: Regional Fora

### Nature of Fora

Having consulted with a range of groups, it has become apparent to the Council that there would be significant merit in providing a means by which institutions within the same region could share information and, over time, agree complementary approaches to widening access within the region. The Council is pleased to note that some institutions have already begun to take steps in this direction, and now wishes to support such activity on a national basis. The Council therefore wishes to establish four regional fora, the purposes of which will be to:

- *enable the systematic exchange of information on current institutional developments in terms of widening access, with a view to maximising the potential for complementary provision within the region; and*
- *provide a mechanism by which collaborative initiatives and funding proposals may be developed.*

**Participation in one of the regional fora is a condition of grant for receipt of any strand of Wider Access funding.**

The Council wishes institutions to assume responsibility for the establishment and operation of the fora taking into account the following requirements.

- *There should be no 'lead institution'; in order to promote impartiality each forum should be chaired on an*

annual rotating basis by a senior management representative of one of the member institutions or an agreed third party.

- Each institution should nominate an individual at senior management level to attend the forum, as well as the SHEFC-funded Development Officer (or equivalent post).
- Consideration should be given to a means by which the voice of other bodies (such as schools, FE colleges and local authorities) can inform the discussions of the forum. However, care should be taken to ensure that the operation of the fora does not become unwieldy. This might be achieved through adopting a 'reserved' and 'unreserved' protocol, or restricting the number of non-HEI members to two or three.
- **Objective:** To establish a network of regionally based fora in order to assist institutions to develop complementary and collaborative strategies.
- **Content:** Participation in one of the four regional fora will be a condition of receipt of any strand of the Wider Access Development Grant.
- **Funding:** £ 160k in first two years, with potential for increase thereafter

#### Strand 4: Selective Funding

Council has decided to allocate selective funding to institutions or consortia which can bring forward proposal for initiatives which will promote the strategic development of links with schools, FE colleges and community-based organisations (including local authorities). Bids received from a non-HE institution will be required to have full backing and support from higher education institutions and will be expected to use the allocated funding to provide additional value to the current range of access provision, as opposed to using the funding to maintain existing initiatives. Proposals may be for one particular project, or may cover a suite of complementary initiatives and should seek to achieve a significant increase in the capability of the institution/consortium to widen access.

- **Objective:** To selectively support initiatives which will take forward the development of SHEFC priority areas,
- **Content:** Institutions are encouraged to form inter-institutional and consortia partnerships
- **Funding:** Up to four years; total funding of £750k.

#### Contribution to other National Initiatives

In addition to the above strands, the Council will retain a limited budget to support Scottish or UK- wide initiatives which are of relevance to widening access.

#### Section B: Part Time Course Development Grant

- **Objective:** To allocate funds selectively to support the development of part-time undergraduate provision which will appeal to people who are unemployed or who are on low incomes. In particular to:
  - (a) support continued development of courses for delivery in AY 2000/01;
  - (b) support development of appropriate central services for part-time study;
  - (c) off-set delivery costs of low initial take up of place in AY 1999/00 and/or 2000/01

**Total Funding:** £0.5M pa for AY 1999/00 and approximately £0.3M for AY 2000/01

Table C3.3 Net enrolment in public and private tertiary education for individuals 17-34, 18-21, 22-25 and 26-29 years of age, by type of tertiary education (based on head counts) (1996)

	AGE 17-34			AGE 18-21			AGE 22-25			AGE 26-29		
	Non-university tertiary education	University - level education	Total	Non-university tertiary education	University - level education	Total	Non-university tertiary education	University - level education	Total	Non-university tertiary education	University - level education	Total
Australia	5.1	9.9	14.9	8.4	22.9	31.3	5.5	9.2	14.7	4.1	5.1	9.3
Austria	0.8	8.9	9.7	2.6	13.5	16.1	1.7	15.0	16.6	x	8.8	8.8
Belgium	6.1	6.3	12.3	20.0	19.6	39.6	6.7	8.7	15.4	2.2	1.8	4.0
Canada	6.9	10.0	16.9	17.3	23.1	40.5	7.3	14.6	21.9	3.7	5.4	9.1
Czech Republic	1.1	5.8	6.9	3.6	13.3	16.9	0.5	7.9	8.3	n	2.1	2.1
Denmark	1.1	10.0	11.1	1.0	7.5	8.5	2.2	21.2	23.5	1.2	10.8	2.1
Finland	2.8	11.8	14.6	4.8	13.3	18.2	5.6	23.2	28.8	1.8	11.8	13.6
France	x	x	13.9	x	x	36.0	x	x	18.6	x	x	4.4
Germany	1.3	8.1	9.4	2.9	7.9	10.8	1.7	15.5	17.2	1.9	9.8	11.8
Greece	3.5	8.0	11.5	10.1	29.3	39.4	4.6	5.3	10.0	1.0	1.0	2.1
Hungary	a	7.4	7.4	a	13.4	13.4	a	9.0	9.0	a	2.8	2.8
Iceland	1.4	7.3	.7	0.8	6.7	7.5	3.3	17.9	21.3	1.4	5.6	7.0
Ireland	m	m	m	x	x	31.4	m	m	m	m	m	m
Italy	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
Japan	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
Korea	4.3	9.4	13.7	15.1	25.6	40.7	4.2	13.2	17.4	0.7	3.0	3.7
Luxembourg	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
Mexico	x	4.1	4.1	x	6.6	6.6	x	6.1	6.1	x	2.0	2.0
Netherlands	a	10.7	10.7	a	24.0	24.0	a	19.2	19.2	a	5.4	5.4
New Zealand	3.2	9.5	12.6	6.1	23.3	29.4	3.3	10.5	13.8	2.3	4.8	7.1
Norway	4.1	9.3	13.4	8.7	10.3	19.0	6.2	18.6	24.8	2.4	8.1	10.5
Poland	1.9	9.4	11.3	5.5	15.8	21.2	2.2	16.4	18.5	x	x	4.2
Portugal	2.4	8.1	10.5	5.2	14.2	19.3	3.5	12.5	16.0	1.1	5.0	6.1
Spain	0.3	12.5	12.8	1.0	26.3	27.3	0.3	19.4	19.8	n	6.2	6.2
Sweden	x	9.9	9.9	x	13.7	13.7	x	17.9	17.9	x	8.0	8.0
Switzerland	3.4	4.6	8.0	2.4	5.1	7.6	6.1	9.2	15.3	3.5	3.8	7.4
Turkey	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
United Kingdom	2.0	7.3	9.4	4.7	22.2	26.9	2.2	7.2	9.4	1.4	3.4	4.8
United States	6.0	10.2	16.2	12.9	21.7	34.6	7.4	14.0	21.5	3.8	7.3	11.1
<b>Country Mean</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>11.2</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>15.2</b>	<b>23.2</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>16.9</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>6.8</b>
<b>WEI Participants</b>												
Argentina	3.4	9.0	12.3	7.0	15.4	22.4	4.0	12.8	16.8	1.8	6.5	8.3
Brazil	x	x	3.6	x	x	6.1	x	x	5.3	x	x	2.3
Indonesia	1.4	m	m	2.3	5.9	8.3	2.4	m	7.1	1.1	m	3.0
Jordan	1.6	5.7	7.2	5.8	19.4	25.2	n	1.6	1.6	n	x	x
Malaysia	3.5	1.8	5.2	11.4	5.0	16.4	2.8	2.4	5.2	0.2	m	0.2
Paraguay	0.6	m	m	1.5	m	m	1.0	m	m	m	m	m
Philippines	1.9	7.7	9.6	m	18.7	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
Uruguay	1.6	7.1	8.7	3.1	8.2	11.3	2.3	11.5	13.8	1.0	7.6	8.6

Source: OECD Education Database. See Annex 3 for notes.

Key: m = Data not available.

x = Data included in another category/column of the table.

n = Magnitude is either negligible or zero

a = Data not applicable because the category does not apply.

**Table C4.2a** Net graduation rates in university-level education by type of programme (1996)

	Non-university tertiary programmes			Short first university degree programmes (e.g. US Bachelor's)			Long first university degree programmes (e.g. German Diplom or Italian Laurea)			Second university degree programmes (e.g. US Master's)			Ph.D or equivalent		
	<b>(A)</b>			<b>(B)</b>			<b>(C)</b>			<b>(D)</b>			<b>(E)</b>		
	M + W	Men	Women	M + W	Men	Women	M + W	Men	Women	M + W	Men	Women	M + W	Men	Women
Australia	m	m	m	35	28	43	x	x	x	12.7	11.8	13.7	0.9	1.1	0.6
Austria	m	m	m	a	a	a	9	10	9	n	n	n	1.3	1.7	0.8
Belgium (Flemish Community)	24	19	30	a	a	a	16	17	16	4.9	4.5	5.4	0.6	0.9	0.4
Canada	44	47	42	30	25	35	x	x	x	4.5	4.4	4.6	0.7	1.0	0.5
Czech Republic	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
Denmark	8	10	6	19	14	25	7	8	7	4.2	4.3	4.2	0.7	0.9	0.4
Finland	17	11	23	9	9	9	12	11	14	x	x	x	1.8	1.9	1.7
France	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
Germany	m	m	m	a	a	a	m	m	m	a	a	a	m	m	m
Greece	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
Hungary	a	a	a	x	x	x	22	18	25	m	m	m	m	m	m
Iceland	14	13	15	16	11	21	8	7	10	1.1	1.1	1.1	n	n	n
Ireland	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
Italy	m	m	m	x	x	x	11	11	12	m	m	m	m	m	m
Japan	m	m	m	m	m	m	x	x	x	m	m	m	m	m	m
Korea	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
Luxembourg	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
Mexico	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
Netherlands	a	a	a	x	x	x	21	19	23	10.4	10.9	10.0	1.8	2.2	1.4
New Zealand	16	11	21	24	20	28	7	6	7	12.2	12.6	11.8	0.6	0.7	0.5
Norway	47	40	55	22	15	29	6	6	6	9.4	10.2	8.6	0.9	1.2	0.6
Poland	10	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
Portugal	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	n	n	n
Spain	m	m	m	11	8	13	15	12	17	m	m	m	m	m	m
Sweden	4	3	4	11	6	16	8	8	7	3.0	2.5	3.6	2.0	2.6	1.3
Switzerland	m	m	m	a	a	a	m	m	m	a	a	a	m	m	m
Turkey	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
United Kingdom	11	9	12	33	31	35	x	x	x	11.3	11.0	11.7	1.1	1.5	0.7
United States	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
<b>Country Mean</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>0.7</b>

**Source:** OECD Education Database. See Annex 3 for notes.



**Table C4.2b** Ratio of tertiary graduates to population at the typical age of graduation (times 100) by type of programme and gender (1996)

	Non-university tertiary programmes			Short first university degree programmes (e.g. US Bachelor's)			Long first university degree programmes (e.g. German Diplom or Italian Laurea)			Second university degree programmes (e.g. US Master's)			Ph.D or equivalent		
	<b>(A)</b>			<b>(B)</b>			<b>(C)</b>			<b>(D)</b>			<b>(E)</b>		
	M + W	Men	Women	M + W	Men	Women	M + W	Men	Women	M + W	Men	Women	M + W	Men	Women
Australia	m	m	m	36	29	43	x	x	x	12.2	11.2	13.1	0.8	1.0	0.6
Austria	5	2	7	a	a	a	10	11	10	a	a	a	1.3	1.8	0.8
Belgium (Flemish Community)	28	24	30	a	a	a	16	17	15	4.9	4.5	5.3	0.7	0.9	0.4
Canada	57	58	56	32	26	37	x	x	x	5.1	5.0	5.2	0.8	1.1	0.5
Czech Republic	6	4	8	3	3	3	10	10	10	x	x	x	0.3	0.4	0.1
Denmark	8	10	6	20	15	26	8	8	7	4.4	4.4	4.3	0.6	0.9	0.4
Finland	19	13	26	11	11	10	13	12	15	x	x	x	1.9	2.0	1.8
France	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
Germany	11	9	13	a	a	a	16	18	14	a	a	a	1.6	2.2	1.0
Greece	5	5	6	x	x	x	13	11	15	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.2
Hungary	a	a	a	x	x	x	22	18	26	2.5	2.8	2.2	0.1	0.2	0.1
Iceland	13	13	13	15	11	20	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
Ireland	16	17	15	14	12	16	11	12	10	4.5	4.6	4.4	0.6	0.8	0.5
Italy	3	2	4	1	1	1	12	11	13	1.2	1.3	1.1	0.1	0.2	0.1
Japan	30	18	43	23	31	15	x	x	x	1.9	3.1	0.7	0.4	0.7	0.1
Korea	20	18	22	26	29	22	x	x	x	3.2	4.5	2.0	0.5	0.9	0.2
Luxembourg	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
Mexico	x	x	x	x	x	x	12	12	12	m	m	m	m	m	m
Netherlands	a	a	a	x	x	x	20	18	21	10.0	10.4	9.5	1.9	2.3	1.5
New Zealand	16	11	21	24	20	28	7	6	7	12.1	12.6	11.7	0.6	0.7	0.5
Norway	50	42	58	22	15	29	6	5	6	9.3	10.1	8.4	0.9	1.1	0.6
Poland	10	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
Portugal	6	4	9	2	1	2	14	10	18	1.5	1.4	1.6	n	n	n
Spain	2	3	2	11	9	14	15	13	17	x	x	x	0.9	1.1	0.8
Sweden	4	4	4	11	7	16	8	9	7	3.0	2.5	3.6	1.9	2.6	1.2
Switzerland	26	36	17	a	a	a	9	12	7	a	a	a	2.9	3.9	1.9
Turkey	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
United Kingdom	12	10	13	34	33	36	x	x	x	12.3	12.0	12.7	1.1	1.4	0.7
United States	22	18	27	35	31	39	x	x	x	12.5	11.7	13.4	1.2	1.4	0.9
Country Mean	15	14	17	13	11	14	9	9	10	4.4	4.4	4.3	0.9	1.2	0.7
<b>WEI Participants</b>															
Argentina	10	5	15	a	a	a	6	5	7	m	m	m	m	m	m
Brazil	x	x	x	x	x	x	10	8	12	0.4	m	m	0.1	m	m
Chile	10	9	10	4	4	3	6	6	7	0.9	1.1	0.7	n.	n.	n
China	7	m	m	2	m	m	x	m	m	0.1	m	m	n	n	n
Indonesia	3	3	3	6	7	5	x	x	x	m	m	m	m	m	m
Jordan	9	5	13	11	11	12	2	1	2	1.4	1.7	0.9	n.	0.1	n.
Malaysia	12	12	12	4	4	4	n	n	n	0.8	0.6	1.0	n	n	n
Paraguay	4	2	6	1	1	1	2	2	2	m	m	m	n	n	n
Philippines	18	19	17	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
Thailand	10	12	8	7	7	8	m	m	m	0.8	0.9	0.8	n.	n.	n.
Uruguay	4	3	4	a	a	a	7	5	8	m	m	m	m	m	m

Brazil: Data refer to 1995. Russian Federation and Thailand: Data refer to 1997.

