

Achieving Equity of Access To Higher Education In Ireland: The Case of Travellers

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The Case of Travellers

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This study contains the results of two separate, but connected, studies on the access and provision for Traveller students in education in Ireland:

- A review of existing policy documentation pertaining to Traveller education provision in Ireland contained within Chapter 1 of this document
- A qualitative research study profiling Travellers who have accessed third level education which sought their views on existing provision and on possible developments of places for Traveller students contained within Chapter 2 of this document

The two studies provided a basis for the comprehensive recommendations regarding achieving equity of access to higher education in Ireland, and for developing a best practice model for academic support for Traveller students contained within Chapter 3 of this document.

Chapter 1, Travellers and education in contemporary Ireland, focuses on the existing policy context of access and provision for Traveller students. It provides a short review of developments in policy from the 1960s to the present. It further examines the current situation of Travellers participating in third level education in Ireland and acknowledges the forthcoming National Traveller Education Strategy. Current available statistics of Travellers accessing the education system are detailed. Lastly, this chapter provides a case study of existing Traveller education initiatives at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

Chapter 2, Empirical findings: 'They're looking for big words and I don't have big words', contains the results of a qualitative research study which used semi-structured interviews to profile Travellers who have accessed third level education. The key research questions were how best can representation of Travellers be increased at third level in Ireland? and how best can Travellers be supported prior to entering, and during third level education? Qualitative insights from successful third level candidates were sought to illuminate best practice for ways of increasing access for Travellers to Irish third level institutions. There are sections on ethnicity, literacy and study skills, prior educational experiences, peer support, motivation for attending third level, non-academic support and institutional considerations. Results from this study give a broader needs analysis for Travellers seeking to access third level in Ireland and serve to inform and guide support interventions in the future. It concludes that while much has been achieved, further measures need to be taken at national and institutional levels to increase the numbers of Travellers accessing third level education.

Chapter 3, Summary of recommendations for increasing Traveller representation in third level, contains comprehensive recommendations at national, institutional and micro levels to inform the development of a best practice model to enhance access of Travellers to third level and provide ways of supporting them effectively.

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chapter 1

Travellers and education in
contemporary Ireland

Travellers and education in contemporary Ireland

Policy context

Education policy in relation to Traveller children has developed significantly since the late 1960s. At this time there was a growing awareness within the education system of the need to provide for, and encourage participation by, Travellers in the school system. An example of this is *Educational Facilities for the Children of Itinerants* (1970). The range of measures to promote inclusion has developed over time and has to some extent reflected a broader concern within the educational community about dealing with educational disadvantage.

An intercultural approach & recognition of cultural rights

In line with other rapid fundamental shifts in Irish society in recent times (including immigration resulting in a more culturally diverse society and the acknowledgement of the need to tackle internal racism), Travellers have been recognised as a minority in the *Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community* (1995) and as having a distinct culture, tradition and history. The White Paper on Education: *Charting our Education Future* (1995) published in the same year demonstrates a shift in educational policy and practice as well. The policy aim is now to recognise cultural diversity through educational provision guided by the 'promotion of quality, equality, pluralism, partnership and accountability' (1995: 3). The need for Travellers to be assimilated into the dominant culture of non-Travellers has now been recognised as inappropriate.

The current policy of the Department of Education and Science (DES) states that Traveller culture must be taken into account in the educational system. Examples of this include *Guidelines on Traveller Education in Primary Schools* (2002); *Guidelines on Traveller Education in Second-Level Schools* (2002) and *An Evaluation of Pre-Schools for Travellers* (2003). Processes and procedures are also being put in place to encourage greater Traveller parental involvement in the education of their child. The broad policy approach is now to place Traveller children in age appropriate, integrated classes but this has met with protest, with some members of the general population withdrawing their children from schools that had enrolled Traveller children. National Traveller movements, such as the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) and Pavee Point, however, are concerned that despite the government advancing an integrationist approach, in practice many schools now withdraw Traveller children from class for learning support with Resource Teachers for Travellers. While this service is undoubtedly valuable, Traveller organisations are raising concerns about how this service is utilised.

The current situation of Travellers participating in third level

It should be recognised, however, that participation by Travellers remains low and that increased participation will only take place with additional supports and financial resources. At the present time, third level education is not a possibility for the vast majority of Travellers. Travellers who complete second-level education and go on to further education, gain from that experience but, without ongoing support, risk losing their Traveller identity and being set apart from their family and friends. The financial costs of further and higher education are also prohibitive for most Traveller families and those who

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have availed of third level education have only been able to do so because of voluntary support and grants which were made available. It is hoped that the forthcoming National Traveller Education Strategy will consider these issues and key policies will be implemented to improve Traveller participation in third level education.

The forthcoming National Traveller Education Strategy in 2004/05

Following the publication of *Traveller Health - A National Strategy 2002-2005* (2002), the development of an innovative National Traveller Education Strategy by the Department of Education and Science through the Advisory Committee on Traveller Education (ACTE) and the Educational Disadvantage Committee during 2004/05 is very timely. The implementation of a holistic strategy will place the education of Travellers higher on the government's agenda of priorities than ever before. The development of such a strategy is to be further welcomed because it acknowledges long-standing recommendations advocated by Traveller development organisations including the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) and Pavee Point who have long called for such a comprehensive strategy.

Many of the recommendations for education put forward in the last key report on Travellers, the *Report of the Taskforce on the Travelling Community* (1995) have yet to be implemented. It would be appropriate for this new education strategy to be devised on the core principles outlined by the Taskforce Report which are equality of opportunity (so that Travellers can aspire to third level education), anti-discrimination, acknowledgement of, and respect for, cultural diversity and multi-ethnicity, affirmative action, integration and interculturalism. The key challenge for a National Traveller Education Strategy is to ensure equality of outcomes for Travellers. The problems have been long standing and persistent and it must be recognised that many causes of inequalities in education cannot be influenced by the education sector alone. The potential for academic success is also limited by poor accommodation factors, compounded with health-related issues, social discrimination, institutionalised racism and prejudice.

Current data collection and ethnic identification

While the Census of Population 2002 included a self ethnic identification for Travellers for the first time, any exact evaluation of Traveller participation in education at all levels is still hampered by a lack of independent and up-to-date statistical data. Currently no statistics are compiled by higher education institutions, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) or the DES on the ethnic background of entrants to higher education at all but Traveller participation is believed to be just over 1%. According to the 2002 Census, of 13,680 Irish Travellers aged 15 years and over, only 197 recorded that they had completed a third level qualification (1.4%). This compares to 21% of the general population, but this figure should also be seen in the context of Central Statistics Office (CSO) data which shows that only 2% of Travellers have completed senior cycle at second level, compared to 23% of the general population for all age groups. For Travellers not to remain invisible to policymakers, accurate data must be gathered.

Due to the youthful nature of the Traveller population (for example, the 2002 Census recorded 23,681 Travellers nationally, accounting for 0.6% of the population and, of these, as many as 63% are under 25 years compared with just 37% of the general population), it is important that data on Travellers completing their Leaving Certificate and participating in third level education are gathered so that progression rates are monitored and that policy developments can be informed by accurate data. This study considers the development of a system of confidential self ethnic identification an essential part of the widening participation agenda in third level so that the National Office of Equity of Access to Higher Education can monitor, evaluate and review widening participation by Travellers (as well as other minorities) in third level.

Table 1 Latest available Traveller education statistics

Resource Allocation	Number(s)
National Education Officer for Travellers	1
Resource teachers for Travellers	476
Visiting teachers for Travellers	40
Traveller pre-schools	51
Special schools for Travellers	3
Junior education centres for Travellers	6
Second-level schools in receipt of extra teaching hours	130
Senior training centres for Travellers	28

Source: Department of Education and Science, Dublin (September 2001)

Statistics compiled by the National Traveller Education Officer in the academic year 2002/03 clearly demonstrate that equity of access and equality of outcomes are not being achieved:

- 5500 Traveller children attended primary schools
- 1608 Travellers attended post-primary schools (only 40% of all Traveller children of post-primary age)
- 51% of Traveller pupils attended to Junior Certificate level, while the comparable retention rate for the general population was 94%
- 62 Traveller pupils attended sixth year post-primary
- 16 Travellers attended third level in 2002 (estimated by visiting teachers).

These statistics suggest that the main objective of any Traveller Education Strategy should be to ensure equity of access and outcomes in education at all levels for Travellers comparable to the general population. To achieve this aim such a strategy must contain targets to improve the educational status of Travellers which must be agreed to, and implemented by, those delivering education to Travellers. These must be consistent with other targets concerning Travellers contained in the National Action Plan Against Poverty and Social Exclusion (2003-05) which is that each third level institution will double the participation by mature disadvantaged students, including Travellers and Refugees by 2006 (within the 15 per cent quota).

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Recommendations

Evaluation of current the educational status of Travellers

- It is necessary for a comprehensive quantitative study of the current status of Traveller education to be conducted at all levels. The current survey being undertaken by the DES at primary school level for the forthcoming National Traveller Education Strategy is welcomed.
- It is welcomed that the recently established National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education intends to agree mechanisms for gathering data on ethnic backgrounds of higher education entrants as a matter of urgency and set quantitative and qualitative access targets for Travellers to the end of 2007.
- Whilst this study acknowledges the significant progress made in the pre-school, primary and post-primary areas of education of Travellers to-date, the statistics above indicate that much work remains to be done in the area of adult education and Travellers progressing to higher education and more focus and resources are required at these levels.

A case study of Traveller education initiatives at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick

While much of Traveller education policy surveyed earlier focuses on young Travellers at the pre-school, primary and second level stages of their education, much of the work to date at Mary Immaculate College is primarily focused on mature Travellers. However, the College acknowledges that focusing on the educational achievement and outcomes of younger Travellers in the policy area will have significant long-term benefits of third level uptake by Travellers in the future.

Much of the work Mary Immaculate College is already involved in concerns some of the priority areas identified by the Advisory Committee on Traveller Education (ACTE) which are necessary to address in the forthcoming National Traveller Education Strategy These are:

1. Second-chance/adult education initiatives for Travellers;
2. The role of community development and community-based education initiatives in Traveller education;
3. Traveller cultural awareness and sensitivity training for pre-service teachers

Second Chance/Adult Education Initiatives for Travellers: The Moving On Project

Mary Immaculate College receives funds through the Higher Education Authority's Strategic Initiative programme and, in 1997, some of these funds were used to establish the Learner Support Unit (LSU). The LSU looks at the difficulties confronting adult learners, including Travellers, who may have had negative experiences of education in the past. The Unit provides a support service to overcome these barriers to encourage lifelong

learning. In association with the Director of Adult and Continuing Education at the College, the Learner Support Unit (LSU) has developed a part-time MIC Gateway bridging course, Foundation Certificate: Higher Education, which has open access. This is for adult students who wish to continue their education with a view to progressing to higher education.

It is hoped that this Gateway bridging course will have participants from the Traveller community in the near future as it has already attracted members of the refugee community. However, due to the lower educational achievement, to date, of Travellers, the Learner Support Unit has recently set-up a special initiative called Moving On to specifically target Travellers and widen their participation.

Eventually, the Learner Support Unit would like to develop peer-led initiatives, such as the training and appointment of Travellers who have attended third level, as learner support workers and/or mentors because they would provide good role models. This approach has proven to be beneficial in helping Traveller students gain confidence to sustain their studies and meet with success.

Role of community development and community-based education initiatives in Traveller education

The Moving On Project specifically aspires to raise awareness around existing opportunities and progression routes into third level for Travellers by liaising with Traveller development groups and community-based education providers, including Limerick Travellers Development Group and Limerick County Vocational Education Committee (VEC). The overall objective is to establish an active cross-sectoral regional network of interested parties to promote access by Travellers to higher education.

Pre-university programme

Recently the Learner Support Unit created another progression pathway between second and third level, in addition to the MIC Gateway bridging course, in partnership with other community-based education providers and non-profit organisations, to encourage Travellers to consider participating in third level (as no Travellers have had access to date). Limerick County Vocational Educational Committee (VEC) and the non-profit organisation, West Limerick Resources have linked with the College's Learner Support Unit to deliver a pilot outreach pre-access course in Newcastle West, West County Limerick, to target adult learners, especially adult Travellers and Traveller parents living in this rural area, which commenced in the Academic Year 2004/05. One of the towns in West County Limerick, Rathkeale, is unique as it has the highest percentage of Travellers living in the Mid-West region and is located in the immediate catchment area of the College. The VEC provides tutors, resources and education facilities in the community. The Learner Support Unit provides a training programme for tutors and the academic writing components of the course. The course will also have an on-campus dimension at Mary Immaculate College so that students on the course will be able to familiarise themselves with the culture of a higher education campus which the College considers to be significant for students in deciding to continue with their studies. Multi-modal delivery of

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this course through outreach and on-campus work will clearly have positive aspects. This course is accredited by Mary Immaculate College and students who are successful will be awarded a certificate which will allow them to enter the MIC Gateway bridging course, Foundation Certificate: Higher Education. Additional incentives will be exemptions from the Information Technology components of the Foundation course if students have gained satisfactory proficiency during the pre-access stage.

Recommendations

- *Sharing of resources by forging cross-sectoral partnerships*

This study recommends active partnerships between higher and further education to secure financial and other resources and use them more efficiently and effectively, for example, off-campus classroom facilities and teachers, and use of computers to ensure equality of outcomes in education for Travellers.

- *Accreditation of courses*

Third level institutions should consider accrediting courses delivered by Vocational Education Committees and promote transferability within the education system. Pre-access programmes could be developed and third level curricula could be evaluated to ensure they are relevant for Travellers.

- *Development of multi-modal delivery of third level courses*

The development of multi-modal course delivery would facilitate access to third level for Travellers and would include distance learning, off-campus provision (in association with other community based educational providers such as VECs and community development and non-profit organisations), as well as on-campus provision.

- *Establishing active regional inter-sectoral committees*

This study recommends establishing active regional cross-sectoral committees with other agencies working with Travellers to promote participation of Travellers in third level, for example, Travellers/Traveller Development Groups, VECs, other agencies such as FÁS, local authorities, youth services, county and city development boards and other non-profit development groups in the immediate catchment area of third level institutions.

- *Linking with the National Qualifications Framework*

All existing initiatives need to be placed within the developing National Qualifications Framework being devised by the National Qualifications Authority so that existing resources will be optimised to promote the most socially inclusive way forward. It is

also important to be mindful of the other issues confronting Travellers such as accommodation, health and poverty which need to be alleviated so that the educational achievement of Travellers will be comparable with the general population.

Traveller cultural awareness and sensitivity training

As a College of Education, Mary Immaculate has put in place Traveller Cultural Awareness/Sensitivity Training (which is delivered in association with local Travellers/Traveller Organisations) attended by pre-service teachers. This training delivers the principles and practice of interculturalism and anti-racism and the need to recognise the distinct culture of Travellers.

Travellers represent a minority within society and this position needs to be acknowledged in the development of policy and public awareness strategies. Traveller Cultural Awareness/Sensitivity Training which is delivered by Travellers/Traveller Organisations should be attended by all third level students. Students should be given the skills so that they can be equipped to transmit democratic values and have the knowledge and skills to implement an intercultural and anti-racist approach in their future employment roles. Students and staff need to reflect on their own values, beliefs and political views. Administrative and support staff in third level institutions who have direct contact with Travellers should also participate in such training. All policies and practices should reflect and respond to the issue of racism as experienced by Travellers.

Third level lecturers should endeavour to deliver an intercultural curriculum. The First Progress Report (2000) pointed out the need for this as a priority. This should include the principles of avoiding racist interpretation in texts, having respect for all cultures, providing information about minorities in all areas of the curriculum, focusing on broader equality and human rights issues as well as the intangible aspects of culture, including values and perspectives. The experiences of Travellers should be represented in an accurate and sensitive way as an indication that society now values the richness of cultural diversity.

Recommendations

- Provide staff development in Traveller Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity Training
- Promote an inclusive intercultural curriculum

Needs analysis of Travellers in third level

Another significant part of the Moving On Project has been to identify ways in which participation of Travellers in higher education can be increased and their learning needs be supported on the educational pathway to higher education. Data was gathered by conducting in-depth qualitative semi-structured interviews with Travellers currently participating in higher education and the empirical findings are documented in the next chapter. A further phase will see a good practice model developed to support the learning needs of Travellers.

chapter 2

Empirical findings: 'They're looking for big words and I don't have big words'

Empirical findings: ‘They’re looking for big words and I don’t have big words’

Data

Qualitative data was gathered from Travellers currently undertaking a course in an Irish third level institution, where ‘third level course’ refers to any course (for example, certificate, diploma or degree) listed by the Central Applications Office (CAO) and the Central Applications System (CAS). The composition parameters of the cohort of informants used were that at least three institutions would be represented and a gender balance of informants (as far as possible) would be achieved.

Methodology

Interviews

Twelve face-to-face interviews were conducted by a researcher using a semi-structured questionnaire (see Appendix 1). These interviews were recorded for accuracy and subsequent analysis. The profiles of the interviewees are given in Table 2:

Table 2 Profiles of Interviewees

Student	Gender	Age	Qualification Sought	Enrolment Status	Primary Education	Secondary Education
1	Female	23-30	Diploma	Part Time	7 Years	1 Year
2	Male	31-40	Diploma	Part Time	1 year	None
3	Female	23-30	Diploma	Part Time	6 Years	None
4	Female	23-30	PhD	Full Time	14 years at school for people with disabilities	
5	Male	23-30	Diploma	Part Time	7 Years	None
6	Female	18-22	Diploma	Part Time	10 Years	1 Year
7	Female	23-30	Diploma	Part Time	6 Years	3 Years
8	Female	31-40	Diploma	Part Time	2 Years	None
9	Female	23-30	Diploma	Part Time	8 Years	None
10	Female	23-30	Diploma	Part Time	9 Years	1 Year
11	Female	23-30	Diploma	Part Time	8 Years	2 Years
12	Female	31-40	Diploma	Part Time	6 Years	3 Years

Empirical findings: 'They're looking for big words and I don't have big words'

Traveller culture and its influence on education

These interviews were extremely rich in highlighting the influence of Traveller culture on approaches to education which are unique to the Irish Travelling community. Education would not always be on the top of a list of Traveller priorities. Other issues such as accommodation, health and discrimination would be given a higher priority.

Some Travellers had not completed all years of primary education due to a transient lifestyle. For example, families may have had to move from place to place so that a father could find work or move away from the site a bereavement in the family, reflecting Traveller attitudes towards death. Not all families would have come into contact with the Visiting Teacher for Travellers (VTT) Service, as it may not have been available in their school-going years (the VTT Service was created in 1980).

Traveller children went to school to be prepared for the religious sacraments of Confession, Communion and Confirmation and then left, which demonstrates the importance Irish Travellers place on religion and Catholicism.

Travellers were often placed in Traveller specific classes with varying age ranges rather than integrated classes. However, some of the younger Travellers interviewed in this study had been placed in integrated classes. Many felt that these Traveller specific classes were inferior to the mainstream classes. Even when in mainstream classes Travellers were excluded from Irish classes and were asked to do other tasks or run errands as they were perceived as having no use for Irish: *'Travellers were telling me that they weren't taught Irish either because the teachers thought that they weren't going to stay in school long anyway and weren't ever going to use it after school'*. Examples of tasks or errands completed by Travellers during Irish classes included picking up litter in the playground, tidying the staff room and running errands such as buying the teacher an apple or taking coins to the bank. However, some Travellers had completed school up to Intermediate/Junior Certificate level.

Travellers left mainstream secondary school at a much younger age to take on adult responsibilities (especially girls): *'within my community, when the Travelling girls come of age they would drop out of school and stay at home and take their mothers role at home like minding the kids, cooking and cleaning'*. Others went to specific Traveller Training Centres for a more vocational education which included cooking, needlework, woodwork, metalwork and literacy skills. However, the VEC Traveller Training Centres seemed to have a positive experience on their career progression and linked Travellers into local Traveller development/support groups, FÁS Community Employment programmes, community development work and youth work. These groups then linked into national groups, for example, National Traveller Women's Forum, Pavee Point, Irish Traveller Movement and the Parish of the Irish Travelling People.

Female Traveller teenagers after leaving school often became childcare assistants and hairdressers and tended to marry at a younger age than the general population, for example, in late adolescent years, and reared larger families. The Traveller women in this study who had children were concerned about how they would be perceived in their own community when they left their children overnight to attend a course, as children are

central to the Travelling community. Some Traveller men were not happy babysitting while their wives were studying and were not always fully supportive.

There seems to be an acceptance in the Travelling community that education is only for the young. The attitudes of parents towards education seemed to be important in terms of offering encouragement and support, for example, when doing homework at home and not asking children to take on responsibilities such as childcare of the younger children in the family.

There seems to be a prevailing attitude of low expectation in terms of educational achievement within the Travelling community and externally which 'disempowered' Travellers, for example, few family members have completed second level and attended third level (this would be similar to non-Travellers from disadvantaged backgrounds): *'there's a lot of Travellers out there that are well able for third level and they won't do it. It's this confidence thing, having the nerve to go in and that's what's stopping them'*. However, there was one positive story of an encouraging and supportive teacher bringing a child with sight problems to the front of the class to read the blackboard.

It appears that there is a low level of knowledge regarding the importance of education among the Travelling community, as often other issues such as accommodation, health and discrimination are more urgent priorities. However, the Travellers in these interviews wanted better education for the next generation, that is, their children to attend all years of primary and secondary school up to Leaving Certificate level. They also wanted to help with children's homework.

The Travellers in these interviews felt education had to become more important for the Travelling community because the economy is changing and in the 'knowledge economy' more education and skills will be needed to survive. This has relevance for the whole of Irish society but particularly for Travellers to work outside the Traveller economy.

Travellers thought that a better education would help them to speak out against issues such as discrimination which was noticed in schools from teachers and other pupils, as well as in the workplace and society. Some Travellers admitted to finding it easier not to identify themselves as Travellers in school as they were afraid of not being accepted by the non-Travellers: *'I suppose I hid who I was in the school because I was afraid the children mightn't accept me if I told them where I came from.'*

In these interviews not many Traveller children had friends from the settled community, for example, they were not invited to other children's homes after school. Many Travellers identified the need for awareness training in educational institutions for all staff and students so that self-identification could be less difficult.

The Traveller women thought more Traveller men should be involved in education and suggested the establishment of more Traveller men's groups.

The majority of interviewees stated that they tried to hide their Traveller identities in school, mostly due to a fear of not being accepted by their peers: *'I tried to hide my identity and I was trying to hide it because I would have no friends.'*

Empirical findings: 'They're looking for big words and I don't have big words'

However, this seemed to change in third level for some of the Traveller students:

'In third level I think people are bigger, they're older and they're wiser so I don't think Travellers face as much discrimination as they would when they're younger.'

Due to this, the interviewees did not try to hide their ethnicity within their peer group in the third level institution: *'I am a Traveller and I'm not going to deny that I am one and it shouldn't make a difference,'* and *'I don't feel any particular pressure from the settled people on the course. I don't feel I have been excluded or deliberately ignored because I'm a Traveller.'*

However, this may be the case within some institutions and peer groups, but it is not necessarily the case for all the Traveller students in third level: *'Racism is also about saying to somebody you're not really fit to be in my University. There are ways people will tell you and there are messages that you get about being a Traveller.'*

Furthermore, those who did not feel they are discriminated against in their institution recognise that this may not be so when it comes to seeking employment: *'I would have admitted that I was a Traveller from day one and that's fine in terms of the rest of the class ... maybe if I was going to be a teacher I mightn't be so anxious to say I am a Traveller because I think that could affect me when I go for jobs because it's not the norm. I've never seen a Traveller teacher.'*

Recommendations

- Extend the Visiting Teacher Service (VTS) to include post-secondary sector
- Promote flexibility regarding entry requirements
- Provide direct Access Programme for Travellers
- Become more flexible with the Irish language prerequisite, especially in Teacher Education Colleges
- Develop new structures to support Travellers in third level
- Create peer-led initiatives
- Develop innovative approaches
- Broaden the role of the National Education Officer for Travellers
- Establish performance indicators/targets for Travellers participation in third level
- Make courses relevant for Travellers
- Foster progression from adult education courses
- Develop education initiatives to promote greater involvement of Traveller parents/Traveller men
- Devise a long-term strategy for Traveller youth
- Develop co-ordinated inter-sectoral and inter-agency working groups

Prior educational experiences

In general, the Traveller interviewees said that they had negative experiences of both primary and secondary school (where attended) education in Ireland. This was mainly due to the fact that the students were Travellers: *'I would have faced an awful lot of discrimination in [primary] school from both the teacher and from the pupils in class because I was a member of the Traveller community'* and *'in [primary school] nobody seemed to care and as a child you couldn't put your finger on it but you just felt that I don't have to really try or have interest.'*

Furthermore, it seems that there was a lack of awareness of the importance of education, both within the family and the educational institutions, with regard to progressing from primary to post-primary education: *'It just didn't bother anybody that I never went back so I didn't get the encouragement that I probably needed to go back to school so I didn't go back'* and *'I gave up school because I couldn't keep pretending I was somebody else and I got very little support at home because my mother and father couldn't read and write.'*

Recommendations

- Make college facilities available (for example, rooms, sports facilities) when possible to Traveller groups to familiarise Travellers with the institutions
- Invite Traveller groups to open days in third level institutions
- Liaise with Traveller groups to promote positive attitudes to third level education

Empirical findings: 'They're looking for big words and I don't have big words'

Motivation for attending third level

There were varying reasons for the Travellers in the current study attending college. These include helping with the work the person is doing and increasing the wages they are paid for that work: *'I did it [going to college] because I wanted to get the understanding of community work and also the reason that you had the qualifications, you should be entitled to better wages ... you are entitled to the same level of payment as the settled people who are also working with you.'*

A desire to learn was another reason for attending college: *'I believe I missed out on third level college due to the fact that there are so many barriers preventing me from participating. This was now my second opportunity in learning so I grabbed it.'* and *'I feel that I need to get as much as skills as I possibly can. Times is changing.'*

For those Travellers who do attend third level education, there have been many benefits: *'Being in third level education does build your awareness up, it does inform you, it does help you see things from different aspects, from different angles and helps you sit back and analyse or develop the skills that you have.'*

However, there may be a fear that these benefits could be countered by the loss of the Traveller identity: *'The classroom is very focused and people are afraid of losing their own identity within that because there's nothing in it in relation to Travellers' identity, Travellers' way of life.'*

Recommendations

- Ensure courses, where possible, include Traveller culture
- Reassure Travellers, through peers, that attending third level education will not cause the loss of identity

Part-time and full-time courses

All but one of the interviewees were studying part-time. Some pointed out that this can be a problem, not just in relation to fees but also in relation to work: *'I'm the only person in my family that works so I have to keep the part-time job but I think going to college part-time is tougher than going full-time. I think it's a lot better to go to college full-time every day.'*

The benefits of taking a part-time course are not as favourable as taking a full-time course so they should be given as much recognition as full-time courses. The various government departments involved need to work together to review education initiatives.

Difference between mature and non-mature learners

All the interviewees were mature learners. There are reasons for this: *'I've only gone to third level because I've gone in as a mature student. I didn't have a formal qualification so I didn't have points to get on any course.'*

For a lot of Travellers, the only way to gain entry to college is through the mature student system: *'Unfortunately for people like myself, the only way of access is when I'm an adult.'*

Travellers as mature learners

Travellers, within these interviews, shared many of the fears and concerns regarding returning to learning that are common to mature students who have not been in a formal learning environment for a long period of time. These included for example, a lack of confidence around learning, difficulties with writing academic English, structuring essays and problems with spelling – particularly during timed examination situations. Here are some comments from the mature Traveller learners: *'I said to myself I'm not going to be able for college. I'm a long time out of school. That's the thought that was running through my mind. and 'I have to hit myself in the head sometimes just to realise that I am actually in third level education, actually even without doing a leaving cert or junior cert in school.'*

However being a mature student brings its own difficulties: *'Being a mature student is much more difficult because you have either work commitments or family commitments and getting on to college is much more difficult.'*

Third level institutions should attempt to attract Traveller students at an earlier age: *'If the colleges were interested in more Traveller children from primary and from secondary school, they would work with specific Travellers.'*

Institutions could work in partnership with the Travellers in school to set up modules to help students with college life: *'They would work with them outside their secondary school. If I wanted to be a primary school teacher, if you came to me in secondary school and set up little modules going through my secondary school in order for me to get a direct line into third level education.'*

Empirical findings: 'They're looking for big words and I don't have big words'

Recommendations

- Set up Gateway bridging programmes for mature Travellers
- Work with Travellers in school to help them gain entry to third level education
- Set up direct entry routes from school for Travellers and publicise these routes within the Travelling community

Literacy and study skills

The academic support needs of the interviewed Travellers were similar to mature students: *'I would find it difficult doing essays and stuff like that so I am in need of a bit of support around it.'*

The Travellers in this study suggested they benefited from one-to-one tutorials, group tutorials, gaining support from non-Travellers on the same course, gaining support from fellow Travellers on the course, gaining external support from outside the academic institution, from former students on the course, former Travellers on the course or others who were found to be helpful and approachable.

Traveller women share many of the problems that female mature learners experience such as finding enough time to study, as many have the responsibilities of rearing young children, running a home and working part-time: *'Because I have three young children like you're trying to keep a home. I want to work but not full-time only part-time plus then having to study in the evenings which is very hard'* and another Traveller noted: *'because I had such a young family I think if I didn't have children, I'd have more time to study'*

In general, most interviewees experienced problems with literacy in their third level education: *'The most difficult thing to deal with it was the written stuff.'*

This was seen as a barrier to completing their courses, but could be addressed by the institution: *'The level of literacy shouldn't be a barrier to third level education and where it is, it should be recognised by the colleges and support systems should be there.'*

Literacy can have an effect on the learning of the students and on the grade awarded to them: *'I know what I want to say but I can't say it because I have a literacy problem.'*

One of the effects of a lack of literacy skills is in the writing of essays for course work. However, it is not just the spelling and grammar that cause difficulties: *'In the essays I learned that the literacy might be a hindrance, it's not spelling or grammar.'*

It can also be the vocabulary needed to write an essay or the structure of the essay: *'Sometimes the structure doesn't make much sense to the person that's reading your stuff. And they're looking for big words and I don't have big words.'*

Doing exams

Exams also pose difficulty for students, especially those who have not had a full primary and secondary school education or have been out of the educational system for a long period of time: *'I think some people are good at exams and some people aren't. If you have a better background in formal education you have a better chance of being able to do exams.'*

In the exam situation, it is the time constraint as well as the literacy that can be difficult. This issue, like a lot of the issues faced by the interviewees, is not restricted to Travellers: *'I'm not very good at expressing stuff in writing in that confinement of forty-five minutes. I think some of it is linked to the fact that I didn't have a formal education as such but then I think a lot of people have the same sort of concerns.'*

Taking notes

A lack of literacy skills also impacts on the ability to take notes in a lecture: *'I never sort of learnt to write very well I always find it difficult just taking notes.'*

Understanding the language of lectures, lecturers and written handouts can also be difficult: *'The part I find very hard is some of the lecturers write down stuff in a funny way that I can't take notes from and I go home without notes.'*

In class, students can feel that the language used is not familiar and this can confuse the student: *'It's even the way people talk. I can't explain it. It's like a twelve-year-old talking to a twenty-year-old. You need to mature.'*

Learner support seminars

One way of helping Travellers and other students deal with the language they will encounter and have to use while in third level education is through literacy or academic language classes. *'Travellers who have a basic level of education should have a literacy class to support them. That needs to happen in order to keep Travellers in third level.'*

However, these classes should not segregate Travellers from other students: *'There were five Travellers in the class and we were put into a tutorial with a tutor from a Traveller organisation which the college might have thought would benefit us, but we didn't think so because this was segregation.'*

Furthermore, literacy classes should not be stand alone classes but instead built around the content of the course: *'If the literacy was built around your college homework it would be a lot easier.'*

Empirical findings: 'They're looking for big words and I don't have big words'

However, if academic language classes are provided, it is important that there is no attempt to change the way students use conversational language in everyday life. Students, including Traveller students, should not be made feel different because of the language they use: *'I've been brought up with all those little words and I'll be damned if I change them for anybody ... I can speak their way but once I go back out among my own community I'll go back to my own.'*

Debate can also take place in class about the use of language as academic vocabulary might not be needed in the work situation: *'There's no point in me coming out with fancy words [to other Travellers]. A lot of them wouldn't even understand what I was saying.'*

Furthermore, a liaison person should be available for Travellers in the institution when they want to discuss issues of concern to the student: *'Just being able to see somebody that you can talk to at times about the course who is someone from staff would be useful. It has to be encouraged for Travellers ... particularly if they're new into the system.'*

Some further points were made in the interview data. One is that academic literacy difficulty is not confined to the Travelling community: *'I didn't understand that it was the same for everyone in the class. Everyone had to learn this system of the structure of the essay.'*

Another was that support did not mean doing the work for the student: *'I don't want anyone to do my work for me. If I can't do it myself it's not mine so it's no good to me. But I would like support to be put in place for people like me to look at what we need to learn, what we need to be studying.'*

Clearly, complementary education services such as academic learning support and computer training for Travellers would be beneficial and could be provided by the learner support units of third level institutions to develop Traveller education and skills.

A liaison person should be employed to promote places for Travellers in third level and to encourage greater uptake of third level education. Extra personnel should also be provided in third level to specifically support Travellers in learning and training at that level. Travellers who have attended third level should be trained and employed as learner support workers.

Recommendations

- Make the status of part-time courses comparable with full-time courses
- Provide complementary educational services such as academic literacy classes
- Provide study skills modules on how to read academically, take notes, organise time, study, revise and do exams
- Provide complementary financial resources
- Provide pre-course modules to prepare the students for college
- Do not segregate Travellers from the rest of the class
- Provide a liaison person for the students

Course selection

In the current study, the majority of the interviewees were studying Community Development. Although this was not mentioned to the interviewees, some had already noticed that most Travellers in third level education seemed to be studying this type of course which restricts Travellers to working within their own communities: *'A lot of the third level courses that Travellers are doing are limited to certain areas like community work and courses in Theology.'*

Furthermore, the range of courses studied by Travellers needs to be broader to enable Travellers to partake in other roles within modern society: *'If Travellers keep grasping the community work thing it won't change. They need to be teachers and doctors and guards and be able to identify themselves as an ethnic minority group.'*

In addition, colleges have a responsibility to advertise and promote their courses to the Travelling community: *'There are certain areas where people have a natural talent for certain things and maybe some colleges could encourage people to take those type of courses as well.'*

Recommendations

- Advertise all courses to the Travelling community
- Encourage Travellers to participate in a range of courses
- Become flexible in relation to entry requirements for certain courses

Perspectives on going to third level

All the interviewees were happy to be in college: *'It's a great feeling and I'm delighted I'm doing it and I hope that I will continue my education even after this course is finished.'*

However, some students were nervous at the thought of attending third level education: *'I was actually very unsure at first [going to third level] ... I said no I'm not doing it and then I came back a month later and said right I'm doing it so it was a struggle to start but I got through it.'*

Empirical findings: 'They're looking for big words and I don't have big words'

Non-academic support

The two main concerns of the interviewees relating to non-academic support were child-care facilities and financial support.

Child care

Child care is very important, not just for Travellers but for mature students in general:
'There are barriers around child care'

Consideration should be given towards subsidising the costs of child care to promote greater participation of adult Travellers in further and higher education. Having facilities such as a crèche, supportive parents and partners were considered invaluable so that students could have some free time to study and somewhere quiet to study:

*'Interviewer: If you could wave a magic wand, what would college be like for you?
Traveller: There would be child care facilities there anyway.'*

'I find it very difficult to get away from the kids because X [her husband] wouldn't understand. He comes from a different background - at least my father was educated and none of his family would have been educated or would have thought to further their education so he wouldn't see the importance and he'd be more hindering me than supporting... He'd be saying 'oh God, she's off again, where are you going now'. He just couldn't comprehend like, why I was doing it and like I'd get sick of explaining stuff to him. So then we'd just have a row... I'm not getting any support from him so that would be a barrier that I'd feel but he doesn't understand so there's nothing that I can do about it only keep explaining stuff.'

However, if the institution is providing childcare, it is important to give the students a choice whether their children attend the facilities or not: *'A crèche should be there for people if they need it. If they don't, they might prefer family. There should be a choice for people.'*

Furthermore, if crèches are provided, they should be seen to be Traveller-friendly:
'There is a difference in our culture to the settled communities and sometimes Travellers don't feel happy leaving young children in the settled peoples' crèches.'

Recommendations

- Provide child-care facilities free of charge where required for students, in particular Traveller students
- Ensure staff in college child-care facilities are trained to work with ethnic minorities

Finances

Financial barriers featured prominently in the interview data. The majority of the interviewees were participating in part-time courses at third level. These courses require fees on the part of the students. This can be a burden on the Travellers attending the courses.

Travellers, similar to mature students, had concerns regarding the payment of registration and course fees for part-time courses, the maintenance costs if they were not employed while on a course, the cost of resources such as books, the extra costs associated with field trips and residential weekends, such as transportation costs, accommodation costs and subsistence costs. Some local Traveller development groups were very supportive, by, for example, finding organisations to sponsor courses, giving Travellers a space to study and use of resources such as computers, as well as releasing Travellers from their work duties during examination times. The Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs had also funded some courses.

At an individual student level, it would be helpful to have more complementary financial resources for Travellers similar to Special Maintenance Grants and the Millennium Partnership Fund directed towards providing student bursaries and assistantships, subsidising course fees, providing for course books and materials and contributing towards transportation costs and the often prohibitive child care costs. From the empirical findings it can be seen that the additional costs of studying can be a serious barrier. The cost of providing laptop computers for flexible and distance learning should also be considered for subsidisation so that inclusion is promoted in the Information Society.

As recommended in the earlier *Report of the Taskforce on the Travelling Community*, (1995) the DES should encourage Traveller participation in third level by targeting Travellers through the Higher Education Grants Scheme and by ensuring that grants are adequate to cover costs.

At present there are numerous further education, training and employment initiatives on offer that perhaps could be viewed as competing for resources and students. These include, VEC and FÁS initiatives such as the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme, Back to Education Initiative, Post Leaving Certificate Courses as well as the new Primary Health Care for Travellers Projects recommended in the National Traveller Health Strategy 2002-05. Often these courses are full-time and the grants available make studying possible as other social benefits such as medical cards and access to childcare facilities can be retained:

'One of the hardships is around the whole financial cost. The fees are fairly substantial.'

'The whole financial side of it is a burden, particularly coming from where you just don't have the funding yourself.'

'I think the idea of colleges having some form of scholarship for Travellers is good. Whilst the cost of some courses might be free, they are still quite costly so a scholarship on particular courses would encourage Travellers into those courses.'

Empirical findings: 'They're looking for big words and I don't have big words'

Recommendations

- Optimise existing resources to bring coherence
- Remove fees for part-time courses
- Provide scholarships or assistantships for Travellers for both full-time and part-time study

Institutional considerations

There were some institutional concerns expressed by the interviewees. These are practical in nature and require small changes to the institution. The first of these is the provision of a place to study for students, in particular Travellers: *'Sometimes resources can be just purely practical even in terms of place to study. Sometimes it mightn't be practical for home study for Travellers if they are in a caravan.'*

In addition, library opening hours might not suit Travellers, in particular those enrolled in part-time courses. The opening hours could be extended: *'Colleges have libraries but easier access to libraries, easier access to study rooms in the college might be helpful for people at times you know.'*

There was also the suggestion that institutions could look into the possibility of providing accommodation for Travellers: *'To make it as easy as possible for Travellers to be able to access third level education there should be accommodation if you need it.'*

Recommendations

- Extend library opening hours
- Provide places to study
- Investigate providing accommodation for Travellers, possibly in conjunction with a scholarship scheme

Peer support

Peer support can help Traveller students in education. This support can come from the Travelling community before the student enters the institution: *'I think that Travellers need to talk to other Travellers that have gone through third level and I think it would help.'*

It can also come from other students in the class, both Traveller and settled, when the student is in the institution: *'People have offered support around notes. If I miss a lecture, people will always offer to give notes.'*

Study groups can be set up to help students while in education: *'I think having supports is quite good for anybody whether you're a Traveller or any particular person because it's good to bounce ideas, to have study groups, to have support there as well from other people.'*

Recommendations

- When advertising courses, ask Travellers who have been to third level to talk to interested parties
- Organise optional study groups for Travellers and other students

Conclusion

There is currently a gap in provision between school and further and higher education. The valuable Visiting Teacher Service (VTS) should be extended to include liaison with the new Education Welfare Officers to reduce early school leaving and assist with the transition of young Travellers leaving school and moving on to further and higher education. At present there are not enough human and financial resources to support progression from second to third level and this gap in provision requires filling urgently. Such support and counselling for all the family is essential as Traveller family members may have had no experience of third level to date. If resources were made available, Mary Immaculate College could link with local schools so that Travellers could participate in Visitor Days, summer camps on the Junior University model or in After School initiatives.

Entry requirements and structures for progression should be flexible to facilitate access so that more Travellers can participate in further and higher level education in the short term. Positive approaches such as open access bridging programmes which operate at Mary Immaculate College clearly promote access and address inequality issues.

There is a need for more direct action to promote Traveller participation at third level, as noted by the First Progress Report of the Committee to Monitor and Co-ordinate the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Task Force on the Travelling Community (2000), along with other minority groups, in line with similar programmes already in operation for disadvantaged groups. This was highlighted in 2002 in the National Forum Report: Ending Disadvantage.

Empirical findings: 'They're looking for big words and I don't have big words'

Appropriate levels of Irish language should not be a prerequisite for entry to a college of education, but should be changed to be a requirement for graduation, so that more Travellers can enter into valuable roles in the educational system, for example, as teachers in Senior Traveller Training Centres, Youthreach, VTOS and Adult Literacy courses to actively promote participation among Travellers in third level.

The recent establishment of the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), and the expansion of programmes to increase the participation of vulnerable groups in higher education (including Travellers) is a welcome development. Whilst this study acknowledges the success of Strategic funding initiatives, there is a need to provide long-term funding for the development of coordinated policy and for mainstreaming.

This study recommends the need to develop a mentoring programme for Traveller students. They would be mentored by other Travellers with experience in third level. This will initiate important peer-support groups.

Innovative forms of adult education and third level education should be cultivated and multi-modal provision promoted. Greater links need to be forged between Traveller organisations, voluntary organisations and statutory bodies so they can learn from each others experiences.

This study recommends that the role of the National Education Officer for Travellers be extended to advise the DES in developing policy in relation to higher education, to oversee the establishment of a dedicated Traveller Education Service and also the implementation of the forthcoming National Traveller Education Strategy. There would also need to be liaison with the recently established National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education.

One of the recommendations in the Review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (2001) was that each third level institution should double participation by mature disadvantaged students, including Travellers and Refugees by 2006 (within the 15 per cent quota). Further indicators should be developed in agreement with third level institutions as this was not part of the work of the 2001 Action Group on Access to Third Level. Thus, it is welcomed that the recently established National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education has stated in its Action Plan 2005-2007 that it intends to agree mechanisms for gathering data on ethnic backgrounds of higher education entrants as a matter of urgency and set quantitative and qualitative access targets for Travellers to the end of 2007 (HEA, 2004: 23).

All disciplines at third level must be relevant and be possible options for Travellers so they can work outside their own community. At present, Travellers participating in third level are narrowly distributed in a few areas such as courses focusing on Community Development and Youth Work, and Travellers tend to return to work in their community. The challenge now is how to attract more Travellers to courses such as law, social work, childcare and teacher training and to provide additional supports and resources, for example, the provision of extra Irish language classes.

Problems with literacy still present significant difficulties to adult Travellers and contribute to social exclusion. As with third level, adult education needs to tackle the barriers which prevent Travellers from participating and invest in more resources in this area.

The need for parental involvement in the education of a child is very established. Improving the literacy of Traveller parents and men should be considered a priority. All levels of education need to be pro-active to encourage greater participation of Traveller parents/Traveller men, particularly from the post-primary sector as Traveller parents may not have attended to this level. Targeting of Travellers through VTOS was recommended by the White Paper on Adult Education (2000) and requires urgent implementation.

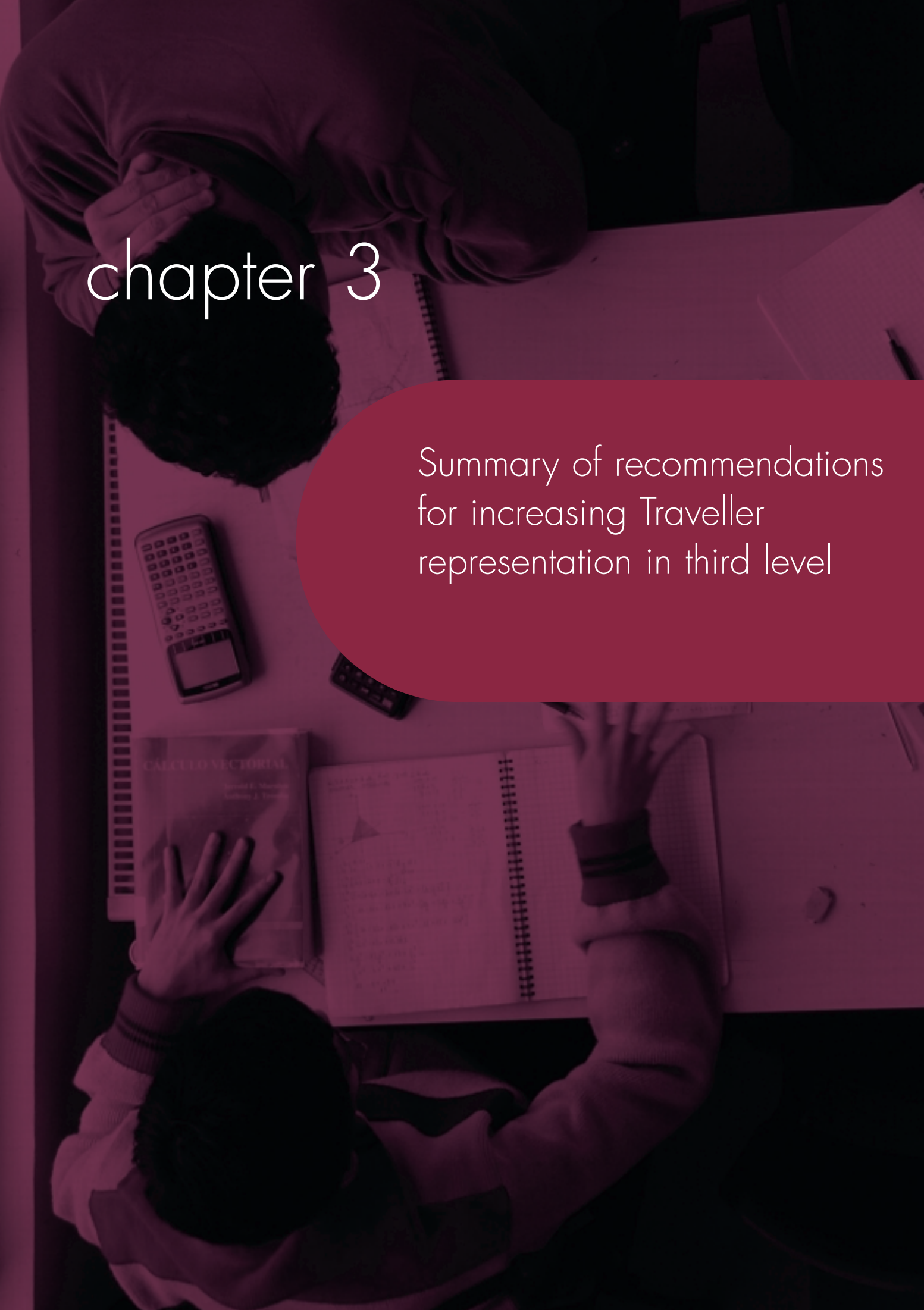
While targeted initiatives are essential to promote greater participation of adult Travellers in third level, the longer-term strategy should be for more younger Travellers to progress through the mainstream education system and gain access to higher education in the same ways as other school leavers.

While this report is focused on education, there are many inter-related factors that determine success in education such as a good quality living environment and good health status. All agencies working with Travellers should work together to enable better outcomes from the educational system.

While much has been achieved in Traveller education, from available statistics it remains clear that more progress needs to be made to achieve equity of access for Travellers to higher education in Ireland. Targets need to be set at national level and measures must be taken at institutional levels through careful planning to make progress in this area. The current Moving On initiative funded by the Higher Education Authority Strategic Initiative fund has succeeded in raising consciousness of Traveller access. Funds have been provided to enable colleges to experiment freely with ways of attracting and providing appropriately for Traveller students. The recommendations highlighted in the following section will inform the development of a best practice model to enhance access of Travellers to third level and provide ways of supporting them effectively.

chapter 3

Summary of recommendations
for increasing Traveller
representation in third level



Summary of recommendations for increasing Traveller representation in third level

National recommendations

- Establish performance indicators/targets for Travellers participation in third level
- Make the tuition fee status of part-time courses comparable with full-time courses
- Work within the National Qualifications Framework to promote progression
- Evaluate current educational status of Travellers at all educational levels
- Broaden the role of the National Education Officer for Travellers to further involvement with third level
- Enhance co-ordinated inter-sectoral and inter-agency working
- Extend the Visiting Teacher Service (VTS) to include post-16 years of age
- Develop a long-term strategy for Traveller youth
- Bring coherence to courses that are competing for resources

Institutional recommendations

- Provide a direct access programme for Travellers and publicise this within the Travelling community
- Foster progression from adult education courses
- Develop new structures to support Travellers in third level, for example, progression routes
- Set up Gateway bridging programmes for mature Travellers
- Provide pre-course modules to prepare the students for college
- Promote sharing of resources by forging cross-sectoral partnerships
- Accredit courses from further education
- Develop innovative approaches
- Develop multi-modal delivery of third level courses
- Encourage Travellers to participate in a range of courses
- Appoint designated worker/liaison person within third level institutions
- Liaise with Traveller groups to promote positive attitudes to third level education
- Establish active regional inter-sectoral committees
- Promote flexibility regarding entry requirements
- Create flexibility with the Irish language requirements for teacher training
- Promote an inclusive intercultural curriculum in teacher training colleges
- Ensure courses, where possible, include Traveller culture

Summary of recommendations for increasing Traveller representation in third level

- Establish peer-mentoring programmes for Travellers
- Make all courses relevant for Travellers
- Promote greater involvement of Traveller parents/Traveller men
- Provide Cultural Awareness/Sensitivity Training for staff
- Work with Travellers in school to help them gain entry to third level education
- Invite Traveller groups to college open days
- Make college facilities (for example, rooms, sports facilities) available when possible to Traveller groups to familiarise Travellers with the institutions
- Advertise courses to the Travelling community
- When advertising courses, ask Travellers who have been to third level to talk to interested parties
- Provide study facilities
- Investigate providing accommodation for Travellers, possibly in conjunction with a scholarship scheme
- Do not segregate Travellers from the rest of the class
- Organise optional study groups for Travellers and other students

Micro-level recommendations

- Provide complementary educational services, for example, provide study skills modules and provide academic literacy classes
- Provide scholarships or assistantships for Travellers for both full-time and part-time study
- Provide complementary financial resources
- Provide assistance with childcare costs
- Ensure staff in college child-care facilities are trained to work with ethnic minorities
- Reassure Travellers, through peers, that attending third level education will not cause the loss of identity

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Appendix 1

Semi-structured questionnaire

1. Could you tell me about your educational history to date.
What education have you got up to now?
2. What was that experience like for you at each stage?
3. Why did you decide to come to third level?
4. Was there anything particular that might have influenced you in coming to college?
5. What is it like for you to be at third level?
Tell me what it is like for you in third level.
6. What is good about being here?
7. What is bad / hard about being here?
8. Were you asked to identify your ethnic background? When / why?
9. Does it make a difference?
10. Would you like to be known as a Traveller?
11. What did friends, family etc. think about you coming to third level?
12. Since you've come here, what, if anything, has helped / supported you?
13. What sort of supports, if any, would be helpful to you here?
14. If you could wave a magic wand, what would college be like for you?

