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An investigation into the profile of entrants to concurrent (post-primary) initial teacher education in Ireland, 2009–2020

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In recent times, Ireland's post-primary schools have experienced considerable social, cultural, economic and technological change. As a result newly qualified teachers are entering an increasingly diverse and rapidly changing school environment. Studies indicate a diversity gap between the profile of pupils, and of teachers in post-primary schools; whereby a homogenous population of teachers, teach a heterogeneous population of students. Consequently, efforts have been made to better understand the diversity, and profile, of those entering the post-primary teaching profession. This paper contributes to this body of knowledge, through an investigation of the profile of entrants to concurrent (post-primary) initial teacher education programmes (ITE) in Ireland 2009–2020. Previous studies have investigated the profile, and diversity, of entrants to consecutive (post-primary) ITE, while less is known about the profile and diversity of entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes. Data from the Higher Education Authority is used to compile a profile of entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE in Ireland from 2009 to 2020. The results indicate that these entrants have a more diverse profile than entrants to concurrent (primary) and consecutive (post-primary) ITE. This paper finds, therefore, that concurrent (post-primary) ITE, contributes to the overall diversity of the teaching profession in Ireland.

Keywords: initial teacher education (ITE); concurrent ITE programmes; student teachers; teacher education; post-primary teacher diversity

Introduction

In recent times Ireland has experienced the considerable social and cultural change (Crotty and Schmidt 2014). These changes have been felt acutely in the Irish education system. In particular, post-primary schools in Ireland have been confronted with a wide range of new challenges that have had a direct impact on their classrooms. These challenges have involved changing family structures, a large increase in the numbers of students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds (CSO 2016; Leicht, Heiss, and Byun 2018; OECD 2019), curricular reform (DES 2015a) and the inclusion of children with special educational needs into mainstream schools (DES 2007), to mention but a few. As a result, newly qualified teachers (NQTs) are entering an increasingly diverse and rapidly changing environment. The question of how best to equip NQTs with the capacity to meet these changes has gained increased

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prominence in both policy and research (Teaching Council 2017). While the skills and qualities developed during ITE will be crucial in this regard, calls have also been made to ensure the profile of entrants to ITE takes account of the recent changes in school-level diversity (Donlevy, Meierkord, and Rajania 2015). An important step in supporting a more diverse cohort of entrants to ITE is to examine the current profile of entrants to these programmes.

Investigations on the diversity and profile of post-primary teachers in Ireland indicate a diversity gap between the profile of pupils, and that of teachers in post-primary schools; whereby a homogenous population of teachers, teach a heterogeneous population of students (Heinz 2008, 2013; Darmody and Smyth 2016). While between 10 and 40 percent of pupils attending post-primary school are non-Irish (CSO 2016), 94 percent of entrants to the post-primary teaching profession identified as Irish (Darmody and Smyth 2016). Entrants to ITE have many common characteristics. They tend to be high academic achievers, female, aged 18–22 and from middle class backgrounds (Drudy et al. 2005; Clarke 2009; Keane and Heinz 2015; Darmody and Smyth 2016). Calls to attract under-represented groups, especially males, those from low socio-economic groups, and ethnic minorities, have been made by the OECD (2005, 2010, 2019) and the Teaching Council (2010).

In Ireland, post-primary ITE is provided through either a consecutive or a concurrent model. In concurrent (undergraduate) ITE programmes the students' academic subjects are taught collectively with education and school placement components. Whilst consecutive (postgraduate) ITE programmes require the student to first acquire a subject qualification at undergraduate level, before pursuing a teaching qualification at postgraduate level. Studies such as the Diversity in Initial Teacher Education (DITE) research project (Heinz 2008, 2013), present extensively on the profile, and diversity, of entrants to consecutive (post-primary) ITE. Less is known about the profile and diversity of entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE. Concurrent (post-primary) ITE is facilitated at undergraduate level, and as such, students do not incur the same expenses as those following consecutive (post-primary) ITE, which involves additional postgraduate fees. This potentially results in a more diverse entrant profile to concurrent (post-primary) ITE (Darmody and Smyth 2016). Historically, concurrent (post-primary) ITE in Ireland had a narrow focus on the preparation of teachers of the sciences and practical school subjects (Gleeson 2004), and graduated smaller number of students, relative to consecutive ITE (Hyland 2012). In the last decade, however, the concurrent (post-primary) sector has expanded beyond its traditional base, evidenced by an increased number of programmes, and student enrolments. Analysis of the programmes on offer in 2020, shows there were 34 concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes offered across ten institutions, with graduates qualified to teach 64 percent of junior cycle, and 68 percent of senior cycle subjects.

This paper presents an investigation of the profile of entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE in Ireland. This investigation covers the period 2009–2020, and is viewed as timely given the considerable reforms that have occurred in concurrent (post-primary) ITE during this time (O'Donoghue, Harford, and O'Doherty 2017). As concurrent (post-primary) ITE has grown to play a significant role in post-primary teacher supply, and understanding of the profile of entrants to these programmes, as well as their impact on the diversity profile of the teaching profession

is required. Consequently, this research seeks to address the question, what is the profile of entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE?

Context: concurrent (post-primary) ITE in Ireland

Concurrent (post-primary) ITE is a popular choice among Irish students (Darmody and Smyth 2016). The benefits of the concurrent model include the facilitation of school leavers to pursue a teaching qualification directly from school (Darmody and Smyth 2016), and student teachers' immersion in pedagogical studies, and subject discipline studies at the same time (Byrne 2002). Gleeson (2004) warns, however that in reality concurrency does not necessarily ensure interconnectivity across modules, and personnel involved in the delivery of these programmes; with student teachers often experiencing discrete and isolated delivery of education and subject discipline components (Byrne 2002).

There are ten providers of concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes in Ireland, all of which are state-run institutions. Seven are universities, two are colleges of education, which are accredited by a university, and one is an institute of technology (IoT). These ten institutions offer 34 concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes, comprising of 52 subject combinations. Table 1 presents a list of the providers and programmes, some programme codes comprise multiple subject options. Seven of the providers also offer the consecutive model of ITE, via the Professional Master's in Education (PME). Concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes must have professional accreditation from the Teaching Council.¹ To meet the accreditation criteria programmes must demonstrate the simultaneous delivery of foundation and professional studies in education, school placement and the studies in the subject discipline(s) (Teaching Council 2011). All programmes are a minimum of four years in duration, comprising of 240 ECTS.² The number of places on concurrent (post-primary) programmes is determined by the Department of Education and Skills (DES), with the allocation of places decided by the Central Applications Office (CAO), with selection based on the CAO points system. Mature applicants, aged 23 years and over, may be required to attend an interview as part of the selection process.

Following a review of ITE provision in Ireland (Sahlberg, Furlong, and Munn 2012), concurrent (post-primary) ITE underwent a period of reconfiguration at both a programme and institutional level. Consequently, the period of this investigation, 2009–2020, coincides with significant change in the sector. The outcomes of this reconfiguration at an institutional level, included the incorporation of two providers, St. Patrick's College, Thurles and Mater Dei, into larger institutions, MIC, and DCU respectively (Sahlberg, Furlong, and Munn 2012). At a programme level, a process of review and accreditation by the Teaching Council, commencing in 2011, resulted in greater uniformity of programme design and structure across providers. In addition, two providers, St. Angela's College and MU, implemented a five-year concurrent (post-primary) ITE model, whilst programmes at the other eight providers remained at four years.

Methodology

This study involved a quantitative approach with the use of data from the Higher Education Authority (HEA). This data was collected and collated by the HEA in

Table 1. Concurrent (post-primary) ITE providers and courses 2020.

Institution	Concurrent (post-primary) courses: Course code and subject specialism(s)
Dublin City University (DCU)	DC010 (Religious Studies & English) DC011 (Religious Studies & History) DC012 (Religious Studies & Music) DC013 (Irish and French, German or Spanish) DC203 (Chemistry & Mathematics or Physics/ Physics & Mathematics) DC205 (Physical Education & Biology) DC206 (Physical Education & Mathematics)
Galway Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT)	GA285 (Art and Design, Communication and Graphics) GA980 (Construction Studies and Design & Communication Graphics)
Maynooth University (MU)	MH212 (Mathematics and Computer Science) MH212 (Mathematics and Education) MH212 (Science and Education)
Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Thurles	MI009 (Business Studies & Accounting) MI010 (Business Studies & Religious Studies) MI011 (Irish & Religious Studies) MI012 (Irish & Business Studies) MI013 (Mathematics and Irish) MI014 (Mathematics and Business Studies)
National College of Art and Design (NCAD)	AD202 (Design/ Fine Art)
NUI Galway (NUIG)	GY109 (Mathematics & Applied Mathematics) GY133 (Computer Science and Mathematical Studies)
St. Angela's College (St. Angela's)	AS001 (Home Economics & Biology) AS002 (Home Economics & Religious Studies) AS003 (Home Economics & Irish)
Trinity College Dublin (TCD)	TR009 (Music Education)
University College Cork (UCC)	CK116 (Physical Education & English or Mathematics or Irish or Geography) CK402, CK404, CK406, CK408 (Science Education)
University of Limerick (UL)	LM090 (Physical Education & English or Mathematics or Irish or Geography) LM091 (Education and Languages) LM092 (Biology & Chemistry or Physics or Agricultural Science) LM094 (Materials & Architectural Technology) LM095 (Materials & Engineering Technology) LM096 (Physics & Chemistry) LM097 (Mathematics and Computer Science)

conjunction with higher education institutions in Ireland and comes from two sources, ‘*Student Record System (SRS)*’ data, which is based on new entrant registration data, and the ‘*Equal Access Survey*’. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are obliged to provide the HEA with student record data on an annual basis. The

Registrar (or equivalent) of each institution certifies the dataset as being a true and accurate reflection of that academic year's student cohort. Participation in the 'Equal Access Survey' is voluntary. This survey, which commenced in 2007, collects information on the social, economic and ethnic background of new entrants to higher education annually. Response rates vary across institutions, and year on year, in 2015 the average response rates of new entrants across all institutions was 70 percent, increasing to 75 percent in 2016 (HEA 2018b).

The data specific to this study relates to the number and profile of entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes over period, 2009–2020. The data was provided to the research team in the form of anonymised aggregate tables, further analysis was conducted exploring frequencies, using MS Excel. The statistical data was used to identify patterns, relationships and connections associated with the enrolment and profile of entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes in Ireland. Adopting a logical and systematic approach provided inductive inferences from the data to distinguish the signals and meaning from the statistical fluctuations (Shamoo and Resnik 2003). The statistics descriptive and inferential qualities helped to summarise and identify statistical frequencies and differences, which have subsequently been analysed and discussed. These frequencies are presented as valid percentages and numbers. Table 2 provides descriptions of each of the variables analysed.

While the HEA entrant data is the primary data source used in this study, this data was cross referenced with data from other sources to ensure more robust outcomes. These included data on ITE in Ireland from sources such as Eurostat (2015), Teaching Council (2010, 2011, 2017), CSO (2016, 2017) and HEA (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015a, 2016, 2017, 2018b), and included data from a number of policy reports, including Hyland (2012) and Darmody and Smyth (2016).

Limitations

Entrants on a number of common entry programmes in UCC and the NCAD were excluded from the data analysis. The UCC programmes (CK402, CK404, CK406, CK408) are offered as general entry science, with students progressing to a concurrent (post-primary) B.Ed. Science at the end of year one. Each year approximately 10 percent of the entrants on these four programmes choose to pursue post-primary teaching, for instance of the 377 entrants in 2016, 30 progressed to the B.Ed. Science in year 2. As such the entrant data for these programmes pertains mostly to non-ITE students. Until 2012 NCAD also offered a common entry course in Art and Design (AD111) through which entrants progressed to a concurrent (post-primary) ITE programme.

A number of new concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes have recently been introduced and the data from these courses has not been incorporated into this study, these include: GMIT GA285 (Art and Design, Communication and Graphics); MIC Thurles MI013 (Mathematics and Irish), MI014 (Mathematics and Business Studies); NUI Galway GY133 (Computer Science and Mathematical Studies); UL LM091 (Education and Languages), LM097 (Mathematics and Computer Science).

The data from the Equal Access Survey was not available for UCC for 2017/2018, or for any institution offering concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes from 2018/

Table 2. Data sources and variables.

Data Source	Variable	Variable Description
Student Record System (SRS)	Number of entrants	Number of new entrants enrolled on each course
Student Record System (SRS)	Gender	<i>Gender</i> is treated as a dichotomous variable (male/female)
Student Record System (SRS)	Age Group	Age at entry by year of birth. <i>Age</i> of entrants, was divided into three age groups (17 years and under, 18–22 years, and 23 and over).
Student Record System (SRS)	Domicile	Country of permanent residence. Permanent domicility in Ireland requires the entrant to have lived in Ireland for 3 years, or more prior to entry. Data on the domicile of entrants was pre-coded into five categories (Ireland, United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, Other EU, Non-EU, and Unknown).
Student Record System (SRS)	Leaving Certificate Points	Points obtained in the Leaving Certificate examinations. <i>Leaving Certificate Points</i> were also pre-coded into ten categories, nine of which were relevant for this study (155 to <305, 205 to <255, 255 to <305, 305 to <355, 355 to <405, 405 to <455, 455 to <505, 505 to <555, 555-600, and Other, N/A).
Student Record System (SRS)	School Type	Classification of post-primary schools attended prior to entry. <i>School Type</i> was pre-coded, into four categories (DEIS, Fee Paying, Neither, Unknown).
Student Record System (SRS)	Grant Status	<i>Grant Status</i> , was pre-coded, as a dichotomous variable, SUSI indicating that the number of students in receipt of a grant, and N/A, indicating those student not in receipt of a grant.
Equal Access Survey	Father Socio-Economic Group	Based on the Central Statistics Office (CSO) classification of ten specific socio-economic groups, including two further groups: ‘own account workers’ and N/A.
Equal Access Survey	Mother Socio-Economic Group	Based on the Central Statistics Office (CSO) classification of ten specific socio-economic groups, including two further groups: ‘own account workers’ and N/A.

2019. From 2019/2020 the parents socio-economic data, as part of the equal access survey, was not available. The data showing the new student entrants’ grant status was only available for four academic years from 2013/2014 to 2016/2017. In addition, due to issues of accessibility, any comparisons made between the data in this study, and data on consecutive (post-primary) ITE exclude data from Hibernia College, a private provider of ITE programmes.

Findings

The data was analysed to determine the composition of entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes in Ireland and the findings are presented under the following headings: number, gender, age profile, domicile, student grants, school type, Leaving Certificate points, parents socio-economic group. Following this description and analysis of the data the findings are discussed resulting in a number of observations and conclusions.

Numbers of entrants

The total number of entrants to concurrent (post-primary) programmes for the period 2009–2020 was 7332. [Table 3](#) illustrates the number of entrants per year. The number of entrants on concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes remained consistent over the period, with only minor fluctuations. This was despite a well-documented economic recession, and the reform and reconfiguration of ITE in Ireland. A notable shift in the number of entrants was from 2015 to 2016 with an increase of 70, this followed the implementation of the recommendations of the review panel on ITE Ireland, to incorporate Mater Dei into DCU and St. Patrick's College, Thurles, into MIC (Sahlberg, Furlong, and Munn 2012). This increase was also consistent with an overall increase in the numbers attending higher education in Ireland in 2016 (HEA 2017). Another notable increase in the number of entrants can be seen in 2019/2020, with an extra 100 students enrolling. This increase was due in part to extra programmes being offered in MIC Thurles, increased numbers enrolling in St. Angela's College and greater numbers enrolling in Physical Education and Mathematics in DCU and Materials and Architectural Technology in UL. In 2016 entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE represented 1.6 percent of all entrants to higher education, in 2020 this figure was 2.2 percent.

Two providers, DCU and UL, accounted for an average of 51 percent of all entrants over the period of this study. This increased to 61 percent in 2015 following the incorporation of Mater Dei into DCU, as mentioned above, but returned closer to the average in 2016 and thereafter (54 percent).

Analysis of the number of entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE demonstrated the substantial role these programmes play in teacher supply in Ireland. In 2016 the NUI Colleges in Ireland³ offered 740 PME places, in addition TCD offered 120 places. Taken together, and excluding the private provider, this was a total of 860 places on the consecutive (post-primary) ITE programmes. This figure is consistent with Heinz (2008) who cited the number of places on PME programmes as approximately 1,000 per year. In 2020 there was a total of 1561 entrants to post-primary ITE in Ireland, with concurrent (post-primary) programmes providing 45 percent of these places (DES 2020a).

Gender of entrants

The feminisation of the teaching profession is well evidenced in the literature (Drudy 2008; Darmody and Smyth 2016). In Ireland for example, studies have demonstrated that males comprise approximately 10 percent of the student cohort on primary ITE programmes (Coolahan 2007), and between 25 and 42 percent in consecutive (post-primary) ITE (Heinz 2008; Darmody and Smyth 2016). Successive reports

Table 3. The number of entrants to concurrent (post-primary) courses 2009-2020.

Academic Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Number of Entrants (N)	N = 618	N = 621	N = 604	N = 636	N = 598	N = 628	N = 643	N = 713	N = 735	N = 718	N = 818	N = 818

highlighted this gender imbalance, calling for a greater representation of males in teaching (Byrne 2002; Darmody and Smyth 2016). Enhancing the attractiveness of teaching as a career is often posed as the solution ensuring greater representation of males in teaching (Byrne 2002). Table 4 presents the gender of entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes from 2009 to 2020.

Notably over the period of investigation the percentage of male entrants decreased by 10 percent. This trend is consistent with general data on the gender of new entrants to higher education. From 2014 there has been decrease in the participation of males in higher education, after a period of gender parity for some years (HEA 2017). The participation level of females in concurrent (post-primary) ITE in 2020 of 58.9 percent ($N=481$), was higher than the national average for female participation in higher education (52 percent) (HEA 2017).

The gender profile of entrants varied considerably across institutions, with the proportion of male entrants to programmes ranging from 0 to 96.0 percent over the period 2009–2020. Table 5 illustrates gender representation by institution in 2020. The percentage of female entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE was higher than the average rate of female participation (59 percent) in six of the institutions. NCAD, St. Angela's and TCD are the significant outliers in this regard. Three institutions showed a higher percentage of male entrants than the average (41 percent), these were GMIT, NUIG and UL. Only GMIT was considerably higher than the average, with 94.7 percent male entrants. Close to 54 percent of all male entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE attend UL. This variability in gender of entrants across institutions may reflect existing research on the role of gender stereotypes in course selection (Drudy et al. 2005).

Age profile of entrants

The largest age group of entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes was aged between 17 and 22 years. The majority of students in this age group progressed directly from school to higher education. The breadth of this age range can be accounted for by anomalies such as student age when starting school, taking time away from study prior to entering higher education, and pursuing alternative programmes prior to entering concurrent (post-primary) ITE. Over the period 2009–2020, those aged 17–22 years comprised on average 91.5 percent of entrants. The participation of this age cohort in concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes increased year on year from 88.8 percent in 2009 to 94.5 percent in 2020. While concurrent (post-primary) ITE is a popular choice for those progressing directly from school, the participation rates of mature students, those aged 23 years and over, have decreased in recent years. Table 6, presents the percentage of entrants aged 23 years and over for the years 2009–2020, as compared to the national average for mature student participation.

The annual rates of participation of mature students in concurrent (post-primary) ITE were lower than the national average for each of the years of this study. The national trend of a decrease in the participation of mature students in full time undergraduate education is reflected in concurrent (post-primary) ITE, whereby a decrease of 5.7 percent was evident between 2009 and 2020. In 2020 only one institution, NCAD, enrolled a higher percentage of mature students (18.2 percent) than the national average.

Table 4. The percentage of female and male entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE courses 2009-2020.

Academic Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
% of female entrants	47.7	46.2	48.1	52.0	52.7	54.8	52.7	58.6	56.7	59.6	58.9	
% of male entrants	52.3	53.8	51.9	48.0	47.3	45.2	47.3	41.4	43.3	40.4	41.4	

Table 5. The percentage of male and female new entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE by institution in 2020.

	2020	
	Male	Female
DCU	39.9	60.1
GMIT	94.7	5.2
MIC	28.7	71.3
MU	38.8	61.1
NCAD	12.1	87.9
NUIG	50.0	50.0
St. Angela's	0.8	99.2
TCD	16.7	83.3
UCC	-	-
UL	64.4	35.6

Domicile of entrants

Data on the domicile of entrants, points to the level of internationalisation concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes. The data indicates that entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes were predominantly domiciled in Ireland, reflecting previous findings on the homogeneity of the nationality of entrants to consecutive (post-primary) ITE (Heinz 2008). Between 2009 and 2020, an average of 99.0 percent of entrants had been living in Ireland for 3 years or more, prior to entering higher education. Table 7 presents the percentage of new entrants domiciled in Ireland, compared to the percentage of international entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE.

From 2009 to 2020, a total of $N=60$ international students entered concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes. The highest number of international entrants came from the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland ($n=33$). Entrants from other countries in the European Union were also represented ($n=16$), as were non-European Union entrants ($n=11$). In 2016 international students accounted for 6 percent of entrants to Irish higher education (HEA 2016), concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes attracted considerably less than this national average, at 0.7 percent in 2020.

Student grants

Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) was introduced in 2012 and is the main financial support scheme for students in Ireland. Eligible students, school leavers or mature students with places on approved full-time third-level education programmes, can apply to SUSI for a student maintenance and/or fee grant. The SUSI grant is means tested, based on the student's gross household income. The majority of SUSI recipients come from middle to low income households (HEA 2015a). Student grant recipient statistics (HEA 2015a), across all undergraduate programmes, reveal that 40 percent of new entrants in IoTs are in receipt of a SUSI grant,

Table 6. A comparison of the percentage of mature entrants to higher education nationally, and to concurrent (post-primary) ITE courses from 2009 to 2020.

Academic Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
% of mature entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE	11.2	10.1	10.7	10.3	9.6	8.9	7.2	6.0	7.1	6.3	5.5	
% of mature entrants national average*	14.0	15.0	14.0	13.0	13.0	12.0	10.0	9.0	9.0	8.4	7.2	

*Source: HEA annual statistics (mature entrants on full time undergraduate programmes, reported as rounded percentages in source documentation)

Table 7. The percentage of Irish and International entrants to concurrent (post-primary) courses 2009-2020.

Academic Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
% of Irish entrants	99.7	99.4	99.5	99.0	99.6	99.7	98.4	99.2	99.2	99.4	99.3	
% of International entrants	0.3	0.6	0.5	1.0	0.4	0.3	1.6	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.7	

compared to 26 percent in universities, and 30 percent in other colleges (including colleges of education).

Table 8 displays the percentage of new entrants on concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes that received a SUSI grant from 2013 to 2016, as data was only available for these years. Comparing this data with all undergraduate programmes (HEA 2015c) reveals that a higher percentage of entrants on concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes are in receipt of a SUSI grant, compared to entrants on other HEA programmes. The figures from the university ITE providers are the most striking. Over the four years from 2013 to 2016, DCU on average has 41.6 percent of new entrants on concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes in receipt of a SUSI grant compared to 26 percent across all university programmes. St. Angela's has 32.7 percent, which although is lower than the percentage of other universities is still significantly above other HEA programmes. The only university that is only marginally higher than the 26 percent of students with a SUSI grant across all universities is TCD, which receives 27.4 percent. In the IoT sector, GMIT has 41.4 percent of its new entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes in receipt of a grant, marginally higher than the 40 percent across all IoT programmes.

School type

Students are classified as having attended one of four school types, Standard, DEIS, Fee paying and Unknown. The majority of entrants, 62 percent, come from standard schools (voluntary secondary, vocational, comprehensive, community schools and gaelscoils), with 21.7 percent of entrants reporting their school type as unknown. The participation of entrants from DEIS, while lower than the number of standard school entrants, provides informative insights into entrant diversity.

The 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools', (DEIS) Plan (DES 2005), focused on addressing the educational needs of school pupils from disadvantaged communities, through the provision of additional supports. There are currently 198 DEIS post-primary schools in Ireland, which represents approximately 27 percent of all schools and accounts for 24 percent of all post-primary pupils (DES 2020b). At the other end of the scale to DEIS schools are the fees paying schools, which charge fees for pupils to attend. In 2020, there were 50 fee paying post-primary schools in Ireland, with a pupil enrolment of 25,881, which accounts for approximately 6.9 percent of the total post-primary school population in Ireland (DES 2020b).

Nationally, the percentage of DEIS pupils that progress to higher education is 24 percent, and this accounts for 10 percent of the student population at third-level institutions, compared to 66 percent of fee paying pupils, which accounts for 8.2 percent of the student population (DES 2017; HEA 2018b). Table 9 shows the representation of entrants from DEIS schools on concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes. Six of the colleges, namely DCU, GMIT, MIC, MU, NCAD and NUIG, have a higher percentage of DEIS pupils than the national average, whilst UL is closer to the national average of 10 percent, and St. Angela's, TCD and UCC are below. The number of fee paying entrants attending concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes is lower than the national average in all colleges except at TCD where it is significantly higher than the national average and at NCAD where it is closer to the national average of 8.2 percent.

Table 8. Percentage of new entrants on concurrent (post primary) ITE courses in receipt of a SUSI grant, from 2013 to 2016.

	DCU	GMIT	MIC	MU	NCAD	NUIG	St Angela's	TCD	UCC	UL	Total
2016	47.6	46.7	52.1	52.3	59.5	40.0	28.7	11.1	28.0	42.0	44.0
2015	49.7	20.0	-	52.9	44.4	66.7	42.2	28.6	22.2	46.0	46.0
2014	37.1	31.3	-	43.3	62.5	63.1	35.2	20.0	34.7	50.8	45.1
2013	32.0	46.6	-	53.1	53.3	41.7	24.7	50.0	30.4	36.4	36.2

Table 9. Average percentage of new entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE courses from DEIS and Fee Paying post-primary schools, between 2009 and 2020.

	DCU	GMIT	MIC	MU	NCAD	NUIG	St Angela's	TCD	UCC	UL	Total
DEIS	12.1	24.9	13.2	12.8	15.3	12.6	7.6	4.4	6.4	10.9	12.0
Fee Paying	3.1	1.6	0.8	0.2	8.0	1.7	1.9	25.2	5.1	1.4	4.9

Leaving Certificate points

The Leaving Certificate examination is the final examination of the Irish post-primary school system and is used by higher education institutions for matriculation purposes to determine which higher education course students are eligible to enter; with the exception of certain colleges, such as NCAD, which also includes a student portfolio requirement. Points are awarded for a given percentage grade in six subjects up to a maximum of six hundred. Recent government policy focuses on equity of access to higher education (DES 2015b). The Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) scheme is an example, which provides reduced points and college supports to post-primary pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, such as those attending DEIS schools (DES 2015b).

The OECD (2011) reported on the importance of attracting high quality entrants onto ITE programmes, and mentioned that if countries wish to raise the standard of teaching in their schools they need to raise the standards for entrance into their ITE programmes. Table 10 presents the percentage of new entrants in each institution according to their points attainment in the examination in 2016.

Table 10 highlights the difference in entry requirements across the concurrent (post-primary) ITE programme providers. The majority of entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes (83.9 percent), have 405 plus leaving certificate points, with 49.1 percent of entrants having between 400 and 500 points, which is comparable with other graduate professions (HEA 2018a).

Parents socio-economic group

The DES has recognised that certain socio-economic groups of Irish society are under-represented in higher education (DES 2015b).⁴ The consultation paper *Towards the development of a new National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education Authority (2015b)* showed that there were significant pockets of educational disadvantage in Irish society, and that higher education access is not distributed equally across all sectors of the population. For example, 26 percent of students with parents from semi-skilled and unskilled socio-economic groups participated in higher education, compared to almost full participation from students with parents from the higher professional socio-economic group.

In 2015, 2016 and 2017 new entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE provided information on their parents occupations, refer to Table 11. Of these new entrants, 32 percent showed a reluctance to provide information on their father's occupation and 35 percent on their mother's. This is a significant proportion, and without knowing the reason for this reluctance, any interpretation of these figures should be cognisant of this and viewed with caution.

In grouping the categories of the entrants' fathers, the highest representation was the professional and employers and managers group which accounted for 20.2 percent in 2015, 24.2 percent in 2016 and 17.4 percent in 2017, followed by the manual skilled and semi-skilled group (working class) at 18.5 percent in 2015, 14.1 percent in 2016 and 11 percent in 2017. The profile of parents of students entering concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes shows a wide spread of socio-economic background, with no one category overshadowing the rest, and much broader than similar research findings for the primary sector (Drudy et al. 2005).

Table 10. The percentage of new entrants in each institution according to points attainment in the Leaving Certificate examination in 2020.

	DCU	GMIT	MIC	MU	NCAD	NUIG	St. Angela's	TCD	UL	Average
155 to <205					3.0					0.3
205 to <255										0.0
255 to <305					9.1		0.8		0.4	1.1
305 to <355	0.5		11.9		27.3		0.8		0.7	4.6
355 to <405	16.0	36.8	15.8		9.1		3.4		9.9	10.1
405 to <455	20.0	15.8	33.7	19.6	21.2	18.6	46.2	50.0	27.8	28.1
455 to <505	17.1		8.9	37.3	6.1	31.3	32.8	33.3	22.4	21.0
505 to <555	16.6		3.0	13.7	3.0	12.5	10.9	16.7	26.3	11.4
555-600	0.5					6.3	3.4		4.3	1.6
Other	28.0	47.4	17.8	29.4	18.2	6.3			6.4	17.1
N/A	1.2		8.9		3.0	25.0	1.7		1.8	4.6

Table 11. Percentage figures of new entrant's father and mother socio-economic profile on concurrent (post-primary) ITE courses in 2015/2016, 2016/2017 and 2017/2018.

	2015/2016		2016/2017		2017/2018	
	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother
Agricultural workers	1.1	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.4	0.6
All others gainfully employed	8.9	9.6	11.6	8.1	11.7	8.6
Employers and Managers	8.6	7.0	13.0	9.1	8.4	6.1
Farmers	8.9	2.5	9.0	1.0	10.1	3.6
Higher Professional	5.8	3.1	6.6	3.2	3.6	3.2
Lower Professional	5.8	12.1	4.6	16.4	5.8	17.7
Manual Skilled	14.9	1.1	11.4	1.1	7.8	2.7
Non-manual	5.4	20.8	8.0	26.1	4.9	24.0
Own account workers	4.0	2.6	4.6	1.7	4.5	1.9
Semi-skilled	3.6	4.4	2.7	4.8	3.2	3.8
Unskilled	3.4	4.4	2.9	2.0	6.1	5.7
N/A	29.7	32.3	25.1	26.5	33.4	22.1

The categories of the entrants' mothers that had the highest representation were the professional and employers and managers group with 22.2 percent in 2015, 28.7 percent in 2016 and 17.8 percent in 2017. This group was followed by the non-manual group at 20.8 percent in 2015, 26.1 percent in 2016 and 24 percent in 2017. A significant and influential change in Irish society in recent times has been the growing number of women that are in the paid workforce, currently totalling 46.0 percent, and with 52.2 percent of all third-level graduates in Ireland being women (CSO 2016), the mother's education or occupational level is now equal to or higher than the father's (Share, Corcoran, and Conway 2012).

Discussion and conclusions

The findings presented in the proceeding sections are now discussed in light of the research question posed at the beginning of this paper, what is the profile of entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE? Analysis of the data on the entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE over an eleven-year period 2009–2020, evidenced their homogeneity in some areas, and their heterogeneity in others. The results of this study demonstrate that entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE are likely to be school leavers aged between 17 and 22 years, who are domiciled in Ireland. Prior to entering higher education most attended a standard post-primary school, and attained 405 points or more in their Leaving Certificate. It is also likely that an entrants' mother can be classified in one of two socio-economic groups; non-manual, or lower professional. Areas of difference were also identified in the profile of entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE. Entrants are just as likely to be male as female and to be in receipt of a SUSI grant or not. There is no dominant socio-economic group for the fathers' of entrants.

The contribution of concurrent (post-primary) ITE to post-primary teacher supply is significant, providing 45 percent of entrants to the profession in 2020.

This finding differs from earlier research which cited concurrent (post-primary) ITE as graduating significantly smaller numbers of post-primary teachers, when compared to consecutive ITE (Heinz 2008; Hyland 2012). It is evident from the numbers entering concurrent (post-primary) ITE over the period of this study, that it is a popular choice for prospective teachers in Ireland. In context of increasing numbers of students entering post-primary schools (DES 2020a), and the requirements for more candidates to enter the teaching profession (Darmody and Smyth 2016; DES 2020a), concurrent (post-primary) ITE could play an important role in this regard.

Despite the decreasing participation rates of males in concurrent (post-primary) ITE since 2009, current participation rates of 41.4 percent are higher than in primary ITE (Coolahan 2007), and consecutive ITE (Heinz 2008). Institutional differences notwithstanding, concurrent (post-primary) ITE appears to support the representation of both genders in the teaching profession. This finding is at odds with previous research pointing to the feminisation of consecutive and concurrent (post-primary) ITE in Ireland (Heinz 2008; Darmody and Smyth 2016). The trend of decreasing numbers of male entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE is, however, cause for concern, given its role as an important source of male teachers. The impact of gender stereotypes on course selection evidenced in the data, while reflective of a broader higher education issue, requires consideration. Teachers in schools are often important role models influencing the new entrant's decision to join the teaching profession (Manuel and Hughes 2006). As such, the under, or indeed, over-representation of one gender in a subject discipline may reinforce existing subject stereotypes among the entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE.

The data evidenced lower than average participation rates of mature students in concurrent (post-primary) ITE, with a downward trend noticeable during the period of this study. As the decreasing participation of mature students in concurrent (post-primary) ITE, reflects the general trend in higher education, it may be that potential mature entrants are making alternative choices, given Ireland's increased economic performance. Mature entrants, however, have the potential to contribute greatly to the teaching profession. They are cited as bringing increased diversity to the profession (Byrne 2002), and enriching the ITE experience for both fellow students and teacher educators (Gleeson 2004). In particular, mature students with work experience in a subject discipline can contribute considerably to the teaching of that discipline (Byrne 2002). As such, the continued decline in the number of mature entrants deserves consideration. Initiatives such as the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) (DES 2015a), which aims to widen access to higher education, with a strong focus on providing pathways to those who would otherwise miss out, may have an impact on the number of mature student entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE in the coming years.

The data evidenced an under-representation of non-Irish entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE. This is consistent with earlier findings on entrants to ITE in Ireland (Heinz 2008; Darmody and Smyth 2016). The professional nature of the ITE programmes, and different jurisdictional requirements for teacher registration, may account for this lack of internationalisation. The average participation rate of international students in concurrent (post-primary) ITE was 1 percent over the period of this study, and is very far removed from the target of 15 percent international participation in Irish higher education by 2020 (DES 2016). The benefits

of intercultural contact to students in host institutions are well documented (Dunne 2009), it appears that concurrent (post-primary) ITE entrants are not experiencing this to the same degree, as their counterparts on other programmes.

The financial constraints that are experienced by lower socio-economic groups in attending third-level education have been well documented (McCoy et al. 2010; McCoy and Byrne 2011). Although, acquiring a student grant does not necessarily provide easy access to higher education for students from low to middle income households (Cullinan et al. 2013). The data revealed that when compared to the national average a higher percentage of new entrants on concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes are in receipt of a SUSI grant. The data was particularly striking in the university sector of concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes, which attracted significantly higher percentages of students in receipt of a student grant. This suggests that concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes are appealing to students from low to middle income households, and also that a number of colleges, such as DCU, MIC, MU, NUIG and UL, are effective in attracting these students.

The data shows that the representation of students from DEIS schools, at 12 percent, is marginally above the national average of 10 percent. DEIS schools provide opportunities for those in communities at risk of disadvantage and social exclusion (DEIS 2017), as such the data suggests participation of students from disadvantaged communities in concurrent (post-primary) ITE. Using a similar comparison, the average percentage of entrants, 4.9 percent, from fee paying schools is below the national average of 8.2 percent.

There is a high demand for places on ITE programmes in Ireland, and colleges are experiencing strong competition for places (Darmody and Smyth 2016). When compared to the entry requirement for primary ITE, which begin at around 470 points (Hyland 2012), the requirements for concurrent (post-primary) ITE is lower. While not a direct comparison, 82 percent of graduates applying for a consecutive (post-primary) ITE programme have a first or second class honours degree (Heinz 2008), as a basic entry requirement. In 2016, 76.3 percent of entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE attained 400 plus points in the Leaving Certificate, this compares with 36.4 percent of students nationally. Entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE, therefore, exhibit a higher than average grade profile.

The socio-economic background of new entrants to concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes revealed surprising findings. It was found that a significant group was the manual skilled, which in 2015 was 14.9, 11.4 percent in 2016 and 7.8 percent in 2017. This is not comparable to figures for all new entrants to higher education programmes, which has the employers and managers groups as the most significant at 23.0 percent (DES 2015b). The fathers that were farmers were 10 percent of the cohort in 2015, 9.4 percent in 2016 and 10.1 in 2017, echoing earlier findings that post-primary teaching is a popular career choice for students with a farming background (Heinz 2008). Drudy et al. (2005) found that the professional, managerial and farming backgrounds were the significant socio-economic background of parents of students entering primary ITE, this study suggests that concurrent (post-primary) ITE programmes are also attracting significant numbers from lower socio-economic groups.

The findings of this study demonstrate the popularity of concurrent (post-primary) ITE among prospective teachers, and evidence the considerable contribution this sector makes to post-primary teacher supply in Ireland. The data revealed that concurrent

(post-primary) ITE appealed to entrants from lower socio-economic groups, and low to middle income households. In addition, when compared to other models of ITE, these programmes attracted a higher percentage of males to the teaching profession. Concurrent (post-primary) ITE also had higher than average participation rates among entrants from DEIS schools. These programmes also had higher than average numbers of entrants in receipt of financial assistance to attend higher education.

Taken together, the results indicate that concurrent (post-primary) ITE, contributes to the overall diversity of the teaching profession in Ireland.

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Notes

1. The Teaching Council of Ireland is the professional standards body for the teaching profession, which promotes and regulates professional standards in teaching. Teaching Council registration began in 2006, where all existing qualified teachers and newly qualified across Ireland were invited to register with the Council.
2. European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits are a standard means for comparing the volume of learning based on the defined learning outcomes and their associated workload for higher education across the European Union and other collaborating European countries.
3. The National University of Ireland (NUI) Colleges are University College Cork (UCC), University College Dublin (UCD), Maynooth University (MU), and National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG).
4. In 1996 the CSO classified the entire population in Ireland into one of ten specific socio-economic groups. In addition, two further groups were then added, titled 'Own account workers' and N/A.

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