

# **A Profile of Undergraduate Mature New Entrants**

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## **Data on the following Institutions was used in this study**

### ***The Universities***

University College Cork  
University College Dublin  
University of Limerick  
Dublin City University  
National University of Ireland Galway  
National University of Ireland Maynooth  
Trinity College Dublin  
Mary Immaculate College Limerick  
Mater Dei Institute of Education  
St. Patrick's College Drumcondra  
National College of Art and Design

### ***The Institutes of Technology***

Athlone Institute of Technology  
Institute of Technology Blanchardstown  
Cork Institute of Technology  
Institute of Technology Carlow  
Dublin Institute of Technology  
Dunlaoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology  
Dundalk Institute of Technology  
Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology  
Limerick Institute of Technology  
Letterkenny Institute of Technology  
Institute of Technology Sligo  
Tralee Institute of Technology  
Institute of Technology Tallaght  
Tipperary Institute  
Waterford Institute of Technology

## 1. Introduction

Ireland has achieved a significant expansion of higher education opportunities over recent decades but, for much of that period, the expansion has primarily been an increase in opportunities for full-time on-campus courses aimed at Leaving Certificate graduates. However, over the last decade, it is recognised that improvements to the educational profile of the adult population will be crucial to our national economic competitiveness. This was reflected in the National Skills Strategy (2007) and the need to address the higher educational needs of adults features prominently in the current *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013*. The *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* equated flexibility of provision with the responsiveness of Irish higher education to Irish society and called for parity of funding for flexible learning.

The educational attainment profile of older adults in Ireland is relatively poor by international standards and the scale of potential demand for higher education from adults in the population now and into the future is very substantial. The increase in unemployment and the increasing vulnerability of employment in recent years adds to what was an already growing demand from adults for higher educational opportunities. In moving beyond the current crisis towards economic renewal, tens of thousands of unemployed adults will require opportunities to re-engage with learning and to advance and update their knowledge and skills. The primary objective of Springboard is to provide such opportunities. Those in employment will require upskilling and retraining opportunities. Whole companies will need to re-assess the adequacy and relevance of their skills base and those in the public sector will require training to adopt new and more effective ways of working.

All this suggests a strong need for higher education opportunities from adults into the future to help ensure the adaptability of Irish society to technological and social change. The participation of mature students in Irish higher education has improved steadily from a situation in 1998 where they accounted for 4.5% of new entrants to the latest figures provided in this report which show that mature students accounted for 15% of new entrants (to undergraduate programmes) in 2010/11. The attractiveness of part-time flexible provision for mature learners is reflected clearly in the fact that 92% of part-time undergraduate new entrants were mature students in 2010/11.

This study outlines the trends in mature student participation in Irish higher education over recent years and presents (for the first time) a profile of mature students in terms of their programmes of study and their socio-demographic profile. It is intended to improve our understanding of mature student engagement with higher education and of higher education's engagement with the broader adult population.

## *Definitions*

A mature new entrant is defined as a student who was 23 or over on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January of the year of entry to the higher education institution, i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> of Jan 2010 in relation to entrants to the academic year 2010/11. This is consistent with the definition underpinning the criteria for student maintenance grants.

For the purposes of this study undergraduate students include those undertaking Honours and Ordinary Degrees and undergraduate Diplomas and Certificates. Occasional students<sup>1</sup> are not included in the analysis.

The data is obtained through the Student Record System (SRS)<sup>2</sup> and the Equal Access Data collection<sup>3</sup>.

The following profile presents summaries of key trends over recent years and a detailed profile of undergraduate mature new entrants to course year 1 for the academic year 2010/2011.

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<sup>1</sup> Occasional students are students taking intra-mural courses of lectures or laboratory instruction which do not lead directly to a third level award. Such students include individuals taking modules for their own interests, students attending access courses teaching study skills, and students taking qualifying courses for admission to postgraduate study.

<sup>2</sup> The SRS is an electronic system devised by the institutions and the HEA to allow much more detailed reporting of third-level students. It introduced the ISCED reporting scheme, and replaced the previous (paper-based) mode of data collection. To complete the SRS submission, the Registrar (or equivalent) of each institution certifies the dataset as being a true and accurate reflection of that academic year's student cohort.

<sup>3</sup> The Equal Access Data Collection survey collects information on the social, economic and cultural background of full time undergraduate new entrants to higher education. This collection is carried out on an annual basis.

## 2. CAO Application and Acceptance Trends

The purpose of the Central Applications Office (CAO) is to centrally process all applications to first year undergraduate courses within the higher education institutions. This section examines the trends in CAO applications and acceptances of mature students between 2007 and 2011.

**Figure 1: CAO Full-time Mature Entrant Applications and Acceptances as a % of all Applications and Acceptances, 2007 – 2011**

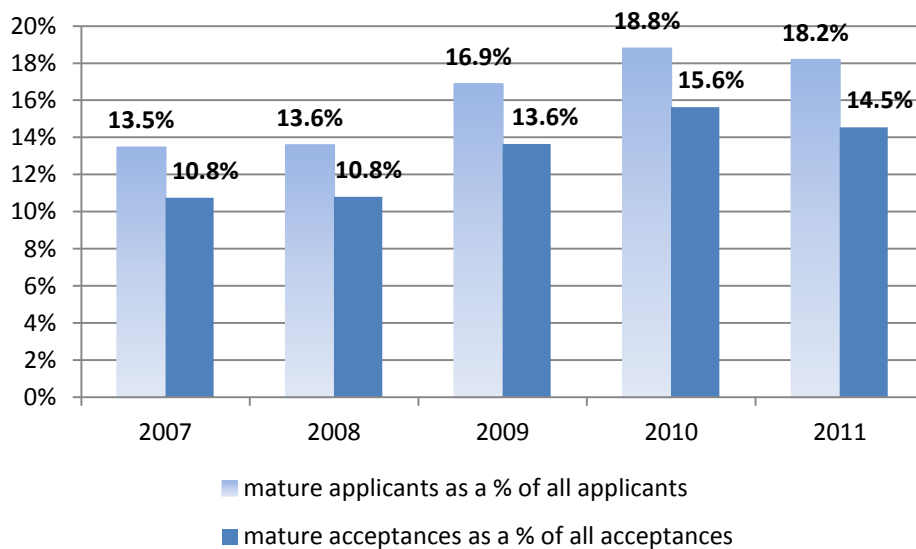


Figure 1 shows that between 2007 and 2010 there was a steady increase in the proportion of applications from mature students increasing from 13.5% (8,805) in 2007 to 18.8% (14,696) in 2010. The proportion of both applicants and acceptors declined in 2011, most likely as a consequence of the part-time higher education opportunities provided under the *Springboard* initiative. Mature applicants declined from 18.8% (14,696) of all applicants in 2010 to 18.2% (13,953) in 2011 and mature acceptors from 15.6% (7,131) of all acceptors in 2010 to 14.5% (6,650) in 2011.

### 3. Trends in Universities and Institutes of Technology by Mode of Study and NFQ level

The two modes of study analysed in this paper are full-time and part-time. The following section examines the proportion of mature new entrants who choose to enter higher education in publicly funded higher education institutions through full and part-time modes of study in 2010/2011 and looks at trends in this data between 2006/2007 and 2010/2011.

**Figure 2: Proportions of Mature and Non-Mature New Entrants for all HEA Institutions, Full-Time and Part-Time, 10/11**

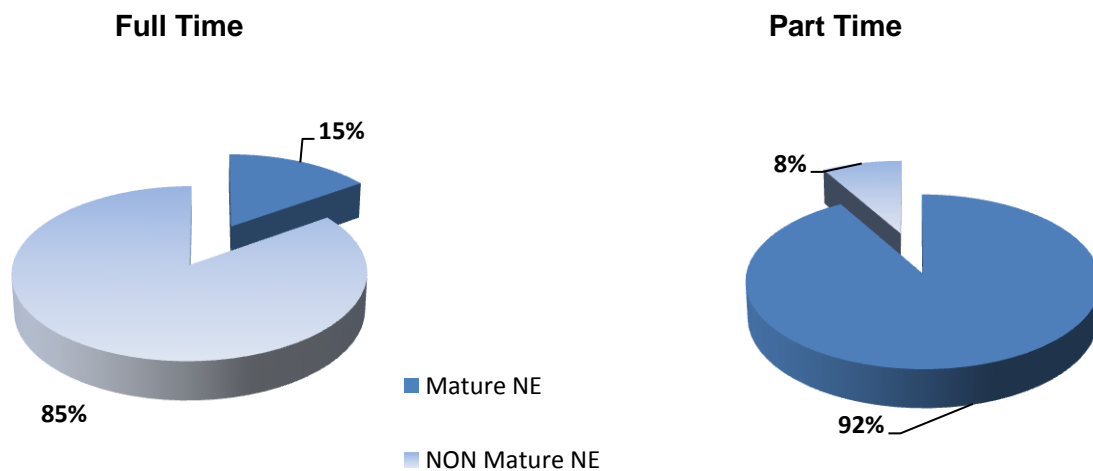
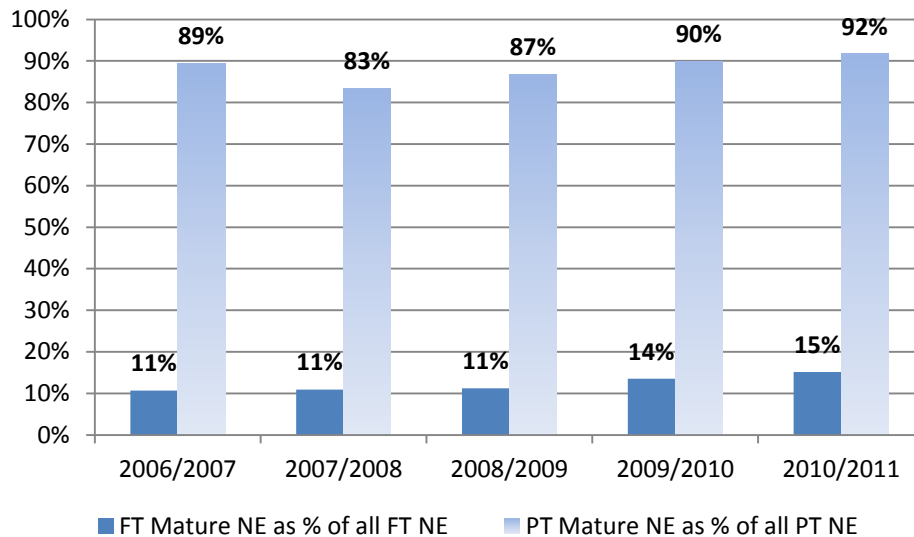


Figure 2 shows that 15% (5,944) of all full-time new entrants in 2010/11 were mature while 92% (1,484) of all part-time new entrants were mature. This more flexible mode of study is clearly a much more attractive mode of study for mature learners who may be juggling work and family commitments while trying to pursue a third level qualification.

Figure 3 shows the proportion of mature new entrants as a percentage of all new entrants for both full and part-time modes of study over the last 5 years.

**Figure 3: Full-Time and Part-Time Mature New Entrants as a % of all New Entrants for all HEA institutions, 06/07 – 10/11**



While the proportion of full-time mature new entrants as a proportion of all full-time new entrants remained static at 11% between 2006/07(3,551) and 2008/09 (4,156) it started to increase from 2009/10 to 14% (5,342) and to 15% (5,944) in 2010/11. The proportion of mature new entrants studying part-time has been more variable over the past 5 years but has been increasing since 2008/09 from 87% (2,297) to 92% (1,484) in 2010/11. This data may be reflecting changes in our economy. More people are now finding themselves out of work and taking this opportunity to cross-skill or upgrade their existing third level qualification.

### 3.1 University and Institute of Technology Trends

This section outlines the differences in the enrolment of mature new entrants in the universities (including teacher training colleges and NCAD) and the institutes of technology (IoTs). Figure 4 examines mature new entrants as a proportion of all new entrants studying full and part-time in the universities and IoTs.

**Figure 4: Full and Part Time Mature New Entrants as a % of all New Entrants, 10/11**

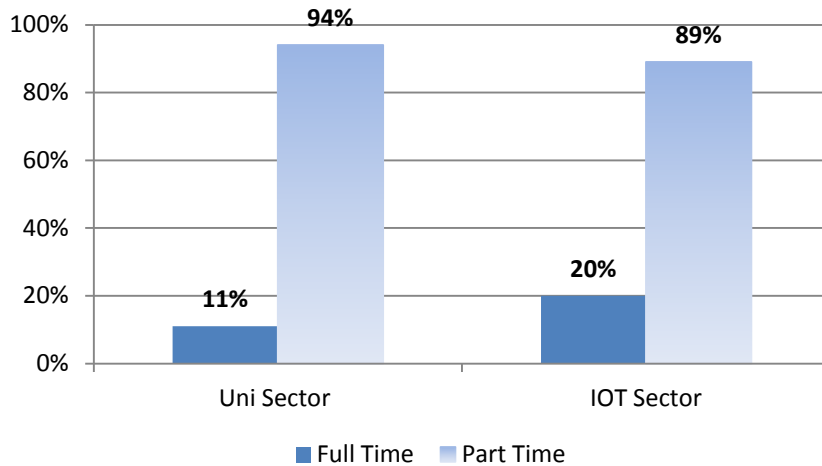
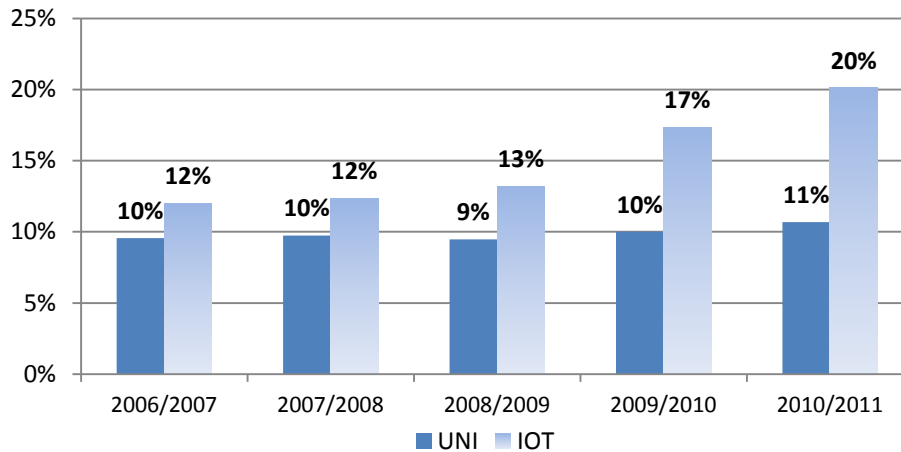


Figure 4 shows that mature full-time new entrants constitute 11% (2,189) of all full-time new entrants in the universities compared to 20% (3,755) in the IoTs. In the case of part-time new entrants, mature students constitute 94% (837) of all part-time new entrants in universities compared to 89% (647) in the IoTs. Mature students studying full-time are therefore more likely to attend an institute of technology than a university. This may be linked to the fact that IoTs are more regionally spread. The proximity of a higher education institution is more important to a mature student largely because of family commitments. It may be just more convenient to attend a college closer to home.

Figure 5 examines the trends for mature full and part-time new entrants as a percentage of all full and part-time new entrants from 06/07 to 10/11.

**Figure 5: Trends in Full and Part-Time Mature New Entrants as a % of all New Entrants, 06/07 - 10/11**

**(a) Full Time**



**(b) Part Time**

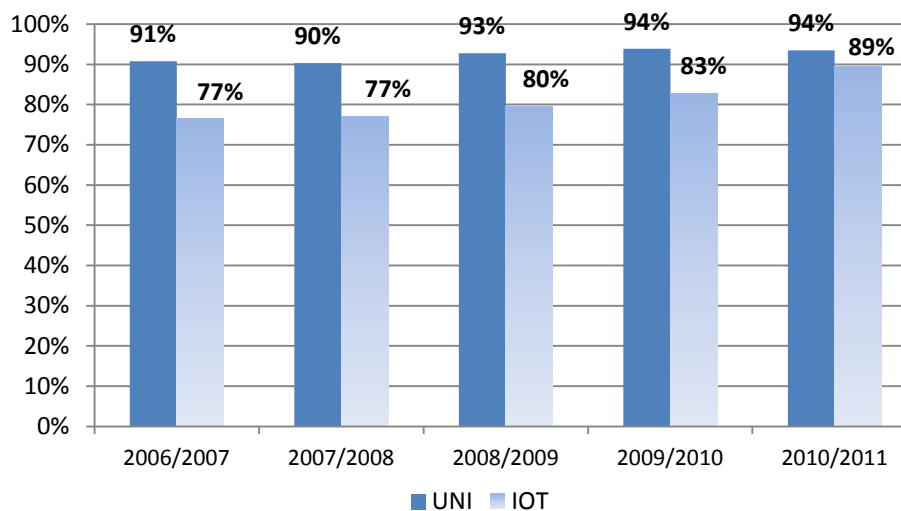


Figure 5 (a) indicates that for full-time mature new entrants in the universities there has been little change between 06/07 (10% (1,749)) and 10/11 (11% (2,189)). Within the IoTs however, following a period of little change between 06/07 (12% (1,802)) and 08/09 (13% (2,253)) there was an increase in 09/10 to 17% (3,269) with a further increase in 10/11 to 20% (3,755). In a time of economic downturn local institutes of technology are capitalising on recruiting those unemployed in a region. When choosing full-time study mature students in recent years have favoured the IoTs, possibly due to the range of courses offered and alignment with improving work prospects and proximity to home keeping the IoTs ahead of the universities with regards to proportions of mature new entrants.

Figure 5 (b) indicates that for part-time mature new entrants, while they are in the majority, in the universities there has been little change between 06/07 (91% (1,791)) and 10/11 (94% (837)). Within the IoTs however following a period of little change between 06/07 (77% (153)) and 08/09 (80% (971)) there was an increase in 09/10 to 83% (538) with a larger increase in 10/11 to 89% (647). Over the 5 year period the IoTs have seen a larger growth in the number of mature new entrants both full and part-time.

### 3.2 NFQ Levels of Study

The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is a system of ten levels categorising various award types. Each level is based on nationally agreed standards of knowledge, skill and competence. It recognises through the framework learning from the very initial stages to the most advanced stages. This section examines the proportion of mature students studying at levels 6, 7 and 8. Level 6 corresponds to an Undergraduate Certificate, Level 7 to an Undergraduate Diploma and Undergraduate Ordinary Bachelor Degree and Level 8 to an Undergraduate Honours Bachelor Degree. Figure 6 examines the proportion of mature new entrants studying at levels 6, 7 and 8 in 10/11. It includes full-time and part-time modes of study and covers both the universities and the IoTs.

**Figure 6: Proportions of Full and Part-Time Mature New Entrants Studying at Levels 6, 7 and 8 in the Universities, 2010/11**

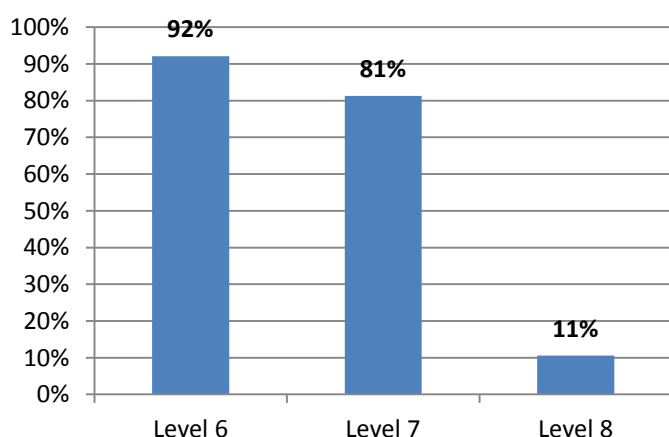


Figure 6 shows that 92% of all new entrants studying at Level 6 in the universities are mature. It is however important to note that the 92% constitutes just 569 students. This is in the main mature students enrolled on Healthcare Certificates. The graph shows that 81% (309 students) of Level 7 new entrants are mature and

just 11% (2,148) of Level 8 new entrants. It is clear from the graph above that mature students studying in the universities are drawn more to short term courses.

**Figure 7: Proportions of Full and Part-Time Mature New Entrants Studying at Levels 6, 7 and 8 in the Institutes of Technology, 2010/11**

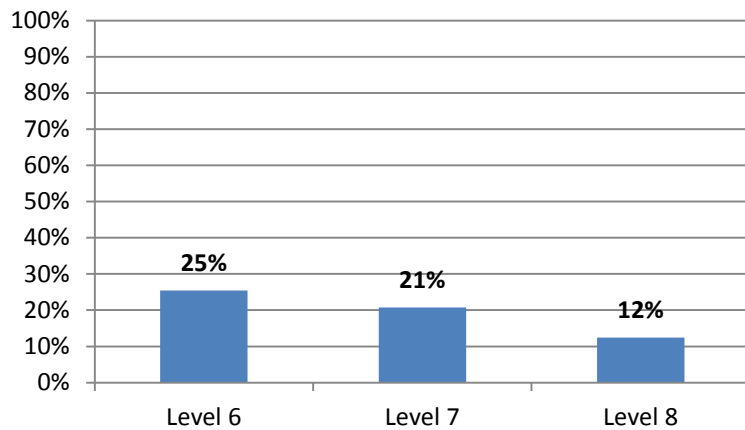


Figure 7 shows that the proportions of mature new entrants studying at levels 6 (960), 7 (1,819) and 8 (1,623) are all relatively equal in contrast to the university proportions. It shows that it is not the level of study that is attracting mature students but the Institution. It is possible that students are more inclined to study for a longer Level 8 qualification in an institute of technology again possibly due to the proximity of the Institute to their home. They can fulfil their family duties and study at the same time.

## 4. Disciplinary Trends

This section examines the discipline choices of both full and part-time mature new entrants. Fig 8 (a-d) examines the field of study chosen by full-time and part-time new entrants in the universities and the institutes of technology.

**Figure 8 (a): Discipline Choice of Mature Full-time New Entrants in the Universities, 2010/11**

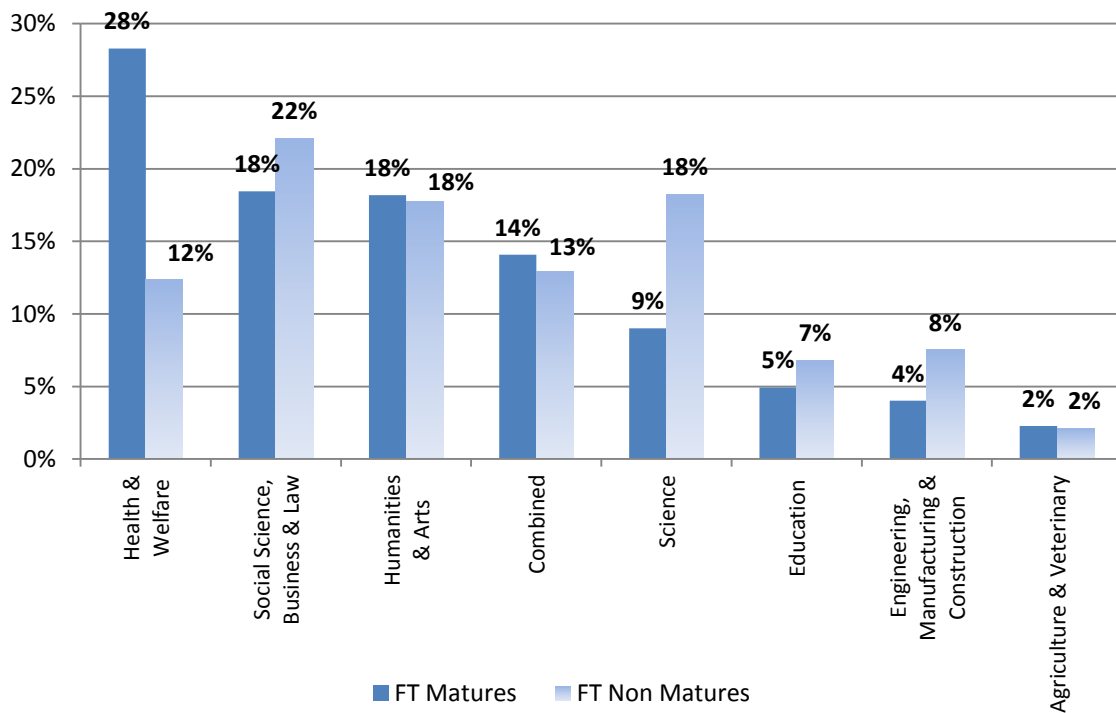
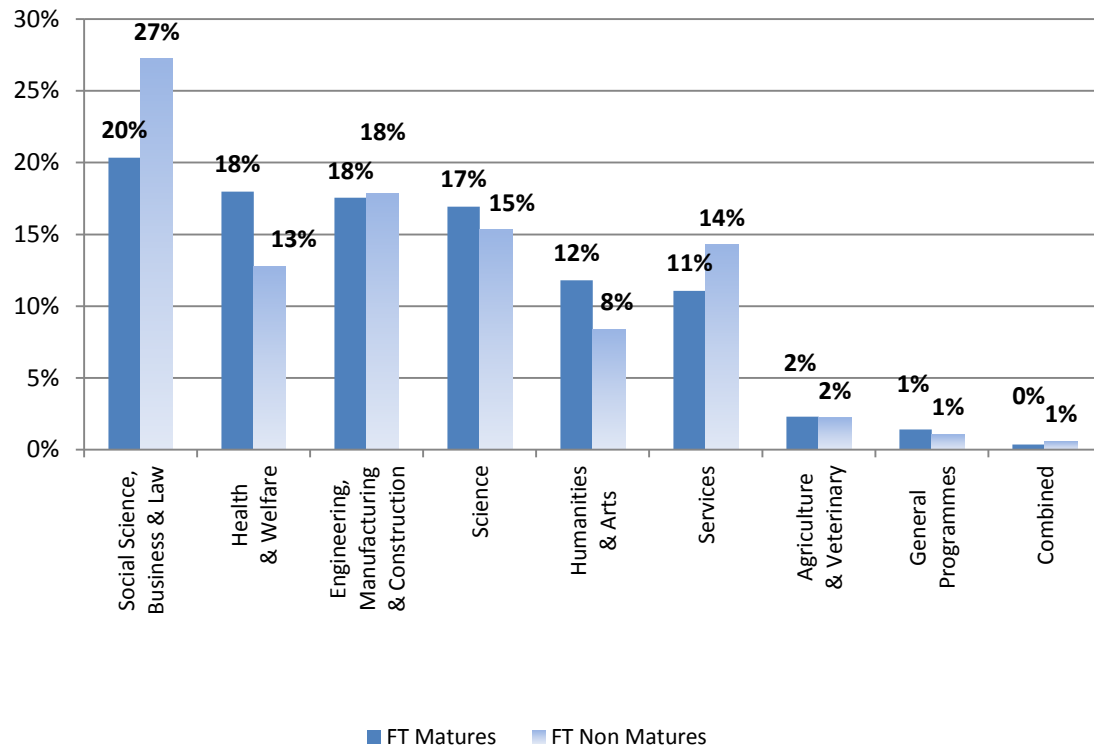


Figure 8a shows the most popular field of study for full-time mature students in the universities is Health and Welfare with 28% of all mature new entrants choosing this field of study. The graph shows that there is 16 percentage points in the difference between its popularity among non-mature new entrants. Courses attracting the mature students to this area are graduate entry medicine, diplomas in nursing, dental hygiene, emergency medical technology and addiction studies and degrees in social, youth and community work.

Health and Welfare is followed by Social Science, Business and Law at 18%. This field of study is however the most popular discipline for full-time non-matures in the universities (22%).

Fig 8b examines the chosen areas of study for full time new entrants in the IoTs.

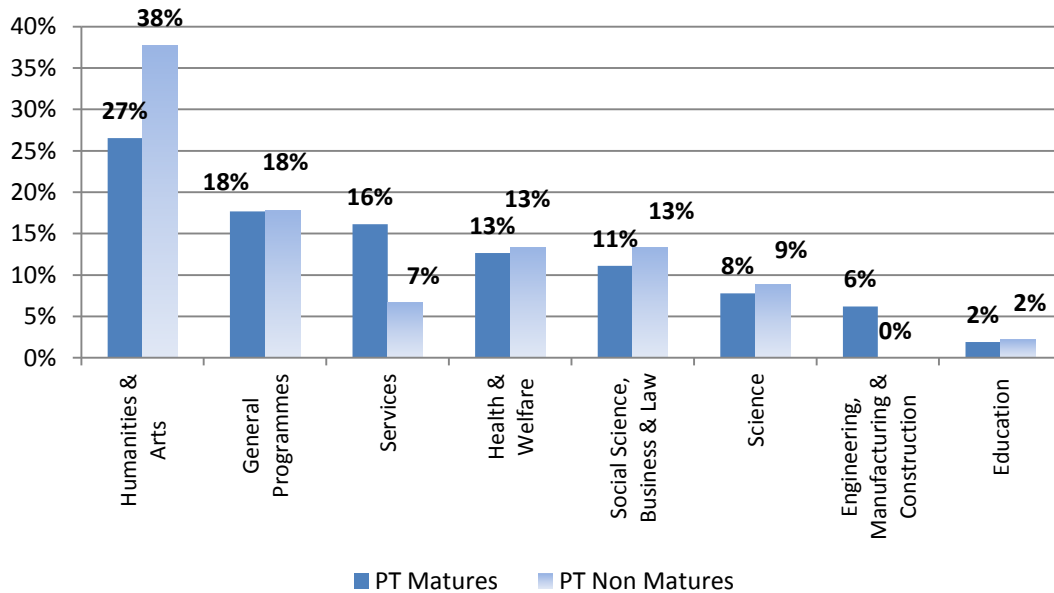
**Figure 8 (b): Discipline Choice for Mature Full-Time New Entrants in the Institutes of Technology, 2010/11**



The most popular field of study for mature new entrants is Social Science, Business and Law with 20% of all mature new entrants enrolled. This is closely followed by Health and Welfare at 18% and Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction also at 18%. Social Science, Business and Law is also the most popular area for non mature students in the institutes of technology. It is very interesting to note that more mature students enrol on Science courses than non-matures and that Engineering is as popular among mature students as it is among non-matures. The opposite is almost true for the university sector with the proportions of mature students studying these disciplines half that of the non-matures. That suggests that, in this instance, the institutes of technology are delivering on their mission of providing technology-based education.

Fig 8c examines the chosen areas of study for part-time undergraduate new entrants in the universities.

**Figure 8c: Discipline Choice of Mature Part-time New Entrants in the Universities, 2010/11**

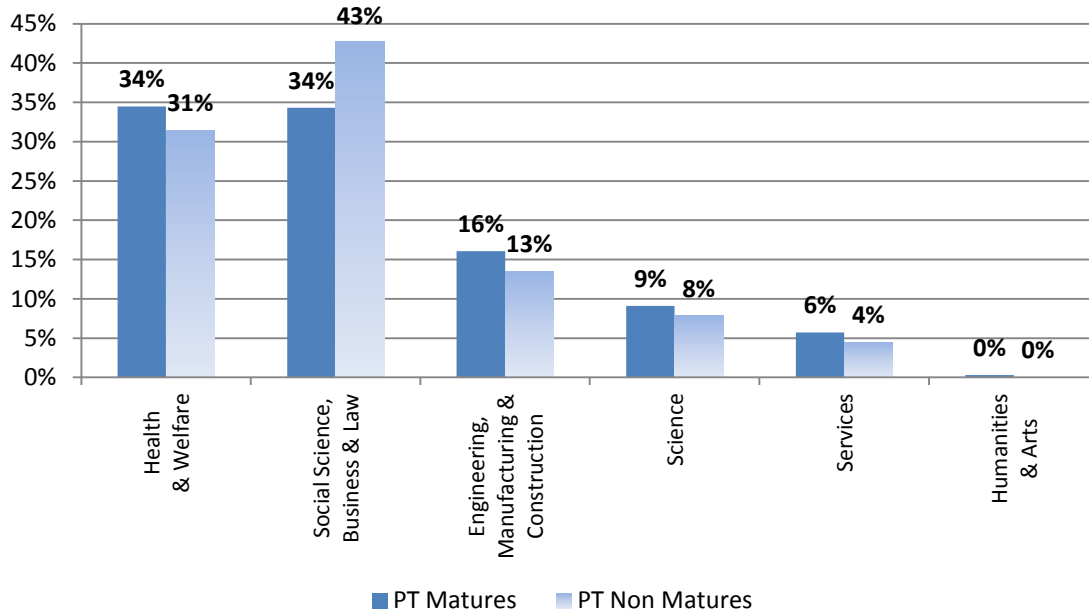


The most popular area of study for part-time mature students in universities is Humanities and Arts (27%). Humanities and Arts is followed by General Programmes at 18%.

This pattern is repeated for the non-mature students with Humanities and Arts at 38% followed by General Programmes at 18%. Services at 16% of all mature new entrants are over twice as popular amongst mature new entrants as non-matures in the universities.

Fig 8d shows the chosen areas of study for part-time new entrants in the institutes of technology.

**Figure 8d: Discipline Choice of Mature Part-time New Entrants in the Institutes of Technology, 2010/11**



Health and Welfare and Social Science, Business and Law are jointly, at 34%, the most popular disciplines for part-time mature new entrants in the institutes of technology. These are also the most popular for the non mature students however Social Science, Business and Law takes the lead at 43% while Health and Welfare is at 31%. It is interesting to note that again Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction and Science are more popular course choices for part-time mature students than non-matures

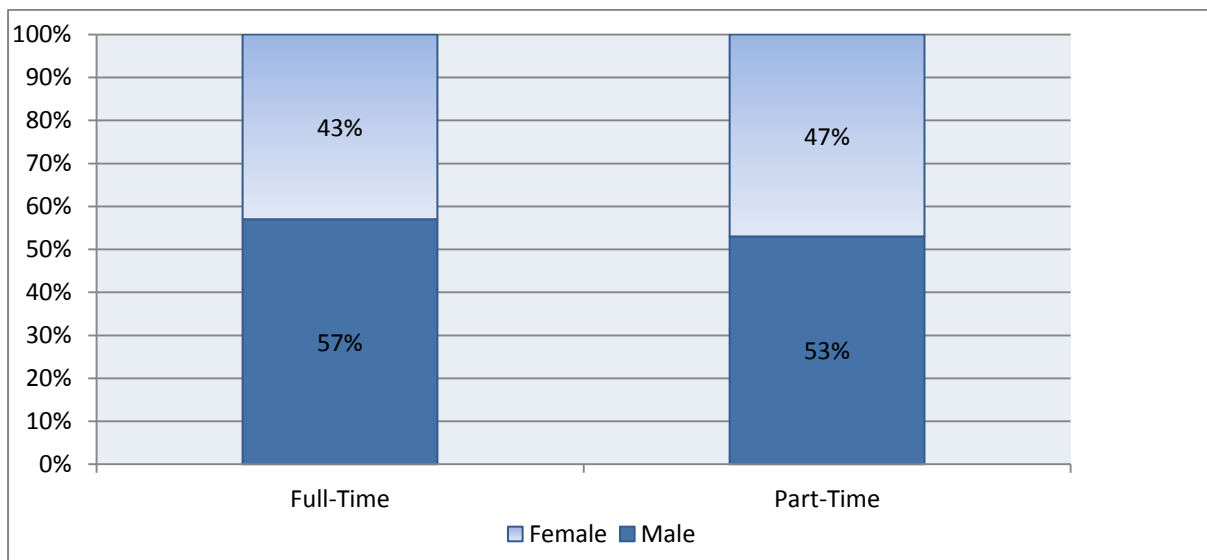
## 5. Profile of Mature New Entrants (age, gender, domiciliary of origin, ethnicity and disability)

This section looks at the profile of full and part-time mature new entrants in terms of their gender, age, domiciliary of origin, ethnicity and disability.

### 5.1 Gender Profile

Figure 9 shows the gender breakdown for full and part-time mature new entrants for 2010/11.

**Figure 9: Male/Female Mature New Entrants, Full and Part-Time, 2010/11**



The graph shows that 57% of full-time mature new entrants are male while 53% of part-time mature new entrants are male.

**Figure 10: Male/Female Mature New Entrants, Full and Part-Time in the universities and institutes of technology, 2010/11**

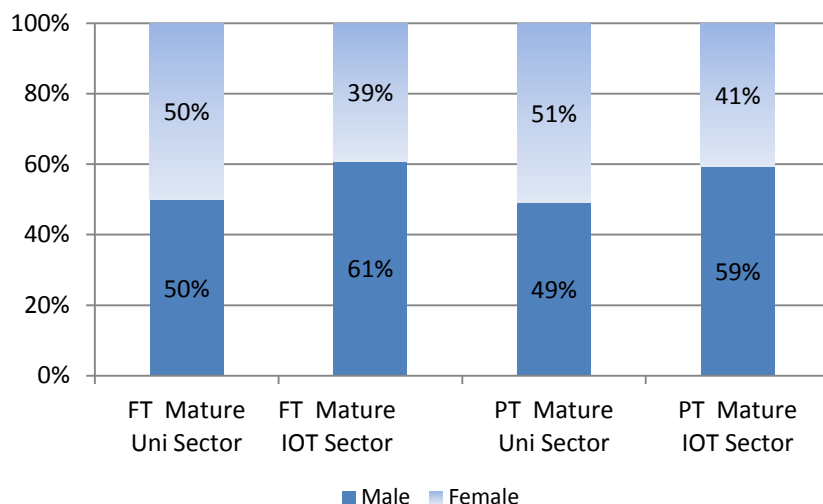


Fig 10 presents the breakdown between males and females for full and part-time mature new entrants in the universities and IoTs. At full-time mode males are predominant in the IoTs with 61% (56% for non-matures) of all full-time mature new entrants. However, in the universities there is a gender balance with males and females both at 50% (males 44% for non-matures). A similar scenario is evident for part-time mature new entrants where males are predominant again in the IoTs (59%) but at 49% are more evenly balanced with females in the universities. This may be associated with the subjects offered by the two sectors where traditionally Engineering, Science and Services are strong within the IoTs and these subjects usually attract a higher proportion of male students.

Figures 11 and 12 show the changes in gender of full-time mature new entrants in both universities and institutes of technology from 2006/07 to 2010/11.

**Figure 11: Male/Female Mature New Entrants, Full Time, Universities, 06/07 – 10/11**

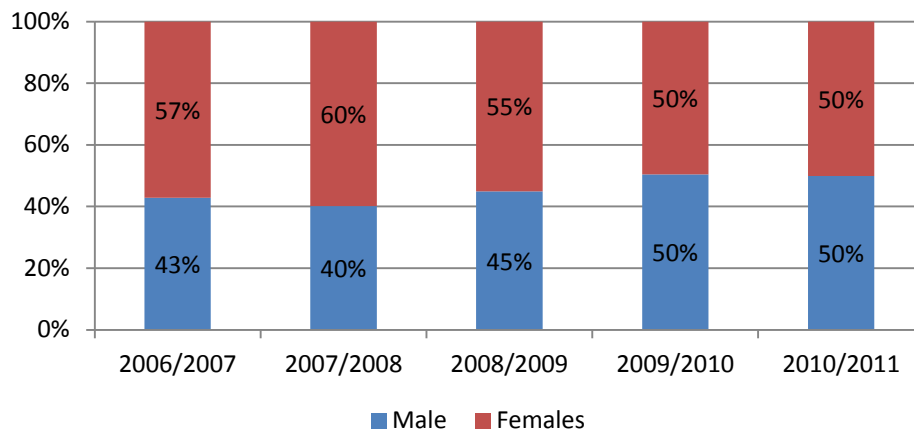


Figure 11 shows that the proportion of male mature full-time new entrants studying in the universities has increased from 43% in 2006/07 to 50% in 2010/11. This may again reflect on the changing economic situation in Ireland. The industry most affected was the Construction industry a traditionally male dominated industry. This may be why numbers of mature males have been increasing in recent years.

**Figure 12: Male/Female Mature New Entrants, Full Time Institutes of Technology 06/07 – 10/11**

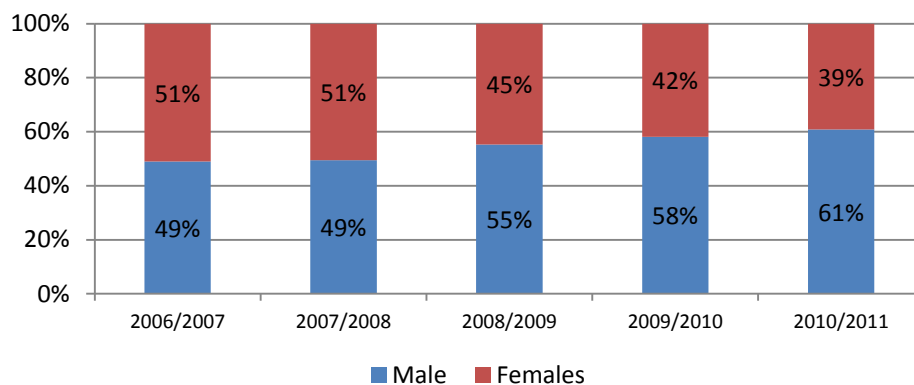
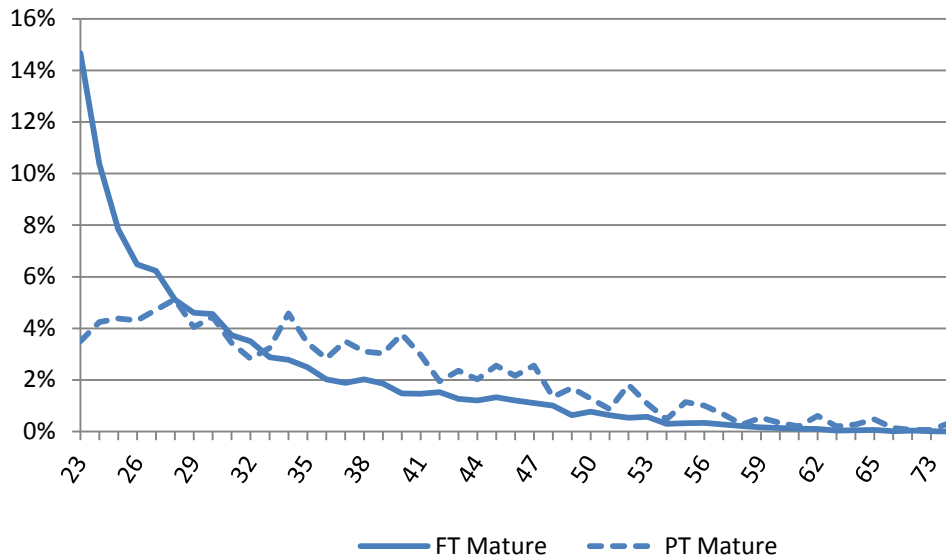


Figure 12 shows again as is the case in the universities that the proportion of male mature full-time new entrants studying in the IoTs has increased from 49% in 2006/07 to 61% in 2010/11, now surpassing females enrolled.

## 5.2 Age Profile of Full and Part-Time Mature New Entrants

Figure 13 outlines the age profile of full and part-time mature new entrants studying in our higher education institutions in 2010/11.

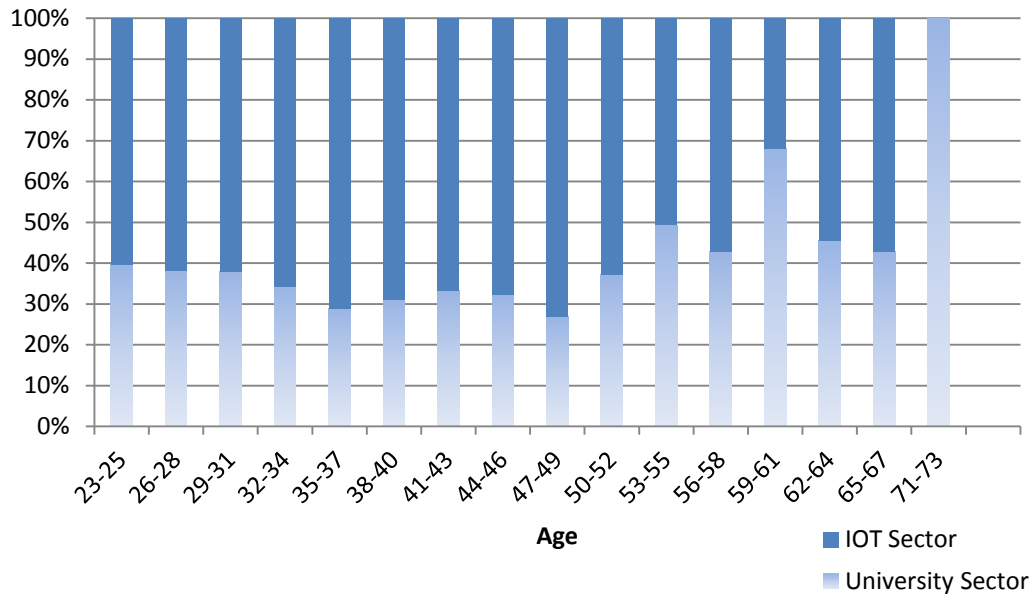
**Figure 13: Mature Students by age as a % of the Total Mature New Entrants: Full and Part-time, 2010/11**



The figure shows that at 14.7%, 23 years olds comprise the majority of full-time mature new entrants in 2010/11. This is followed by 24 year olds at 10.4%. There is then a gradual decline to 2% for those aged within the 35-39 bracket and 1% for ages within 40-48 bracket. Students aged 49 upwards represent less than 0.5% of mature new entrants. In contrast for part-time mature new entrants there is no large peak at any particular age with these students being more evenly distributed over the ages between 23 and 56. Those of age 57 upwards represent less than 1% of part-time mature new entrants.

Figure 14 a-b outline the differences in the age profile of full and part-time mature new entrants by sector in 2010/11

**Figure 14a: Age Profile of Mature Full-Time New Entrants, 2010/11**



**Figure 14b: Age Profile of Mature Part-Time New Entrants, 2010/11**

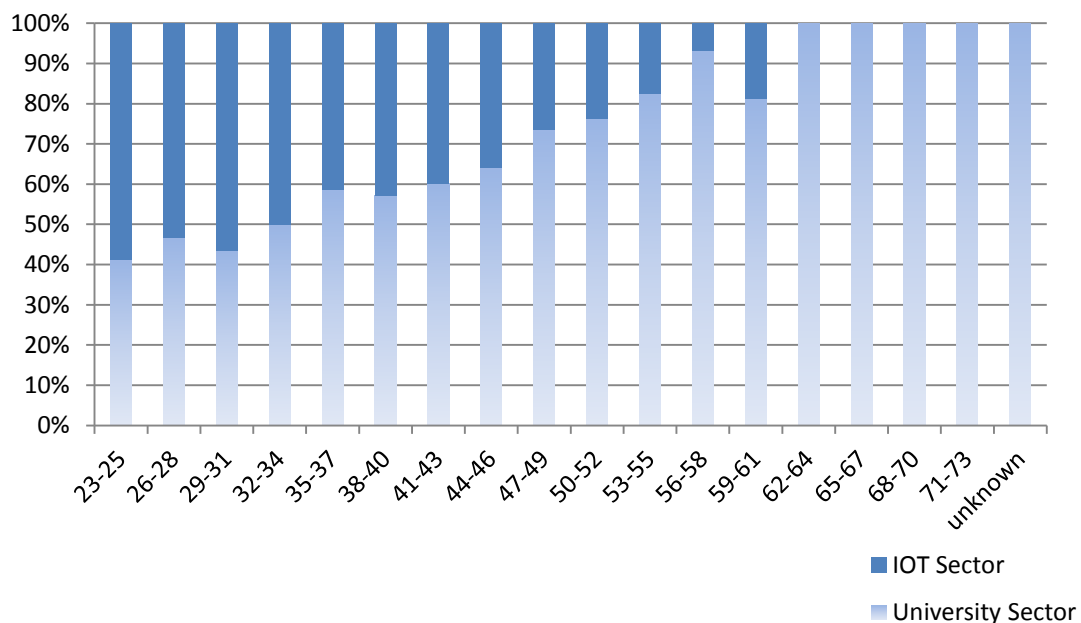


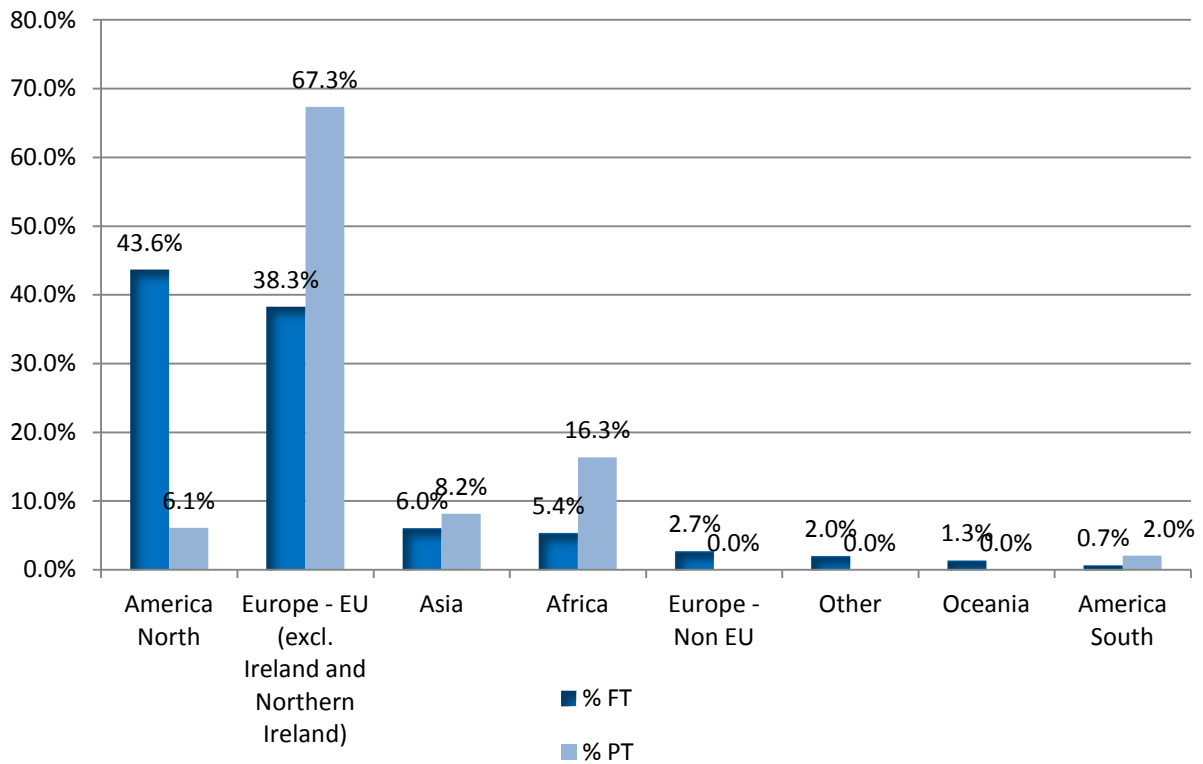
Figure 14a shows that for most age brackets the IoTs have a higher proportion of mature full-time new entrants compared to the universities. The exception to this is the 59 to 61 and 71 to 73 age groups where the universities have a higher proportion of learners registered. However, Figure 14b shows that in the case of part-time mature new entrants the universities have a higher proportion of students at all age

groups with the exception of those in the 23 to 31 age bracket where the balance is reversed in favour of the IoTs.

### 5.3. Domiciliary of Origin of Full and Part-Time Mature New Entrants

This section examines the domiciliary of origin of mature new entrants. Figure 15 outlines the proportion of mature new entrants by region for full and part-time modes of study for the year 2010/11. Just 2.6% (198) full and part-time mature students were non-Irish in 2010/11.

**Figure 15: Domiciliary of Origin of Full and Part-Time Mature New Entrants, 2010/11**



The graph shows that the highest proportion of full-time mature new entrants is from North America with 43.6%. The highest proportion of part-time mature new entrants are from Europe – EU (excl. Ireland and Northern Ireland).

Figure 16 outlines the domiciliary of origin of full and part-time mature new entrants in the universities and the institutes of technology.

**Figure 16: Domiciliary of Origin of Full and Part-Time Mature New Entrants, 2010/11 in the Universities and Institutes of Technology**

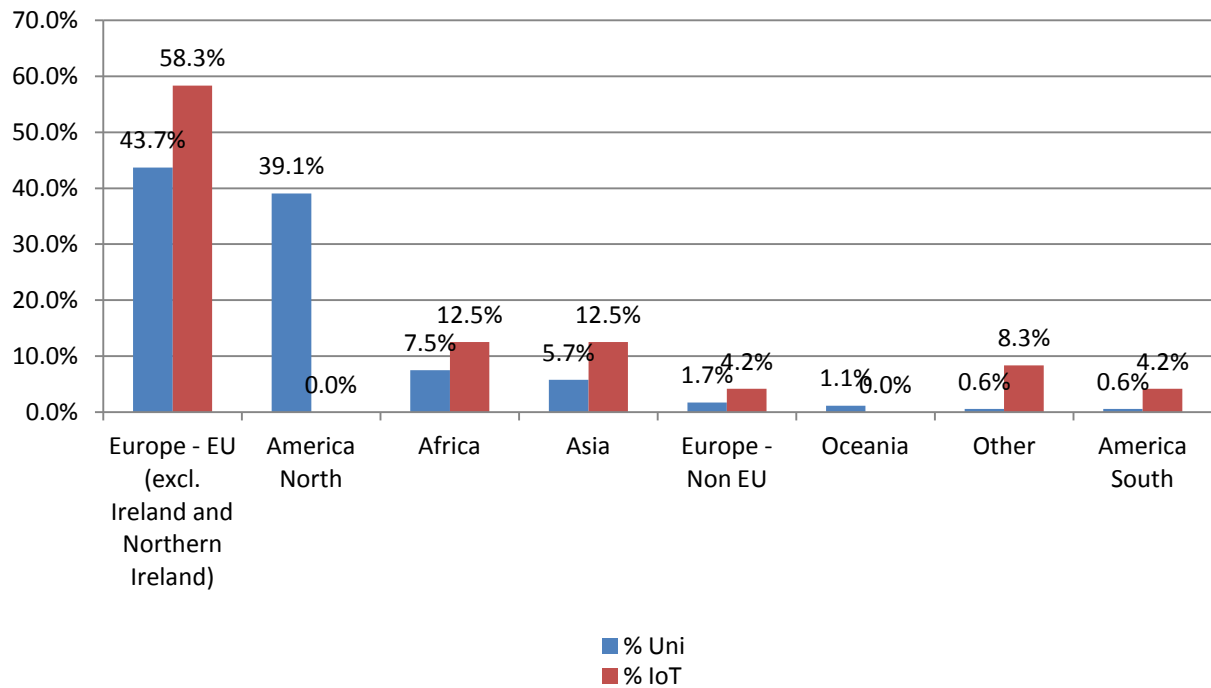


Figure 16 shows that 58.3% of mature new entrants in the institutes of technology and 43.7% in the universities have a domiciliary of origin in Europe-EU.

#### **5.4. Ethnicity of Full-Time Mature New Entrants**

Data on ethnicity is gathered from the Equal Access Survey. Only full-time new entrants are surveyed. Overall in 2010/11, 84% of mature new entrants and 87% of non-mature new entrants responded to the survey. Table 1 outlines the ethnicity of mature and non-mature respondents.

**Table 1: Ethnic/Cultural Background of Mature and Non Mature Respondents**

<b>Ethnic/Cultural Background</b>	<b>Mature Respondents</b>	<b>Non Mature Respondents</b>
Irish	82.0%	91.9%
Irish Traveller	0.2%	0.1%
Any Other White Background	11.7%	4.4%
African	3.6%	0.9%
Any Other Black Background	0.2%	0.0%
Chinese	0.3%	0.6%
Any Other Asian Background	0.6%	0.9%
Other	1.4%	1.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

The table shows that 82% of mature respondents were Irish in comparison to 91.9% for non-mature respondents. The next highest group for both mature and non-mature respondents is any other white background. However, at 11.7% this group is considerably higher for the mature respondents compared to 4.4% for non-mature respondents. 3.6% of mature full-time new entrants are African which is also considerably higher than the non-matures.

### 5.5. Disability

Data on disability is also gathered from the Equal Access Survey. Only data on full-time entrants is gathered. Table 3 below outlines the proportions of full-time mature new entrant respondents in 2010/11 that indicated a disability and what that disability was.

**Table 2: Respondents Indicating a Disability: Mature v Non-Mature, 2010/11**

	<b>Mature Respondents</b>	<b>Non Mature Respondents</b>
<b>Total Indicating a Disability</b>	<b>562</b>	<b>1974</b>
<b>Category of Disability</b>	<b>As % of above total</b>	<b>As % of above total</b>
Blindness, deafness, severe vision or hearing impairment	8.9%	7.1%
Physical Condition	18.9%	6.2%
Specific Learning Difficulty	32.0%	60.6%
Psych./Emotional Condition	33.3%	11.7%
Other, incl Chronic Illness	24.0%	20.5%
<b>% indicating support required</b>	<b>34.9%</b>	<b>45.8%</b>

The table shows that the proportion of mature respondents reporting a disability is higher than those for non-mature respondents for each category of disability with the exception of the specific learning difficulty category where the non-mature respondents take the lead. Overall the numbers reporting a disability are three and a half times more for non-matures. From the 562 mature respondents indicating a disability, at 33.3%, the largest category of student with a disability is those with a psychological/emotional condition. The smallest category is those who have indicated blindness, deafness or a severe vision or hearing impairment (8.9%). Approximately a third of those mature respondents (34.9%) who indicated a disability reported that they required additional support.

Table 3 outlines the proportion of mature and non-mature new entrant respondents as a proportion of all mature and non-mature new entrants in 2010 indicating a disability.

**Table 3: Respondents Indicating a Disability as a % All New Entrants: Mature v Non Mature**

<b>Category of Disability</b>	<b>Mature Respondents As % All Mature New Entrants</b>	<b>Non Mature Respondents As % All Non Mature New Entrants</b>
Blindness, deafness, severe vision or hearing impairment	0.8%	0.4%
Physical Condition	1.8%	0.4%
Specific Learning Difficulty	3.0%	3.6%
Psych./Emotional Condition	3.1%	0.7%
Other, incl Chronic Illness	2.3%	1.2%
<b>Respondents with disability as % of all new entrants</b>	<b>9.5%</b>	<b>5.9%</b>
<b>Respondents with disability as % of all respondents to survey</b>	<b>11.2%</b>	<b>6.9%</b>
<b>those indicating support required as % of all new entrants</b>	<b>3.3%</b>	<b>2.7%</b>

It is estimated that 9.5% of all full-time mature new entrants indicated they had one or more disabilities compared to 5.9% of all non-mature new entrants.

Traditionally those with sensory and physical disabilities have very low participation rates. However this analysis shows that these categories of disability are well represented amongst the mature new entrants with significantly higher numbers than the non-mature new entrants.

## 6. Socio Economic Background

Socio-economic data is gathered by the Equal Access Survey at registration annually. The information below outlines the response rates by mature new entrants to the survey and the results by socio-economic group.

Table 4 shows the overall response rates by sector for full-time mature v non-mature new entrants.

**Table 4: Response Rates and Question: Full-time Mature New Entrants v Non-Mature New Entrants, 2010/11**

	Universities	Institutes of Technology	Total
<b>All New Entrants 2010/2011</b>			
Mature	2,189	3,755	5,944
Non-Mature	18,310	14,909	33,219
<b>% of New Entrants Responding to the Equal Access Survey 2010/2011</b>			
Mature	77%	89%	84%
Non-Mature	81%	94%	87%
<b>% of New Entrants for whom a Socio Economic Classification was assigned</b>			
Mature	38%	28%	32%
Non-Mature	63%	56%	60%

The response rate for mature students is higher in the institutes of technology compared to the universities. However in both universities and institutes of technology response rates for matures are lower than response rates for non-mature students. The table shows that response rates to the socio-economic questions are significantly lower with a number of students opting to not answer these questions. The overall response rate to the socio-economic questions was 32% for mature students compared to 84% to the survey overall.

Table 5 outlines the socio-economic profile of mature new entrants compared to non-mature new entrant survey respondents.

**Table 5: Socio–Economic Profile of Respondents for Whom a Classification was assigned: Mature v Non Mature Respondents, 2010/11**

Socio Economic Group	Mature Respondents	Non Mature Respondents
Employer and Manager	15.1%	22.1%
Higher Professional	8.3%	13.3%
Lower Professional	9.6%	10.7%
Non-Manual	11.3%	11.7%
Skilled Manual	22.6%	13.7%
Semi- Skilled	9.7%	6.0%
Unskilled	4.2%	2.8%
Own Account	10.1%	9.1%
Farmers	7.4%	9.6%
Agricultural Workers	1.8%	0.9%
TOTAL	100%	100%

The table shows that a smaller proportion of mature new entrants are classified as Employer and Manager, Higher Professional, Lower Professional and Farmers. Traditionally these groups are highly represented in higher education. Interestingly mature students in the non-manual classification are equally as represented as those in the mainstream. This is a cause for concern in light of evidence of low participation rates among children from the non-manual (lower middle income) group as it suggests that this group does not redress the inequalities that they experience in accessing higher education later in life. A greater proportion of the mature new entrant respondents are represented by the Skilled Manual, Semi-Skilled and Unskilled group. This group has been traditionally under-represented at third level.

Table 6 outlines the socio-economic profile of full-time mature new entrants compared to non-mature new entrants in the universities and the institutes of technology for 2010/11.

**Table 6: Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents for Whom a Classification was assigned: Mature v Non Mature Respondents, 2010/11**

Socio Economic Group	Mature University Respondents	Non-Mature University Respondents	Mature IoTs Respondents	Non-Mature IoTs Respondents
Employer and Manager	16.3%	23.5%	14.1%	20.2%
Higher Professional	13.1%	17.4%	4.4%	7.6%
Lower Professional	11.2%	12.5%	8.3%	8.3%
Non Manual	11.3%	11.0%	11.3%	12.6%
Skilled Manual	20.3%	10.0%	24.4%	18.9%
Semi- Skilled	9.0%	5.0%	10.3%	7.5%
Unskilled	2.6%	1.9%	5.5%	4.0%
Own Account	8.6%	8.3%	11.3%	10.2%
Farmers	6.7%	9.6%	8.0%	9.6%
Agricultural Workers	1.1%	0.7%	2.4%	1.0%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%

In the universities the largest socio-economic group (SEG) for mature respondents is skilled manual at 20.3% of respondents. This compares to 10% for the same group in the non-mature respondents. However, looking at the next highest groups these would be the Employer and Manager group (16.3%) and Higher Professional (13.1%) suggesting a return to education for the latter group for cross-skilling/retraining.

In the IoTs the largest socio-economic group for mature respondents is again skilled manual group at 24.4% of mature respondents. The gap between non-mature and mature for this socio-economic group in the IoTs is not as defined with 19% of non-mature respondents coming from the skilled manual group.

The semi-skilled and unskilled groups are better represented in the mature respondents for both the IoTs and the universities. In the case of non-manual group within the universities matures have a very slight lead (0.3%) however in the IoTs the non-matures are better represented in this group.

## 7. Progression

The 2010 HEA report 'A Study of Progression in Irish Higher Education' presents empirical evidence relating to the issue of progression through higher education in Ireland. The data refers to the progression of students from 1<sup>st</sup> year in 2008/2009 to 2<sup>nd</sup> year in 2009/10. Figure 16 is taken from this report and outlines the non-presence<sup>4</sup> rates of students under 23 vs mature students. The impact of age appears to vary according to the students' level and higher education institution attended.

**Figure 16: Non-Presence Rates by Age Category**

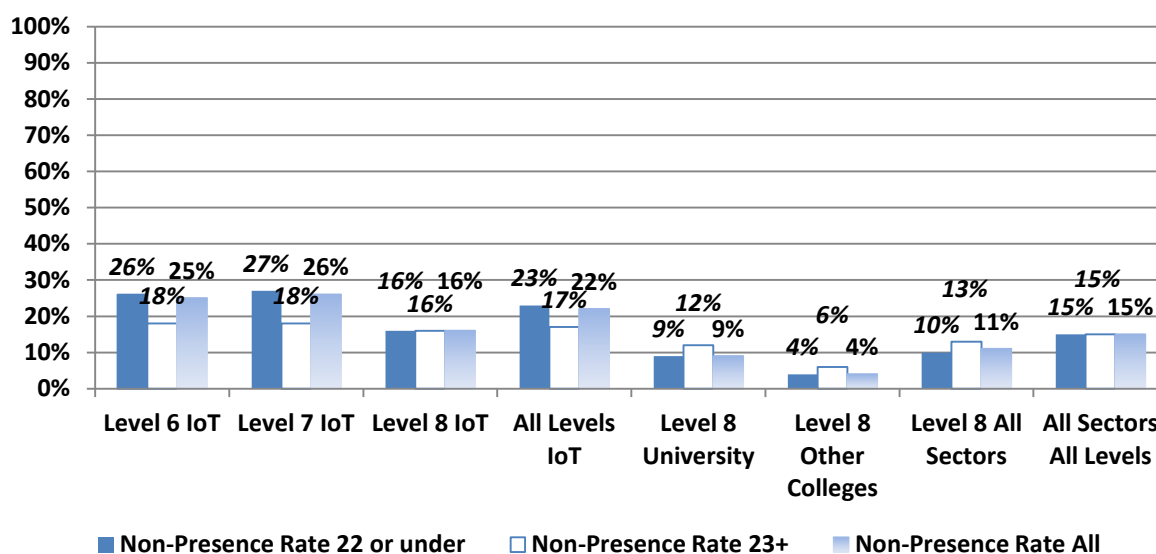


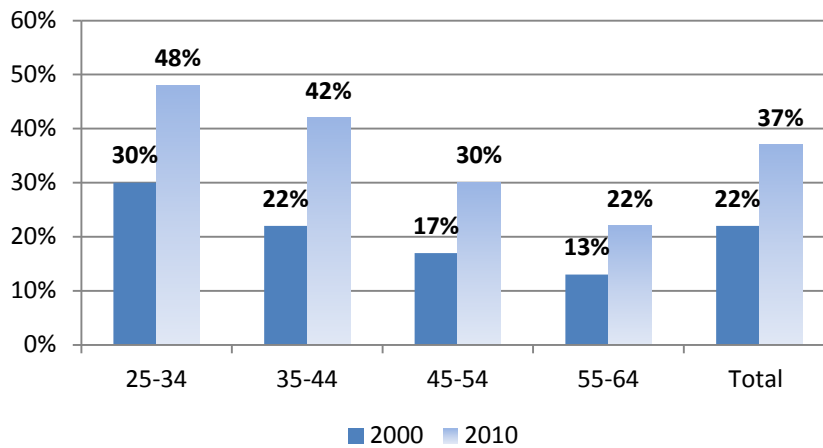
Figure 16 shows that at levels 6 and 7 mature new entrants are substantially more likely to progress to the following year than a new entrant who is under the age of 23. At level 6 and 7, 18% of mature students are not present in the following year compared to 26-27% of new entrants under 23 years of age. This relatively high level of progression among mature students in the IoTs may be due to some extent to their greater dedication to their courses compared to their younger counterparts, the shorter duration of the course compared to level 8 courses and the geographical dispersion of the IoTs throughout the country, which through their proximity to students' homes may make them attractive to mature students. At level 8 in the IoT sector there is no difference in terms of non presence rates between the age groups. However at the same level in the universities mature new entrants seem to be slightly less likely to progress to the following year than those under 23.

<sup>4</sup> Non presence refers to instances in which a student's ID does not appear in their institutions data return for the following academic year.

## 8. Overview of the Population

Data collected by the Central Statistics Office through the Quarterly National Household Survey, Quarter 2, 2010 show that over one third (37%) of 25-64 year olds had attained a third level qualification compared with just one fifth (22%) in Q2 of 2000. Fig 16 shows that the younger age groups reported the highest percentage of people with third level qualifications with 48% of 25-34 year olds and 42% of 35-44 year olds in this group compared to 30% and 22% for 45-54 and 55-64 year olds respectively. The largest increase was recorded in the 35-44 year age group where there was an increase of 20% from 22% in 2000 to 42% in 2010.

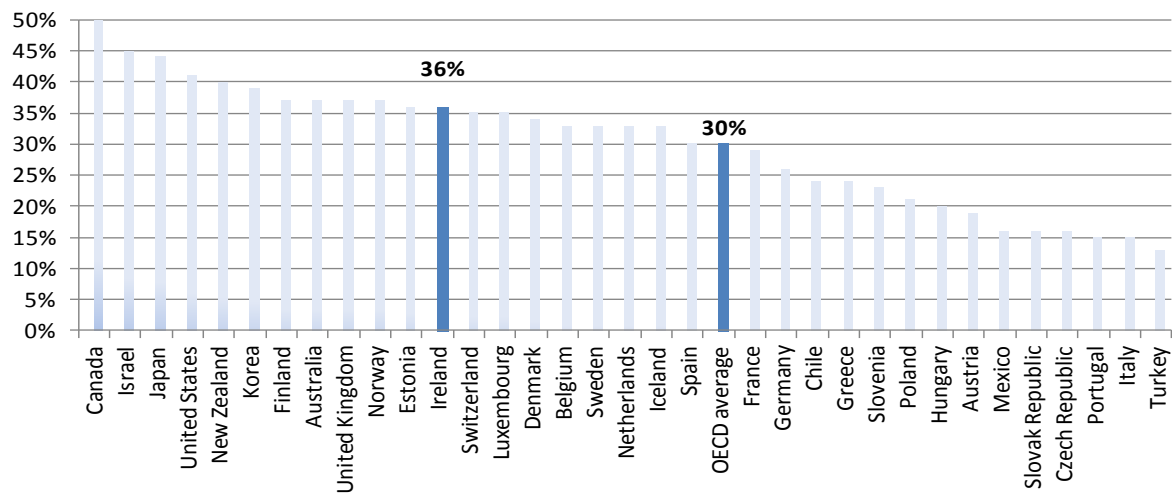
**Figure 17: Percentage of people aged 25-64 that have attained a third level qualification, classified by age group, April-June 2000 to April-June 2010.**



Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, Quarter 2 2010, CSO

Figure 18 presents the latest available figures from the OECD.

**Figure 18: Percentage of the population (25-64 year olds) with tertiary education 2009**



Source: *Education at a Glance, 2011, OECD*

The graph shows that in 2009, in Ireland, 36% of all 25-64 year olds had a third level qualification. This compared to a figure of 30% for the OECD average shows that Ireland is performing well and ranked 12<sup>th</sup> in the OECD countries.

## 9. Future Work

This section outlines some recent work by the HEA which, in addition to the actions and targets set out in the National Access Plan, should further support mature students.

In May 2011 a new scheme, *Springboard*, was introduced for people who have lost their jobs as a result of the recession. As part of the Government's Jobs Initiative, Springboard offers free, part-time higher education at certificate, degree and post-graduate levels in areas where there are job opportunities, such as information and communications technology, the green economy, international financial services, the biopharma-pharmachem industry and business start-ups. 5,885 places were approved in over 200 *Springboard* courses in higher education colleges all around the country. It is likely that this initiative will also serve to increase the number of mature students entering education. The Student Record System in its 2011/2012 return will be able to identify students enrolled on Springboard programmes. An analysis of this data will be carried out in early 2012.

The Student Record System will also, in its 2011-2012 data, be able to identify the number of credits taken and accumulated by students. This data will be invaluable in quantifying the level and intensity of learning undertaken by part-time students.

## 10. KEY POINTS

- 15% (5,944) of full-time undergraduate new entrants in 2010/11 are mature students. This is an increase from 13.6% (5,342) in 2009/10.
- 92% (1,484) of part-time undergraduate new entrants are mature students.
- 18% (7,428) of combined full-time and part-time new entrants are mature students.
- Between 07/08 and 10/11 there has been a 36% increase in mature full time undergraduate new entrants and an 11% increase in mature part time new entrants.
- 11% (2,189) of full-time new entrants to the universities are mature students compared to 20% (3,755) in the institutes of technology. The difference between the sectors in the case of part time new entrants is smaller – 94% (837) of new entrants in the universities are mature compared to 89% (647) in the institutes of technology.
- The most popular area of study for full-time mature students in the universities is Health and Welfare (28%) followed by Social Science, Business and Law (18%). The latter is the most popular discipline for full-time mature students in the IoTs (20%), however this is followed by Health and Welfare and Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction (both 18%).
- Part-time mature students in the universities are drawn to the Humanities and Arts (27%) while in the institutes of technology Health and Welfare and Social Science, Business and Law (both 34%) are most popular.
- The proportion of male mature new entrants is greater at both full-time (57%) and part-time (54%).
- 23 and 24 year olds comprise the majority of full-time mature new entrants (14.7% and 10.4% respectively). Part-time mature new entrants show a more even distribution across the age groups between 23 and 56 with no large grouping at any particular age.
- Over most age groups the institutes of technology has a higher proportion of mature full-time new entrants compared to the

universities. The exception to this are the 59 to 60 and 71 to 73 age brackets where the universities are more popular. The reverse is true for mature part time new entrants where the universities predominate with the exception of the 23 to 31 age bracket.

- 82% of mature respondents were Irish in comparison with a higher percentage of 91.9% for non-mature respondents.
- The percentages of mature respondents reporting a disability is higher than those for non-mature respondents for each category of disability with the exception of the specific learning difficulty.
- From the 562 mature respondents indicating a disability, at 33.3%, the largest category of student with a disability is those with a psychological/emotional condition.
- Response rates for mature new entrants to the Equal Access survey are lower than for non mature new entrants, in particular for the socio-economic question where the response rates for mature students is almost half that of non-mature students.
- The semi-skilled and unskilled groups are better represented in the mature respondents for both the IoTs and universities. In the case of non manual group within the universities the matures have a very slight lead (0.3%), however in the IoTs sector the non-matures take the lead.
- At levels 6 and 7 mature new entrants are substantially more likely to progress to the following year than a new entrant who is under the age of 23. 18% of mature students are not present in the following year compared to 26-27% of new entrants under 23 years of age
- At level 8 in the IoTs sector there is no difference in terms of non presence rates between the age groups. However in the universities mature new entrants seem to be slightly less likely to progress to the following year than those under 23.

## ANNEX 1

**Table 1 Response rates by Institution for Mature New Entrants to the Equal Access Data Survey 2010/2011**

Institute	Response Rate for Mature FT UG NE
National College of Art and Design	100%
Tipperary Institute	100%
IT Tallaght	100%
IT Carlow	100%
Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology	100%
Dublin Institute of Technology	100%
University of Limerick	100%
IT Blanchardstown	99%
IT Sligo	99%
National University of Ireland, Maynooth	97%
University College Dublin	97%
IT Tralee	97%
Mary Immaculate College, Limerick	95%
Mater Dei Institute, Clonliffe Road, Dublin 3.	95%
Waterford IT	95%
Trinity College Dublin	94%
Letterkenny IT	94%
Cork IT	93%
University College Cork	93%
Athlone IT	90%
Dundalk IT	88%
Galway-Mayo IT	84%
Limerick IT	66%
St. Patricks College Drumcondra	63%
Dublin City University	38%
National University of Ireland, Galway	33%

Table 1 shows the response rate for mature full time undergraduate new entrants by higher education institution to the Equal Access Survey 2010/2011. The response rates are ranked in order of response to 2010/2011. Overall the response rates are high for the survey. Twenty two of the 26 institutes that responded to the survey had a response rate of 80-100%. Only two institutes had a response rate between 70 and 79% while two had response rates below 40%.