

Irish College of Humanities and Applied Sciences

2024

2024 Annual Quality Report ICHAS
CASE STUDIES RELATED to
Academic Year September 2022 –
August 2023

CASE STUDY 2

Title: “Parity of treatment of NFQ Levels 5 and 6 Major Awards for Progression Purposes”

Theme: 3. Access, Transfer, Progression (ATP) - exploring pathways and innovations from FE to HE.

Keywords (2-3): FE, HE Pathways.

Insert Case Study 1 below (in any format - QQI does not prescribe):

Case Description

The publication of *QQI Insights. From Counting to Cultivating Successful Participation: A Review of the Landscape of Practice Supporting Access Transfer and Progression in Irish Education and Training* (Peck and Stritch, 2023) prompted a reconsideration of the College’s suite of policies and procedures on access transfer and progression. The review focussed on the key findings of the report giving special attention to potential gaps in pathways, the nature of consistencies in the application of RPL and the mode and purpose of categorization. This final item included consideration of how diversity is conceptualised in relation to universalism but also how ATP is best framed as the student journey in its entirety as opposed to points on that journey. In keeping with the recommended theme, the Case Study focuses on one aspect of this internal reconsideration, that is, how the pathway from FE to HE is experienced by ICHAS students in the context of QAE processes. Specifically, it focuses on a review of relevant entry points and an analysis of the prevalence of the cohort accessing through that pathway.

Case Analysis

One of the notable recommendations arising from the aforementioned report was as follows: “In its role as custodian of the National Framework of Qualifications, QQI should take all necessary steps to ensure parity of treatment of NFQ Levels 5 and 6 major awards for progression purposes” (Peck and Stritch, 2023, p. 12). The recommended AQR theme provided an opportunity to assess if and how “parity of treatment” materialised in the College’s QAE.

Eleven ATP pathways through the qualifications system have been identified (Peck and Stritch, 2023). The internal review focusing on FET to HET pathways found that only one, described as “localised pathway arrangements”, applied to the College’s intake (Peck and Stritch, 2023 p. 31). LPAs are distinguishable through the following characteristics:

- Entry Requirements - Each programme has its own entry criteria
- Application process through the CAO and/or directly to the HET provider

- Information is available through ETBs and HEI brochures and websites
- Where the volume of learners using this pathway is unknown

All undergraduate programmes offered by the College included access to Level 5 candidates holding distinctions in at least three subjects with subject matter connectivity advised. The application process was directly through the College and all information on the course was also accessed through the college. An overview of enrolment data indicated this was a very small percentage of the overall cohort averaging at approximately 5%. This figure was slightly higher when full-time programmes were considered in isolation. This did not include a far more significant number of students who hold Level 5 and Level 6 qualifications but who did not rely on these qualifications for admission purposes. Notably, while not containing the required weighting, these qualifications often have greater significance in terms of suitability for the programme which may also serve as a predictor of completion. This would also apply to students who accessed with a Level 5 Major Award from a cognate subject area. The insufficient level of data would make this difficult to trace evidentially within the College but might be a valuable phenomenon to pursue sectorally. Tracing completion rates to Level 5 or 6 not only aligns with the proposed linkage of ATP to ongoing student support and completion but would be a powerful message in terms of parity of treatment.

Case Outcome

The conclusion of the QAE review in this context was that QAE processes are currently fit for purpose in that there is parity of treatment afforded to applicants holding Level 5 and 6 Major Awards on all undergraduate programmes offered by the College. While not the remit of the QAE officer it was also noted that parity of treatment might not necessarily equate with parity of opportunity. It was also noted that perhaps the most significant innovation in this context, the formation of the National Tertiary Office, which is designed to encourage further such collaborations between FET and HET will not be available to applicants to Independent Colleges (NTO, 2023). That stated, the recommendation quoted above was noted and the review committee expressed enthusiastic openness to any initiative that might facilitate further access for graduates of FET programmes.

References

National Tertiary Office – NTO, (2023) *About the NTO*. <https://nto.heai.ie/about/>

Peck, C. & Stritch, D. (2023). QOI INSIGHTS. From Counting to Cultivating Successful Participation: A Review of the Landscape of Practice Supporting Access Transfer and Progression in Irish Education and Training. QOI.

https://www.qoi.ie/sites/default/files/2023-11/2023-review-of-the-landscape-of-practice-supporting-atp-in-irish-education-and-training_0.pdf