

Trinity Access Programmes



Ten Years On –

A Reflection & Evaluation of Foundation Course
Mature Student Experiences

1997 – 2007



Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed to the ongoing shaping of the Foundation Course for Mature Students and to this publication. The 10th anniversary celebration is a fitting time for acknowledgment.

I will start by thanking the mature students themselves all of whom have been a pleasure to interact with, learn from and be inspired by.

Next, I would like to thank the longstanding course coordinator, Irena Boydell for her steadfast dedication to the development of the course. Irena's predecessor, Maureen Dunne, should also be acknowledged and she too deserves praise for laying a strong and solid foundation upon which to build.

The course tutors both past and present, deserve a hearty round of applause for nurturing and cultivating the educational aspirations of the mature students and for their sensitivity to the unique educational and personal needs of mature learners. Special thanks also must go to the Course Organisers and to the TAP Steering Committee for their guidance and direction.

A very special word of thanks to Mr. Dermot Desmond for his continuous and generous funding, which enabled the provision of significant scholarships to all TAP mature students. This has helped in addressing the very real financial pressures associated with a return to learning. Thank you also to Nissan Ireland for supporting an important new dimension of TAP – Research and Evaluation which has contributed to this publication, to Allianz for helping provide a range of practical services for Foundation Course students and to all TAP sponsors for their vital support.

Last, but by no means least, I would like to thank those individuals who helped to compile, write, edit and design this publication, including Irena Boydell, Carmel Carroll, Lisa Coady, Eoghan Heavey, Jerry Huysmans, John Kelly, Peter Omelia, Katriona O'Sullivan and Eileen Punch. Particularly, I would like to express my gratitude to Carol Guilda for writing such an insightful and thought-provoking thesis and for granting permission for extracts from this thesis to be printed in this publication.

I hope that you enjoy reading *Ten Years On – A Reflection & Evaluation of Foundation Course Mature Student Experiences*. We look forward to the next 10 years!

Kathleen O'Toole

Access Officer (Acting)

Trinity Access Programmes

Foreword

Ten Years On: A Reflection & Evaluation of Foundation Course Mature Student Experiences celebrates the 10th anniversary of the Trinity Access Programmes (TAP) Foundation Course for Higher Education: Mature Students. This course was established in 1997 in Trinity College, Dublin as part of a TAP strategic initiative for under-represented mature students who, due to socio-economic circumstances, had not attained their educational potential. It was one of the first full-time preparatory courses for third-level education established in the state. It is part funded by the HEA, with additional financial support from corporate donors.

Since its beginnings, the Course has grown and developed considerably. The introduction of innovative curricula and teaching methods has bolstered its status as one of the leading higher education access courses for mature students. Indeed, in 2004, the TAP Foundation Course for Mature Students acted as a catalyst for an innovative collaboration between two CDVECs – Plunkett College, Whitehall and Pearse College, Crumlin and TAP in the extended delivery of a Liberal Arts Course, Level 5 for mature students. This collaboration has resulted in a direct increase in the number of mature students applying for and gaining entry to degree courses in TCD.

TAP is proud of the achievements of its mature students who, often in the face of challenging circumstances, have achieved personal growth, academic qualifications, and are seen as role models by their family members, friends and communities. Many mature students successfully complete the Foundation Course and go on to fulfil a long held dream of a third-level education.

In order to further develop the Foundation Course and similar access courses and to gain a deeper understanding of mature student participation in foundation courses for third-level education, TAP facilitated a research project. This research, undertaken by Carol Guildea, provides a greater insight into mature student experiences as they prepare for and progress to third-level studies.

The following publication is organised in two parts: Part One presents a collection of student writings reflecting their experiences as TAP students. Part Two contains a summation from the research undertaken by Carol Guildea, in which she examines the factors behind the choices which lead to the application, retention, and progression of Foundation Course Mature Students returning to full-time education.

Irena Boydell
Co-ordinator

Part One – Reflections of Mature Student Experiences

In this part of the publication celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Foundation Course for Mature Students, a selection of students and graduates past and present, reflect on their educational journey. The reflections are presented in a chronological manner – Carol Barry’s reflection discusses the factors which eventually led to her thinking about, applying for, and gaining a place on the Foundation Course for Mature Students with the Trinity Access Programmes. Raymond Short poetically outlines what access to Higher Education means to him. Fidelma King provides a short, yet poignant reflection demonstrating her appreciation of TAP on a personal level.

Maureen Lowndes’ poem is a reflective biographical piece portraying her achievements despite those who consistently doubted and looked down upon her throughout her life. Maureen demonstrates how it was not until she began the Foundation Course for Mature Students, that she found acceptance and contentment. Josephine Hensman describes how completing the Foundation Course and applying for her degree course gave her a sense of regaining her youth. Maureen Blake discusses the challenges of studying at undergraduate level, she also highlights the rewards.

Louise O’Brien presents a poetic picture on the value of time management when undertaking third-level study. Dolores King reflects on the completion of her degree as a defining and very proud moment in her life. David Frew outlines how TAP aided his decision to study subjects he enjoyed, and because of that, he is now involved in an area in which he has found fulfilment and meaningful employment. Finally, Tracey Flaherty discusses the wider effects that participating in Higher Education via the Trinity Access Programmes has had on her, and indeed, her family.

Presented here, are the personal reflections of ten individuals who began their educational journey with the Trinity Access Programmes Foundation Course for Mature Students. Together they collectively demonstrate that through various forms of personal and/or academic struggle come eventual academic success and a sense of personal fulfilment.

Reflection 1:

Carol Barry

(Foundation Course 2000)

I've been married for 35 years and at least 17 of those years I have spent doing office administration work. I never had a sense of fulfilment doing these jobs and I always felt there had to be something more dynamic and challenging out there but I lacked the confidence, education and skills to go out and find them. I noticed other people with better education and college degrees acquiring more interesting and better jobs with higher earning potential as an added bonus. I felt the time was right to fulfil one of my ambitions and that was to obtain a university degree, so after careful consideration the TAP course was recommended. But guilt crept in as I felt I should be out working and contributing to the household income. I also felt selfish because I knew deep inside that I really wanted to do this course. The TAP Open Day helped me reach the most important decision concerning my future, one of the most exciting days of my life came at the end of June 2000 when I received a letter from TAP confirming I had a place, my life has been like a rollercoaster ever since. TAP has given me confidence in my abilities and capabilities and has always provided a strong network of support. I was 48 when I started TAP and 52 when I graduated from College. TAP has helped me fulfil another ambition because I now work for the Disability Service in Trinity College. At last I have found my dynamic and challenging job. If you are determined, highly motivated, have a love of learning and would love the opportunity to study in an academic environment then TAP is for you.



Reflection 2:

Raymond Short

(Foundation Course 2003)

Ode to TAP

*You take a soul twisted and torn by social norm.
And with care, comb it clear of all its fears and tangles.
When it is free of all the twists, it is free to curl its own natural form
This is the time to see the real me, and go with the flow to where I must go.
I have the energy to find my natural form.*

*Time and patience and love see how things should be – you have given me.
This gives joy to you and gives joy to me.
Being untangled sets me free to find new life deep within me.
Discover there, the potential stored.*

*It takes 9 months just the time that nature has defined,
for one as beautifully formed as me to say – stop twisting me.
This time with you has been a journey unseen before its start.
Now I can say straight away this was work well done.
And go to the next stage, with joy.*

Reflection 3:

Fidelma King

(Foundation Course 2001)

From the day we are born we are pushed and pulled in different directions. Sometimes we lose ourselves and our zest for life. The Trinity Access Programme gave me back the zest I had forgotten existed in me and showed me a sense of worth, that will stay with me – for this, I am truly grateful.



Trinity Access Programmes

*I was not born with silver; I was not born with gold,
My tender shoulders burdened, with a load I did not choose.*

*I raged and cried to God I told him he was so unfair,
But now my eyes have opened, I have healed from my despair.*

*I have went through the school of life and first class honours is my grade,
This achievement can only be won by the one who feels the pain.*

*My mind has opened to the wonders of this beautiful and wonderful world,
The night sky bathed in moonlight, twinkling stars on a clear frosty night.*

*The wild beauty of the mountains, the brook meandering on its gentle way,
As I celebrate all this beauty I give thanks for all that has come my way.
I give thanks for the gift of writing, it was my healing from abuse,
I give thanks for the gift of crochet and the healing power of art.*

*I give thanks for my wonderful son, who is full of youth and life,
I give thanks to wonderful TAP teachers who opened my mind to learning.*

*And I thank the Trinity Access Programme, they told me I had so much to offer,
They saved my life, gave me goals to achieve and above all they cared for and accepted me.*



Reflection 5:

Josephine Hensman

(Foundation Course 1998)

For me TAP was the beginning of the reawakening of my mind to education. I remember the day my friend Kathleen and I sent off our CAO forms, we were like teenagers again, as we walked to the bank and then to the post office. We laughed and laughed we were so light-hearted – we couldn't believe we were actually applying for University. I went on to St. Pat's College where I completed a B.A. degree in English and Religion. Mixing with all the young students in TAP and St. Pat's made me feel younger than my years. I found it really satisfying to complete the assignments, and, in a strange way, it was all very liberating. I think of Trinity and TAP with fond memories, and hopefully TAP will continue for many years.

Reflection 6:

Maureen Blake

(Foundation Course 2001)

Academic life was never an easy road for me to take. I had to apply twice before being accepted onto TAP. I struggled with every subject, from sociological concepts to basic math. At first my attitude was very self critical but I learnt not only to accept the offer of help from fellow students but also to ask for help when I needed it. That may sound obvious but when you are sitting in a room full of people and they all understand how to open a document on the computer – and you have to put up your hand to ask “how do I turn on the computer”? It was a difficult time for me. My advice to new students is – don’t be too hard on yourself, if you feel you are struggling say it to someone. There is always help available to you. When I left TAP to continue on with my studies, I left knowing that I could always access TAP services and someone would always be there to talk to. With perseverance, I successfully went on to earn my degree in Sociology and Social Policy.



Reflection 7:

Dolores King

(Foundation Course 2001)

I spent 5 years walking through the Front Square of Trinity College watching graduates on their big day and wondering would that day ever come for me. Looking back I didn't know if I could face the first day on the Access Programme, even leaving the house and getting on the bus was an ordeal. But I soon settled in, made wonderful friends and learned lots of new skills. The year passed in a flash. The next four years of my degree were filled with ups and downs; meeting deadlines for assignments, balancing family and work, crying salted tears over the dreaded statistics course – would I ever make it to the big day? The final year came around - the last hurdle, final exams - all was well in the end and after waiting for this day for half a century the big day finally arrived and was well worth the wait.

Up at the crack of dawn, first in for the cap and gown, paraded around Front Square, photographed at all the old haunts - then to the Exam Hall for the ceremony. The sun was beaming in on that November day and I was beaming inside as I went up to collect my parchment and then went on to sign the register. It was a very emotional experience. After the ceremony I was met with the cheers of my family and friends. I couldn't have done it without their support. The 9th of November 2006 was one of the best days in my life.



Chocolate Covered Coffee Beans & Cigarettes

*I remember well the times that came before September last
When a good night's sleep became a far gone dream of the past
And so I stay up restless, yet another essay to write
And I drink more strong black coffee to see me through the night.*

*At the sight of colloquialisms and the much dreaded use of 'I'
"Use more academic language" in unison they cry
I return from stint at the library aware of what they said
And take my new best friend, The Oxford Dictionary, to bed.*

*As I toss and turn the night away, the reason becomes clear,
This sleeplessness is due to deadlines rushing past my ear.
At 2 a.m. I rise again and decide it's not too late
I will write a perfect essay and will not procrastinate.*

*As morning starts approaching, awake I cannot keep
With head on the keyboard I fall into a fitful sleep
Early next morning I wake to computer light
To find this poem there waiting, and not an essay, is in sight.*

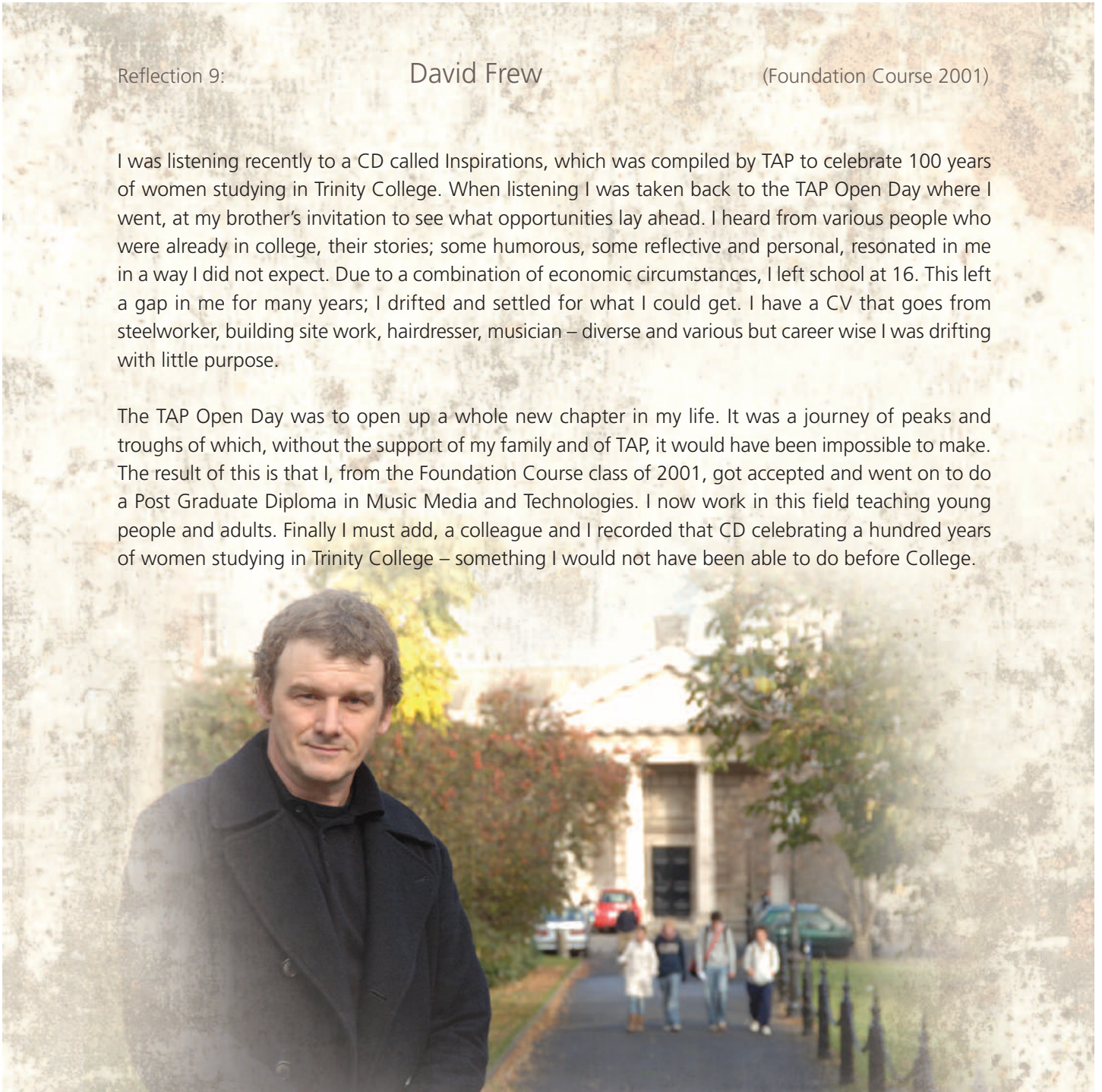
Reflection 9:

David Frew

(Foundation Course 2001)

I was listening recently to a CD called Inspirations, which was compiled by TAP to celebrate 100 years of women studying in Trinity College. When listening I was taken back to the TAP Open Day where I went, at my brother's invitation to see what opportunities lay ahead. I heard from various people who were already in college, their stories; some humorous, some reflective and personal, resonated in me in a way I did not expect. Due to a combination of economic circumstances, I left school at 16. This left a gap in me for many years; I drifted and settled for what I could get. I have a CV that goes from steelworker, building site work, hairdresser, musician – diverse and various but career wise I was drifting with little purpose.

The TAP Open Day was to open up a whole new chapter in my life. It was a journey of peaks and troughs of which, without the support of my family and of TAP, it would have been impossible to make. The result of this is that I, from the Foundation Course class of 2001, got accepted and went on to do a Post Graduate Diploma in Music Media and Technologies. I now work in this field teaching young people and adults. Finally I must add, a colleague and I recorded that CD celebrating a hundred years of women studying in Trinity College – something I would not have been able to do before College.



When asked to give a contribution to the 10th Anniversary publication, I thought long and hard. How could I express what the Programme means to me - surely there are far better observations and anecdotes than mine? But if nothing else the Trinity Access Programme has taught me that my story is as valid and as worthy as every other one. My road to TAP was long and problematic but it proves that where there is a will, with the Trinity Access Programme there definitely is a way. From an early age my mother instilled in me the idea that education was a never ending challenge and one to be truly embraced. But university was never really an option for me. It would be far more lucrative to go out get a job and support oneself. I was further distanced from education when I became a lone parent with a child to support. Advice I received whilst pregnant was that I should have my child adopted as I would not be able to give him a university education. I resolved that come what may, if he wanted to, he would go to a third-level institution.

Although he loved the social side of schooling he struggled abysmally through the academics but he stayed on to do his Leaving Cert under immense duress. He showed no interest in furthering his education but applied for a course as everyone else did. It was an uphill struggle to make ends meet; sacrifices were made but never begrudged. Thankfully a talk given to his class prompted him to apply to the Trinity Access Programmes Foundation Course for Young Adults - within weeks of starting TAP, his turning point came – he was assessed as being dyslexic. College life opened up a whole new world that he eagerly explored. He thrived on both the social and academic life that the Access Programme had catapulted him into. I watched the transformation with delight and I must say a certain envy. He is now in his final year of his chosen degree course, against all odds he is nearly there, which fills me with immense pride.

My son knew how much I had sacrificed and how I had been denied furthering my own education. He encouraged me to look into the Trinity Access Programme for Mature Students. I was offered a place in Trinity and very slowly hope crept into the scenario. The transition proved very difficult initially, stemming more so from my own perceived inadequacies that I wasn't up to it. My confidence slowly increased. I still stress over many things but the support, skills and most of all the encouragement the personnel of the Trinity Access Programme has furnished me with has been second to none. This year the Trinity Access Programme celebrates its 10th Anniversary. It has given so many Mature Students and Young Adults the opportunity to go that one step further to fulfilling their dreams and completing their education. This summer my son will watch me graduate from the Programme as I proudly watched him four years ago. I in turn, will see him graduate from Trinity College with an honours degree. A proud achievement by any standards – but for both of us, an achievement only made possible by the Trinity Access Programmes.

Part Two – An Evaluation of Mature Student Experiences

In this part of the publication celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Foundation Course for Mature Students, a summation of a recent research study entitled *The Trinity Access Programme: Foundation Course for Mature Students - An exploration of the factors behind the choices which lead to (i) application, (ii) retention and (iii) progression of Mature Students, returning to Education* compiled by Carol Guildea is presented and the implications of the research discussed.

This summary of the evaluation on the mature student experiences is presented as four key sections, which have informed the overall findings of this research.

In the first of these, a snapshot of the mature student cohorts from 1997-2007 is presented and encompasses a detailed look at the demographics of mature student profiles. Together with this, an examination of the major similarities of mature student experiences prior to applying to TAP is discussed.

The second section analyses the push and pull factors experienced by mature students in their quest to return to education. For greater clarity these push and pull factors are examined at both individual and system level.

The third section focuses on the challenges faced by mature students throughout their return to and participation in third-level education. In order to present these challenges as succinctly as possible, these are discussed in chronological order, starting with the pre-entry stage, then considering issues during the Foundation Course year and finally examining those at post-entry stage / at progression to third-level stage.

Finally the fourth section presents key recommendations that have emerged from this evaluation and briefly considers the implications of these findings.

SECTION ONE

The Foundation Course Students, 1997-2007

While it is true that education is a continuous process, it is also increasingly acknowledged that the forms it takes are not identical for young people and for adults. This is due to the fact that the status, circumstances, responsibilities and roles of these two sub sets of the population differ substantially. Wide variations have been found to exist between members of the mature student population, however it is possible to identify some characteristics, which appear to apply to most of the group. Greater consciousness and understanding of mature students, as a sociological group on the part of educators, management and government policy makers may help to gain a further insight into and an understanding of the common barriers facing mature students. From this, a greater comprehension and understanding of the choices made by Mature Students can be gained which it is hoped will positively affect the way in which mature students experience third-level education.

Gender

Research in the area of gender and education has shown that individual returns to education are greater for females than males. Recent research has shown that forty per cent of males go on to further study after leaving school compared to fifty per cent of females (Gorby et al., 2004). Indeed, the current undergraduate student population in TCD consists of sixty-one per cent females and thirty-nine per cent males, a pattern which is mirrored in the gender breakdown of adults returning to education via the Foundation Course. Over the past ten years, one hundred and forty seven females and ninety-six males have participated in the Foundation Course (60.25% and 39.75% respectively). Therefore, in relation to gender, mature students returning to education are in almost direct proportion to the wider student population.

Age

With regard to the statistical composition of the student population of Ireland, eighty-five per cent of mature students were under the age of forty-five years in 1996 (Lynch, 1997). Analysis of the first TAP mature cohort in 1997, the middle cohort in 2002 and the 2006 cohort, revealed that while the biggest percentage of the 1997 cohort (33%) were in the 41-46 age bracket, in 2006 the greatest frequency were from the 23-28 year old age category. While seventy-three per cent of the 2002 class were under 40 years old, this had reduced to sixty-two per cent in the class of 2006, therefore the overall age profile is seen to be shifting, with the younger matures procuring less of the available places than in previous years.

Area of habitation

The majority of mature TAP students over its ten year history have been found to originate from Dublin. Although a wide range of areas are represented, the largest numbers of students have lived in Co. Dublin (12.7%), Dublin 5 (9.3%) and Dublin 7 (8.5%) at their time of acceptance to the course. However, every postcode between Dublin 1 and Dublin 24 has been represented, as have the Counties Kildare and Wicklow.

Pre-entry issues experienced by mature students

From examination of the experiences of matures prior to applying to study on the Foundation Course it has been possible to identify the major similarities in their collective experiences and circumstances. Three recurrent themes have arisen throughout the research namely: family history and childhood education, occupation and adult education.

Family history and childhood education

Previous research has established that mature students are self-directing and are in the middle of a process of growth rather than at the start of one (Rogers, 2002). Hence, their previous experiences of the education system together with their life-experiences are significant, as they bring these with them in their return to education. Interestingly, the TAP mature students all shared similar socio-economic backgrounds and similar experiences with regard to family history of education.

The mature students have predominately grown up in families lacking a strong historical foundation in education and sixty-nine per cent were the first in their families to attend third-level education. Almost sixty per cent of these students came from families of four or more siblings, certainly large families in contemporary terms. And a family culture of education has emerged a well recognised aspect of the mature student profile. Almost all students described a history that was devoid of any family role models in third and in some cases, second-level education and as children, they felt they were socialised away from continuing with education. Students vocalised a strong awareness of this and considered family influences to be a major contributing factor for leaving education so prematurely.

'I came from a family that never progressed to third-level. Most of us didn't even get... Leaving Cert. And then to do four extra years in college- that wasn't even a consideration. Leaving Cert wasn't a consideration'

'You didn't know anyone who went to third-level and it was just never thought about'

Interestingly, a recent study on access programmes found that mature students held strong and deep rooted views of education as a middle class pursuit but this research identified an element of responsibility on behalf of the students themselves for their own individual choice (Marks et al., 2003).

'I was good at school, I got good grades but I didn't take it seriously'

The stage at which participants originally left the education system was quite wide ranging, with some leaving as early as primary school and others completing second-level. The average leaving age however was sixteen. In addition to family culture, two secondary reasons - the financial needs of the nuclear family and the availability of employment were identified as factors influencing their move away from education. Students perceived that in the absence of a motivation to continue with education, the motivation for and opportunity to earn and to support others financially was strong.

'It was just a given that I would go and get a job and help support the family'

Additionally, the culture of education at primary and secondary-level, and therefore the activities of the school, were identified as having a negative and limiting effect on student's choices. That said, these mature students did not have an entirely negative experience of the education system on the whole and many showed a positive nostalgia when referring to their childhood education.

'We were never ever brought to open days. Not only were we never given the option to go, we were never even told about them'

'I really liked being at school'

Therefore it is argued that socialisation at a systems level, through a lack of information regarding education, when combined with reinforcement within the family circumstance and social network regarding the workforce, has a significant impact on mature students leaving their initial childhood schooling.

Occupation

With regard to the occupation of students prior to attending the TAP course, the majority, were homemakers, who in turn were all women bar one. Second were those unemployed, an equal split of males and females. Administration and labour were the third most common occupations, with the majority of those engaged in administration being female, and all of the labourers being male. Based on the occupational history of TAP mature students, the vast majority came from occupations which are traditionally unskilled and gender specific.

Adult Education

It has become clear from this research, that mature students have a resounding interest in education. Indeed over seventy per cent of matures agreed they had always wanted to attend university. This was further supported by the fact that many of the students had completed a variety of nationally recognised training courses prior to their application for TAP. In fact, rather than seeing the completion of the Foundation Course as an educational achievement in itself, over ninety-five per cent of the mature students viewed it as a stepping stone to a Level 8 qualification.

'I would say everyone who was on the Foundation Course looked at it as a way to get into college. I would think so. I did when I started'

The mature students were aware that their standard of living, in addition to their contribution to society and the economy, would be limited if they did not develop their personal knowledge and demonstrated a considerable understanding of the importance of an educational qualification in order to evolve and aspire to higher positions in the workforce.

'Any time I get sick of studying in here I go to some greasy spoon café and when I think that the alternative is working in some place like that, it gives me a real reality check. I don't want to work behind a counter'

SECTION TWO

The Push and Pull Factors for Mature Students Entering the Foundation Course

In this section of the publication, the primary motivators seen to impact on a mature student's decision to return to education are considered. These are initially addressed as push and pull factors and are then further considered at both individual and system level. The main components of the two key motivating factors are identified as individual choice combined with course availability.

Push Factors: Motivations for returning to Education

Push factors: at an individual level

The Self Concept

Motivation to overcome the barriers to education has been related to a number of factors. However, within much of the literature in this area, the inner needs and drives of a learner are identified as key motivations and it is argued that an individual's self concept plays an important role in occupational choice (McCann, 1999).

The findings from this research support this hypothesis as when mature students were asked whether they have always wanted to attend a third-level course, over seventy-five per cent of respondents indicated that they had. It was also clear that the majority of mature students interviewed had a strong desire to attain an educational qualification and that this inner-desire had been present since their childhood.

'It was always in my mind, I did want a third-level education. I always wanted to go on and do it... I always knew someday I would do it'

In particular, many of the mature students referred to the perceived vacuum they experienced due to their exit from the education system and on completing their journey through the formal education system, expressed a sense of inner satisfaction in relation to their self-concept.

'I had this inkling for five years before or even more that I always wanted to go back to education because I had never done the Junior Cert. and I had never done the Leaving Cert. I always had this feeling and so I started to make inquiries about it'

'Looking back, I feel like I have got something out of my system'

Individual Development

One's own personal development was identified by many of the mature students as a motivator for returning to and continuing with education. Super's research in the area of developmental stages highlights that an individual will enter a life stage, only when they have completed all of the tasks of the previous stage (Super, 1963). This was mirrored in the findings of this research, as many students referred to a personal process they were working through themselves, one which they had to complete before returning to education.

'I always had an interest in books and drama. I loved reading and going to the theatres. I did that myself all my life, but I always wanted more. I wanted to get an education for myself. To answer a call from within'

'You have to be really ready for going back to college in your own mind. You really have to be ready to go back to education'

In the case of mature students on the Foundation Course, many had left school at an early age to join the workforce. Hence, it is argued that for these individuals, childhood education may not have come to its natural conclusion. But all of these students brought with them to education their own package of experience, assets and values and the research found that this "life-experience" had a significant effect on the adult learner. Many of their experiences were framed in a positive light with the mature students clearly able to see the value of the transferable skills they have acquired.

'I'm coming from administration... I have huge time management skills from that employment and I have brought them forward with me [as an asset in my education]'

For some however, life experience was observed to have had a lasting negative impact, a phenomenon which was more prevalent for the older members of the mature student population.

'With people in their fifties, when you get to that stage, you might have had a lot of knock-backs and they bring that with them in here. It affects them at one stage or another and affects their chances of graduating'

Push factors: At a system level

The Family

It is clear from the previous section that a genuine desire for education, in addition to the prospect of advancing in the workforce, are two of the primary factors found to motivate individuals in their return to education. A third major motivating factor identified by this research was the family. This was particularly evident for females returning to education, and many females described how their return to education was heavily influenced by their wish to normalise further education for their children. In this way they attempted to alter the culture and social norms within their family and this desire to act as role models for their children was found to be a key motivation for mature students.

'In a way I came back for my little boy. He keeps me in college- I want him to think that it's normal, so someday maybe he might come in. What I don't want is for him to be afraid to walk into Trinity like I once was'

Interestingly when one examines the available literature in this area, the 'family' is not highlighted as a prominent motivator or 'push factor', but it is evident from this research that this was an important driving force behind many mature students decision to return to education.

'My husband went back, and my daughter, and me. It has had the ripple effect'

Social capital has been shown to reside not only in the family, but also in the community (Coleman, 1997). Thus, it is argued that students from under-represented groups who are currently participating in or who have successfully completed third-level education are valuable sources of social and cultural capital to their communities and families. It is clear from this research, that the students themselves are fully aware of the social and cultural value that their education is having on their own nuclear family. Additionally, they are also beginning to introduce the community to new norms, practices and social networks. Indeed, almost a quarter of those surveyed indicated they were informed about the Trinity Access Programme through a friend or a relative, i.e. through the wider community.

Pull Factors: Motivations for returning to Education

Globalisation and the economic changes that have occurred in Ireland in recent times have facilitated motivation at an individual level. This motivation has been assisted by 'pull factors' such as financial assistance and academic support for those who choose to return to education. Most importantly, the increase in the availability of courses is a significant draw or motivation in the decision to return to education (Walters, 1997). Many of the mature students in this research highlighted that they wished to return to education, many years before they actually did and it is clear that the transitions and transformations experienced by Ireland as a nation due to the processes of globalisation, have been pull factors towards education at an individual level, particularly when compared with what was available in terms of education previous to the impact of globalisation (Horton & Patapan, 2004).

'I went back in my twenties and did my Leaving Cert, which was in the 80s. But at that stage, there was no course, there was nothing for Matures really. So I had to go back working'

It is clear that recent government investment has improved the education system which has largely contributed to the increased numbers of adults returning to education. This is beneficial from a systems perspective also, as the courses available fulfil the function of increasing the skills base of the workforce.

Push and Pull Factors Combined: When functions at a system level meet individual responsibility

The concept of 'individual choice' is highly visible in an individual's decision to return to education. Simultaneously however, it is evident that awareness on behalf of mature students of the importance and responsibility of the Government, in supporting the individual, is just as vital.

Not only the wider society, but also the individual, benefits from education. Similarly, it is contended that both parties have a responsibility with regard to education. For mature students this involves the fulfilment of their self concept and their active participation in higher education, the government then (on behalf of society) should provide and support such students who wish to return to higher education.

'I would be very aware of taking responsibility for me, but in a new territory, support is so important'

'The decision was mine but I got a lot of bolstering along the way'

SECTION THREE

Challenges Faced by Mature Students

From this research, it has been possible to pinpoint certain obstacles faced by matures in their quest to return to education. In order to present these difficulties / obstacles as succinctly as possible, they will be discussed in chronological order, starting with the pre-entry stage, then considering issues during the Foundation Course and finally examining those at post-entry stage.

Barriers at the pre-entry stage

Access to information

Throughout the process of returning to education, adults face a number of challenges or barriers. The greatest barrier identified at the pre-entry stage was that of a lack of information about the availability of the course itself. In many cases it was found that participants came upon the course haphazardly or by chance. While forty-three per cent of mature students heard about the course through official sources including linked schools, guidance counsellors and the TAP website, the remaining forty-seven per cent heard about the course either by luck or through more informal channels such as word of mouth.

'I happened to see the course advertised in a newspaper and I just applied for it'

This barrier has also been identified in recent governmental reports, which have indicated that some students have had the experience of getting information about access programmes in a random and unsystematic manner (Ireland, 2006). Similarly, findings from another study about the experiences of mature students in Higher Education reported that a number of students discovered the course they were doing through newspaper advertisements (Crossan et al., 2003).

Availability of places

It has also been observed on a year to year basis, that applications for the Foundation Course exceed the number of places offered. Hence, while lack of information regarding the availability of programmes of this nature is a barrier at an individual level, it is not currently of consequence at a systems level. This is evident from the numbers of successful applicants accepting offers of places.

Psychological barriers – perceptions of Trinity

The 'notion' of Trinity was identified as another barrier by the mature students at the pre-entry stage. In essence, many students had a pre-conceived idea or notion of what Trinity College was, and saw it as an unwelcoming, elite institution.

'When I walked through Trinity every day as a kid going home, I was always waiting for someone to say to me 'what are you doing here?'

Overview of the 'pre-entry' stage

It is evident that at the pre-entry stage, the motivations for returning to education outweigh the hurdles for the majority of adults who have come through the experience successfully. The push factors for returning to education as discussed in the last section include the potential for individual development and fulfilment of the self concept combined with the prospect of gaining a Level 8 qualification. This qualification, the mature students expect, will lead to a better position when re-engaging in the workforce, which may facilitate further individual development at a later stage.

Very few barriers to education were identified by the mature students at the 'pre-entry' stage of the process. It is argued that this is due to the fact that there has been no measurable cultural transition at this stage. Any barriers which may be anticipated are purely theoretical, and when combined with the pull factors of financial and academic support from TAP, are minimal and negligible.

Challenges at entry stage and during participation in the Foundation Course

Throughout much of the literature in this area, the difficulties and challenges facing adults returning to education have been identified and described in great detail (Ireland, 1983; Seligma, 1994). From a statistical perspective, forty-three students out of the two hundred and forty-three admitted to the course between 1997 and 2006 did not complete the Foundation Course itself. Hence, the challenges associated with participating in and completing the TAP Foundation Course specifically merit consideration and exploration. The challenges faced by matures that emerged from this research are discussed under three separate areas; psychological barriers, system barriers and personal barriers.

Psychological barriers – perceptions of university

Many mature students involved in this research vocalised that they felt that they were entering an academic world that not only was alien to them, but that they also found personally intimidating. As part of this, a number spoke of how they perceive themselves as being different to the 'normal' student body in Trinity and not of the right calibre to study in Trinity College.

'College wasn't for the likes of us'

'I used to think I wasn't of the calibre to be in college'

System barriers

The system related barriers included issues, which were linked with full-time study and lack of time for other life tasks, course content and financial difficulty. These challenges, originating from the education system were those that were most often referred to as being problematic for participants at this particular stage of the process.

It was found in this research that the issue of finance proved to be a barrier for only a minority of mature students returning to education and it was clear that the funding provided by TAP was sufficient for most individuals to survive on. While eighty per cent of males and seventy-two per cent of females indicated that they did not find it difficult to meet the financial expenses during their Foundation Course year, finance was identified as an issue for some students.

'You got financial support all the way through from TAP. It wasn't an awful lot but we got that help along the way and it made a huge difference'

'It was a very frightening feeling. No more work, nothing coming in anymore'

As a minority of mature students clearly did have financial difficulties, it is evident that information on external funding options is not perhaps as accessible to these students as it should be. It is also plausible to argue that greater assistance in budgeting and resource management is needed to assist those who are struggling financially. Although small, this group is significant as it represents a weakness within the system and demonstrates that when policies are informed by human capital concepts, it is necessary to consider that some groups may not have access to relevant information.

Seventy-five per cent however did not find finance to be a concern during their year on the Foundation Course and this was seen to be due to two factors; firstly the financial support provided by the Trinity Access Programme and secondly because other problems and challenges were more pressing for the majority of mature students.

Personal barriers

Research has shown that when an individual holds a variety of conflicting roles, they may experience difficulty when trying to marry these differing roles (Super: 1991). Tasks identified as typically occurring during adulthood more usually include that of being a parent than a student and due to this, family related challenges were identified as a potential barrier by a number of the mature students. The obstacles in relation to family responsibilities are reminiscent of the initial barrier of family responsibility faced by these students during their childhood education as discussed earlier.

At this stage in the education process however, family related barriers were viewed more as a barrier for women than men. While eighty-three per cent of the male mature students stated that lack of encouragement was not a difficulty for them during the Foundation Course, lack of familial support was considered to be a problem for eighty-two per cent of female mature students. Great admiration for the women, particularly with regard to the extra strain of their maternal role was expressed by many of the mature students. One male mature student identified that 'the parent role' was a potentially major barrier, not for him, but for his female colleagues on the Foundation Course.

'I did find it very tough going to mix my responsibilities to my family and then here'

'I don't know how the women with children do it, do the course full time. You can see that it is especially hard for them trying to be there for their children and then trying to do their essays and things as well. I have the greatest respect for the women with children who complete the course'

However, difficulties regarding family responsibilities and caring roles were not limited to parenting issues. For example, a challenge identified as problematic for thirty-two per cent of mature students with regard to education was that of the ill health of close friends and/or relative.

As noted, the primary challenges facing mature students at this stage in their journey through the education system were related to finance and family responsibilities. TAP has shown itself to be aware of these challenges, as a variety of measures have been undertaken throughout the years by staff and management to prevent these challenges from overwhelming the mature students. Supports such as increased funding for childcare, permission to defer for a year or to split a year, are three examples of how TAP has attempted to alleviate the stress of these challenges.

Overview of the Foundation Course year

Evidently mature students encounter challenges and barriers during their year on the Foundation Course, however the majority of students, due to their own motivation and support systems successfully complete the course. In addition to the confidence gained from academic learning during the year, one of the most valued experiences of the course is the sense of community experienced by the student body at large. It is useful to note however, that no student who dropped out of the Foundation Course was available to contribute to this research. Without an in-depth evaluation into why they dropped out of the Foundation Course, the barriers facing mature students on the Foundation Course cannot be completely understood.

Post entry issues and challenges

Although in the main the students, who took part in this study, were exceptionally happy with their experience during their time on the course, it was the experience of what came after the course which evoked the most detailed and passionate responses. This was due mainly to the fact that although each of the mature students followed a similar path upon completion of the Foundation Course, each had very different experiences. It is these experiences at third-level, which are explored at this juncture rather than experiences related to other choices thereafter as ninety-seven per cent of students view the Foundation Course as a stepping-stone to third-level education. Consequently, this section seeks to outline the most significant obstacles faced when continuing to third-level education. The challenges involved in transferring to third-level education from the Foundation Course were found to be multiple and varied and are addressed as five key areas; entry procedures, transition, culture (language), course-content and structural barriers.

Entry procedures

One of the challenges encountered by the mature students for study at undergraduate level occurred during the Foundation Course year itself. Prior to sitting their end of year exams, these students can attend up to six interviews in Trinity College. Although there is a standardised interview procedure across the college, students had varying experiences of this interview and selection process. A number of mature students expressed a lack of understanding and clarity around how selection for courses was decided.

'I got the distinction in the course but no place in college and I put that down to the interview'

Transition to undergraduate life

Transitions involve individual change or adaptation and may be defined as 'any event, or non event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles (Schlossberg: 1995). They may be 'characterised by a discontinuity with previous life events and emergence of coping responses,' and as such, may be difficult for individuals (Brammer: 1991). Transitions represent a stage of disequilibrium in the life of an individual and have the potential to cause feelings of great stress and uncertainty. They break links with the stability and familiarity of the past, and the individual must adjust in response to the environmental pressure. The transition to undergraduate study from the Foundation Course was described as a turbulent process by every student who progressed onwards.

'I got a complete shock about what college was like. It was a real shock to the system'

'There was a chasm between coming off the programme and entering the university. A huge chasm and that is a problem'

The transition to undergraduate level study was found to be much more challenging for the mature students than their initial return to full time education in TAP. The difficulties associated with transition are multifaceted and can be broadly separated into three areas; the functional, social and academic aspects of the change. Both the functional and social difficulties were felt immediately by the students. Less often, the mature students mentioned the academic difficulties as an initial difficulty in the transition.

'It took me two days to get my timetable. There is no-one there telling you how to do it. There are bits of paper everywhere. You are on your own. I don't know how the Leaving Cert kids get on with it'

'Feeling older and not fitting in. That was crap'

'You wouldn't have a clue what the lecturer was going on about 20 minutes into the lecture, so that was hard'

The area most focused on by the mature students was the social challenges during the transition from the Foundation Course to third-level. This suggests that the social barrier is a prominent obstacle for mature students of lower socio-economic background, even more so than that of the academic content of the course or the functional and structural barriers involved in activities such as organising your own timetable.

Cultural barriers- language

It was at the post-Foundation Course stage that the cultural barriers to third-level education became most apparent for TAP mature students returning to education. Language in particular was identified as a major barrier, with regard to both the vocabulary and dialect used. Third-level courses are provided within an environment of academic discourse and it is well recognised that this environment confers a cultural value on those who use it (Archer et al.: 2003). Indeed, it is argued that the education system demands successful students to have linguistic and cultural competencies, which are usually transmitted in the family and can be summated by the term 'cultural capital.' Consequently, certain individuals become more familiar with and attain a better standard of academic language based on their family background.

Initially, many of the mature students perceived their 'accent' set them apart as different to 'the norm' and a number felt very self-conscious about their personal accents, which they perceived as pejorative and stigmatising. They explained that they felt discrimination and prejudice was expressed in a subtle manner towards them as a result. It is plausible that this led to the creation of a social reality, which marked them out as different and hampered their strides towards acceptance.

'I find that my accent is a very big obstacle. People don't treat me with any respect after they hear me talking'

However, difficulties with language were not purely limited to that of the spoken. While mature students found they eventually overcame their insecurities with regard to their dialect, many students expressed a longer lasting difficulty with written language. It was found that academic discourse was an intimidating factor for many upon entry to third-level education, even after their year on the Foundation Course and was an issue for Irish and non-Irish students alike.

'I found that writing was very difficult. I had to write and rewrite and my confidence went right down'

Irrespective of whether English was the first language of mature students or not, it is clear that the academic language of third-level was a significant and continuous challenge for these students, particularly with regard to written prose. For those whose first language was not English, this language barrier was the most challenging aspect of their return to education.

Course content

Significantly, although the academic content of third-level programmes was referred to as being difficult particularly in relation to language, and for most, much harder than that of the Foundation Course, the mature students did not refer to this as being a consistent challenge. Most students pinpointed aspects of the courses that they found difficult, but did not view these as over-powering.

'The practical challenge of doing maths... that was a nightmare. It was really tough but I managed to scrape by that so it wasn't too much a problem for me on the grand scheme of things'

Functional/structural barriers

In many instances, students described the fear, stress and anxiety at encountering the 'day-to-day' functional and structural tasks in college. These included activities such as visiting the library, using computers and other tasks which required a familiarisation with the functional aspects of college. Interestingly, many students mentioned the fact that they perceived the 'normal' student body, as having no problems in adjusting to college life. This added to their anxiety as they perceived themselves to be the only students facing these challenges.

'Coming into college in the first year was nerve-wracking and daunting. Not knowing exactly what you were doing all the time. Finding my way was very difficult and was very scary, even though you could say I was in Trinity for a year before I started my degree'

'You were really put off by the kids just coming in after their Leaving Cert. You see them as real bright and you feel like you can't keep up with them'

Indeed, confidence was highlighted as a significant challenge for the mature students. Forty-eight per cent of males and sixty-one per cent of females admitted that they lacked confidence in their educational ability, despite having gained a place on the Foundation Course, successfully completing it and gaining a place at undergraduate degree level.

'I would have lacked confidence and lacked an image of myself in study'

'Confidence was a big problem for me'

SECTION FOUR

Salient Recommendations

It has not been possible within the limited space available here to address all aspects of the findings from the research on which this publication is based. However it is appropriate at this juncture to discuss the main recommendations for the future that have emerged as a result of this study and have been generated as a result of the findings presented in the previous sections of this publication. In total three main recommendations have emerged namely;

- Need for greater integration of the TAP Foundation Course for Mature Students within Trinity College
- Need for standardised entry procedures to all third-level under-graduate courses
- Incorporate the Foundation Course qualification in the National Framework of Qualifications

Need for greater integration of the TAP Foundation Course for Mature Students within Trinity College

Mature students in TAP have a very long, if not the longest journey towards achieving their educational qualifications. A huge commitment is required on their part in order to re-engage with education as an adult. A major question then is: does the Foundation Course equip the mature students with the skills that they need to benefit from and participate in a third-level educational course?

While the experience of mature students on the Foundation Course was generally found to be a positive one, it is believed that more could be done to prepare the students for the main challenge facing them, such as dealing with the significant social and cultural disparities which are found to have an impact upon transition to third-level.

It is clear that every effort is made to support the mature students academically and prepare them for the academic related challenges of third-level. However, based on the findings here, a greater emphasis on socialisation into the cultural processes of university life is recommended. This recommendation is based on the fact that social and cultural issues encountered by students were found to pose a much greater challenge for matures than any academic obstacles they experienced.

It was also found that the mature students perceive themselves to be on the periphery of college life during their time in the Foundation Course. With this in mind, greater attempts should be made to assist integration into the culture and daily life of Trinity College itself. This would potentially assist in minimising the barriers of a turbulent transition to and isolation in third-level, experienced by current and previous students. It is argued that this integration is also essential to reduce the tensions and turbulence associated with the transition for those students who continue further at third-level. If the rates of non-completion of undergraduate level study are to decrease, a greater integration between the Trinity Access Programmes and Trinity College is imperative. It is proposed that to aid the progression of students into third-level education, integration at cultural, structural and academic levels should be a primary focus.

Improvements at a structural level will, in turn, assist to achieve increased cultural integration. For example, if classes and/or meetings were held on campus rather than in the classrooms in Goldsmith Hall, this would allow the mature students to experience the 'hustle and bustle' of daily campus life first hand. An ideal and long term goal would be the relocation of the offices of the Trinity Access

Programmes to the main college campus. It is thought that structural changes such as these will, in turn, assist integration and changes at a social level, as previous research indicates that activities, which provide hands-on experience of college life, are considered by students to be very helpful in breaking down the attitudinal and social barriers associated with third-level education (Ireland: 2006).

This research has shown that the mature students experience their year on the Foundation Course as positive and that a community of students from a similar background creates a sense of belonging. While enjoying the sense of community the mature students are actually becoming increasingly integrated in an established collective, one which is in the minority at third-level and many students described how they experienced a sense of isolation at third-level. This lack of belonging was possibly exemplified by the fact that they entered third-level through the non-traditional route.

Although a large number of individuals expressed the importance of the social support network provided by TAP in Goldsmith Hall, which provided a secure base, where they could socialise with people from the same background as themselves, these alliances seemed in some cases to remove any incentive for students to mix with other 'traditional' students in their course. Furthermore it hinders their motivation to integrate into the wider college community, particularly at the beginning of undergraduate level study. As a result, many mature students find themselves compartmentalised in terms of who they socialise with, which is not ideal in terms of the challenges facing mature students returning to adult education.

Mature students did find some aspects of returning to third-level education 'shocking.' In particular, the lack of familiarity with the social and cultural differences of university life was described as being problematic and it was found that upon transition to third-level education, mature students tended to operate on the periphery of college life. By limiting their level of integrating with the wider campus community, it is feared that these students are being 'tunnelled' through College, which in the long term, could hinder their career options at the end of their degree. This is due to the fact that they may not develop the integration and networking skills essential for success in the current market. Hence, it is argued that similar to the responsibilities with regard to lifelong learning as discussed above, a responsibility to minimise barriers to education exists at both an individual and systems level.

In summary, a main aim of the Foundation Course is to equip mature students with the skills that they will need to benefit from and participate in a third-level educational course. Currently, there is a strong focus upon academic standards in TAP. However, it is felt that an increased focus should be placed on the social and cultural skills the students will need for the transition. The lives of the mature students should be as entwined as possible in the functional, structural, social and therefore cultural activities of the main campus, as this could potentially decrease the alienation and stress associated with the transition to undergraduate level study. It is not suggested however that TAP should decrease the focus it places on academic standards, as many students who are less academically able still need this area to be a main focus, but rather this should be considered in conjunction with the social and cultural skills identified to ease transition.

Need for standardised entry procedures to all third-level under-graduate courses

In contrast with the application process for the Foundation Course itself, it was found that the application procedure to third-level education poses a significant challenge for many mature students. Based on the perceived experiences already described, it is suggested that the variety of entry procedures currently adopted by third-level institutions should be examined and a more coherent national entry process be developed. This suggestion is supported by current governmental policy documents which call for a more simplified and uniform application procedure at this level (Ireland: 2006).

Currently, it is acknowledged that few institutions are in a position to say that all staff are fully engaged in promoting equity of access (Ireland: 2006). However, until 1998 there was no specific adult education policy in Ireland. The Paper Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning was the first Green Paper on Adult Education in the history of the State. This Paper suggested that Higher Education Institutions should introduce a system of mature student quotas in as many faculties as feasible (Ireland: 1998).*

* In 1997 Trinity College established a system of reserved places for students from under-represented groups. Since 2004, 15% of the CAO quotas in all faculties are reserved for students from non-traditional backgrounds, to include students who are socio-economically disadvantaged.

It is therefore recommended that one common, open, competitive entry system to third-level should be designed. A contemporary interviewing technique should be employed and standardised across all university departments to provide an equal opportunity for all potential applicants to stand on a level footing when applying for a degree course. A transparent and open entry route would also assist in removing and minimising any perceived stigma attached to the 'back door entry' to third-level education. Further to this, it is recommended that the Foundation Course itself and all other access courses should be incorporated into the national framework of educational qualifications.

Incorporation of the Foundation Course qualification into the National Framework of Qualifications

As already discussed, the Foundation Course is viewed by many mature students primarily as a stepping stone to further education. Indeed, the Foundation Course is, in essence, a preparatory course for study at third-level. However, it is also an educational experience; a self contained programme with a curriculum and end of year exams. It is therefore recognised that a greater value should be placed on successful completion of the Foundation Course itself.

For those students who successfully complete the Foundation Course but do not get offered a place at third-level, and for those students who do not complete third-level studies, their experience of 'non-completion' can affect both their self-confidence and their self-concept. If successful completion of the Foundation Course was viewed as an achievement in itself, it is believed that this would have a more positive impact. In summary, it is recommended that the qualification attained at the end of the Foundation Course year should be incorporated into the National Framework of Qualifications.

Due to changes at government policy level there has been a recent upsurge in the number and variety of courses available to adults who wish to return to education. In particular, FETAC was established under the Qualifications Act 1999 and these awards recognise Further Education achievement and provide systematic pathways of progression. Hence, incorporating the Foundation Course for Mature Students into the National Framework of Qualifications would be beneficial at both a systems and an individual level. Secondary benefits would include aiding the perceptions of equality and assisting transparency of the application system to third-level. This recommendation is timely given that The Taskforce on Lifelong Learning considers that goals of facilitating access, transfer and progression are absolutely fundamental to both the qualifications framework and to the overall strategic framework of lifelong learning (Ireland: 2002).

Afterword

The majority of mature students have had positive experiences while on the TAP Foundation Course for Higher Education: Mature Students. However, a number of implications for the future development of the TAP Foundation Course and other access courses for mature students have emerged:

The return of mature students to full-time education at the foundation/access stage is dependant on the responsiveness of the state in ensuring that such courses are widely available and both responsive and flexible in their delivery and curricula; these are important 'pull' factors. Progression to third-level education on completion of the foundation course has emerged as a key consideration. The achievement of one common, open, and competitive entry system to third-level is likely to be the biggest hurdle. The procedures used for selection of mature students, including interviews, need to be as transparent as possible and should include the provision for feedback to unsuccessful candidates. The transition from foundation/ access courses to third-level education has emerged as a key period in the mature student's educational journey. Some TAP mature students are more successful at remaining in and completing undergraduate studies than others. As such, this area warrants further research. On an individual level and at a systems level, the Foundation Course would benefit from being incorporated within the National Framework of Qualifications. This would alleviate any sense of non-completion for students who do not progress to third-level or for those who do not complete third-level studies. A nationally-recognised qualification would promote transfer and progression across the education sector. There is now a need for comparative research to be carried out based on the experiences of mature students from the Liberal Arts, Level 5 courses offered in collaboration with the CDVECs and of the TAP Foundation Courses.

While adult education is the last area of mass education which remains to be developed in Ireland, it is slowly emerging out of the mists of uncertainty. It is hoped the current research has pinpointed some direction for future developments in the area of foundation/ access courses for third-level education and that this publication will contribute to debate in this area such as that initiated by the HEA consultation paper of July 2007 *'Towards a new policy approach to higher education access courses'*.

Finally, as the co-ordinator of the TAP Foundation Course for Mature Students since 2000 I have had the wonderful opportunity to share the excitement of the many mature students who have seized the opportunities available and made incredible personal journeys of self-fulfilment and discovery, often in the face of difficult circumstances. I wish to thank the mature students from the years 1997 – 2007 for their insightful contributions to the development of the Course, for their support of new students on the Foundation Course and their continued involvement in TAP activities. It is also heartening to note that many TAP mature students are progressing to post-graduate studies and thus moving access to another level.

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