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Overview of Third Level Access Initiatives

# What is Access?

Third-level Access initiatives aims to foster participation of underrepresented groups in Irish Higher Education Institutions.

Many Irish Universities and Institutes of Technology have Access Offices which assist people access certificate and degree courses and then support students as they progress.

# Why was “Access” established?

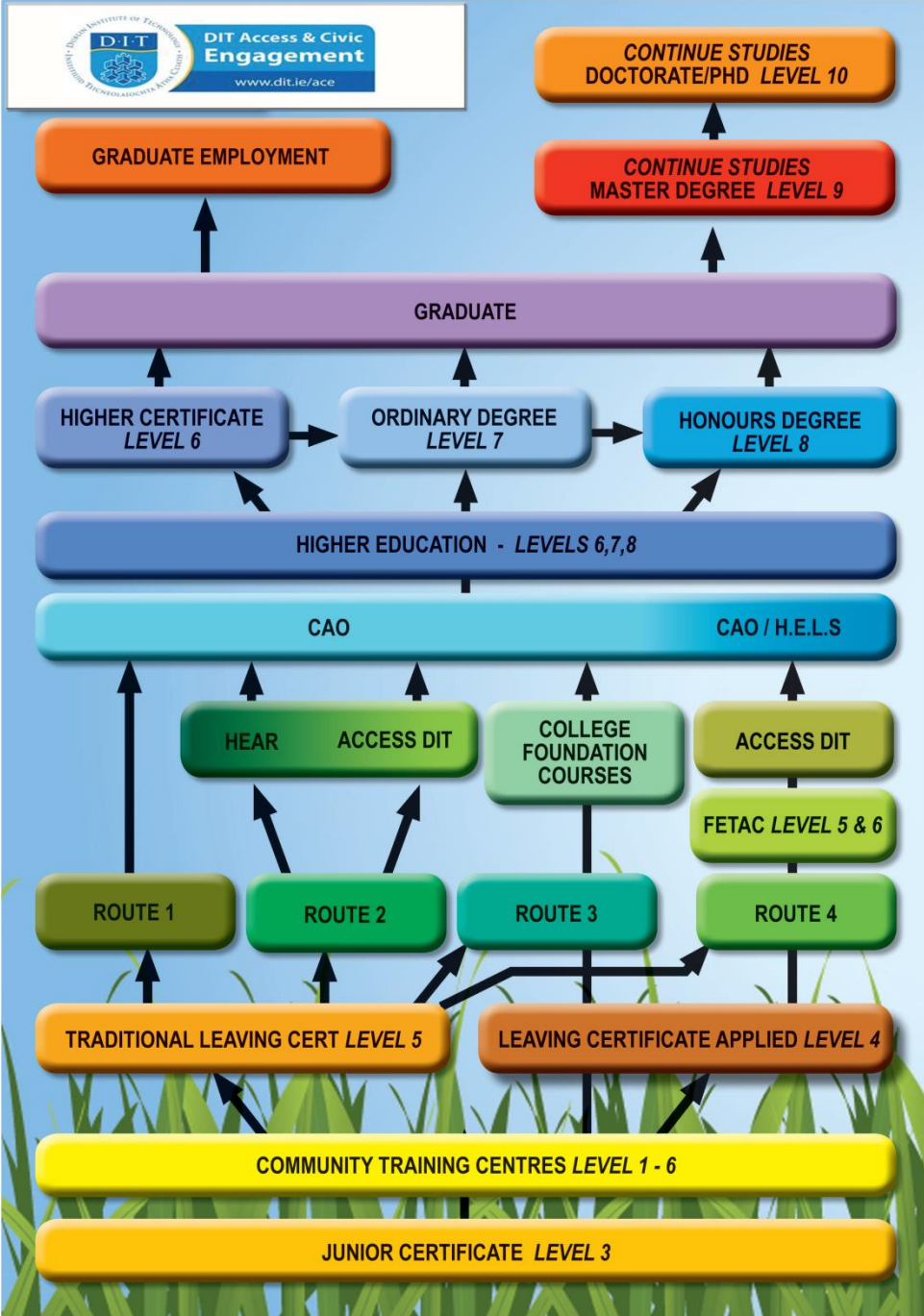
- In response to research highlighting persistent inequalities in access to higher education for those from lower socio-economic groups and certain areas.
- For example, admission rates to higher education when analysed by postcode showed that rates of participation varied from 86% (Dublin 14) to 11% (Dublin 10) (O’Connell, Clancy & McCoy 2006, table 5.8, p102)
- The DIT Access Service also identified that in particular, low numbers of students were progressing to higher education from linked inner city schools and specifically implemented the Dublin Inner City Schools Programme in 2009 to help increase participation rates from these schools.

# How does Access work?

“Access Offices” usually assist people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds

There are a number of ways people can access a third-level course, these include:

- CAO
- Higher Education Access Route
- Direct Entry Schemes
- FETAC Links Scheme
- Foundation/Bridging Courses



# Post-Entry Supports

- Students who secure a place in college via an Access scheme can then avail of a range of supports
  - ▣ Social
    - Dedicated Support Worker
    - Special Pre-Induction Orientation Programme
    - Regular Funded Social Events
  - ▣ Financial
    - Additional bursary
    - Assistance completing grant forms
    - Budgeting advice

# Post-Entry Supports

- Academic
  - Additional Tutorials
  - Liaising with course-tutor Re: extenuating circumstances
  - Peer Assistance
  
- Additional Supports vary from college to college, but usually includes a series of large group, small group and 1-1 meetings with support officer.
  
- If challenges emerge for students during the year, the support officer is the first point of contact and can liaise with the college to ensure the student's needs are met.

# Responding to Young Carers

- Access Services are a confidential source of support, so students do not need to fear asking for help
- The Access Support Officer will understand the young carer's situation from Day 1 and will endeavor to put in place pro-active supports with the full input of the young carer
- The Access Support Officer will be able to liaise with community partners to ensure that support for the carer is available to take time off and socialise



# Responding to Young Carers

- Emergency financial assistance is available to ease the carer's mind
- A safe space to discuss their concerns with a trusted, understanding adult along with free counselling referrals and appointments
- Time management training for assistance in juggling college workload and carer duties

# The Good News

- On average, the retention and progression of students supported by Access Services at Higher Education Institutions nationwide is higher than that of the overall student body.
- Your Support Officer can facilitate the space for non-linear progression (ie, taking time off, repeating a year, liaising with FETAC colleges, etc...) to account for needs of carers
- A targeted Peer Mentoring scheme, which pairs upper year young carers with new first year carers can help foster a sense of identification in college

# The Good News

- Access Supports can provide a positive point of engagement outside the family home, build aspirations and tweeze out anxieties by connecting the dots to supports available both at third-level and beyond.
- Students will be supported by Access Offices to raise awareness about their situations with the wider student body, if they choose to speak out

Questions?  
Comments?

**Thank you.**