



Under-Represented: Lone Parents in Higher Education

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Introduction

This cross-departmental study was funded by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in conjunction with the Higher Education Authority (HEA), the Department for Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and the Department for Social Protection (DSP)

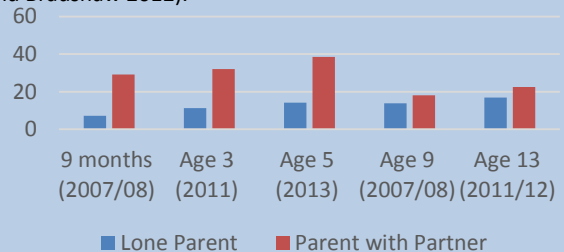
Objective

Review the barriers and supports for lone parents in accessing HE, Recommend policy changes.

Method

- Interviews with Lone Parent Stakeholder Groups
- Interviews with Lone Parents
- Questionnaire sent to each HEIs regarding provision and policy pertaining to lone parents
- Analysis of Growing up in Ireland data
- Analysis of Eurostudent Data

Figure below indicates **Low Education Levels of Lone Parents** in Ireland, has been previously well documented (NESF 2001; Smyth and Byrne 2004; CSO 2007, 2012). There is **substantial variation across European countries** in the educational attainment levels of lone parents. **Ireland emerges as a country where the share of lone parents with lower secondary education or below is high** (41%) alongside Belgium (37%), Luxembourg (44%), Estonia (54%) and Malta (78%) (Chezhen and Bradshaw 2012).



Analysis of longitudinal GUI data reveals that lone Parents have similar rates of educational acquisition over the life-course, however, inequalities in educational levels are maintained.

Considerable variation between FE and HE in the supports on offer for lone parents to access HE.

The approach to supporting students in the FET sector could be relevant. FET is often used as a pathway to HE by lone parents. There are incentives for lone parents to return to education at FE level as a starting point (subsidised childcare, transport funding, shorter set hours). If such incentives do not continue into HE then these students often cannot progress (HE Representative).

Conditionality: Lone Parents Vulnerable to Policy Change in Multiple Areas, leads to complexity in accessing financial supports (SUSSI)



Higher Education Institutions

- limited visibility in a range of policies and practices of HEIs;
- very limited data collection around lone parent participation and outcomes,
- limited targeting of lone parents for entry;
- limited policy development regarding the needs of lone parents once they transition into HE;
- an underdeveloped childcare infrastructure for lone parents attending HE.
- Limited flexibility in HE provision.

Impact

- Research recorded in Dail proceedings.
- Measures supported in Budget 2016:
- HEA: €1m for measures to support more lone parents to access higher education
- DSP: The introduction of a €500 Cost of Education Allowance by DSP for parents, including lone parents, in receipt of BTEA. Increases in Lone Parent Payments in Budget 2017 and Budget 2018.