



Student Retention in a Modular World

A Study of Student Retention
UCD Entrants 1999-2007



Retention,
Modularisation,
Orientation
What's Changed?

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& Susan Mulkeen

Registrar's Preface

It is a pleasure to introduce this important and significant report on retention at UCD. The original work done by Mathews and Mulkeen and published in 2002 established the facts at the time regarding student retention, and indicated how the university might best minimize the difficulties encountered by students in their transition to University.

This new study, by Colleen Blaney and Susan Mulkeen, reflects on what has changed since 2002, assesses the impact of modularisation, semesterisation and restructuring, and the effectiveness of measures taken to improve the student experience. The report makes important recommendations, especially in regard to identifying and supporting the students most likely to leave UCD.

The paradigm in this area is changing from one where the goal is seen as maximising retention, to one where there is a more holistic objective of maximising student engagement and persistence. This report will be most useful as UCD addresses this challenge.



Philip Nolan

Registrar and Deputy President



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Executive Summary

Introduction

UCD has undergone significant change since the Mathews and Mulkeen study of retention in 2002. Modularisation and semesterisation, institutional restructuring, increased resources for student recruitment and support and the introduction of the Horizons curriculum have all impacted on the staff and students of the university. This project aimed to update the university's retention statistics and specifically look at how a student's experience of Orientation may impact his or her experience of student life.

Who studies at UCD?

The annual intake of students to full-time first year undergraduate courses in UCD has increased over the years from about 3,500 in 1999 to just over 4,000 in 2007. A profile of UCD entrants is as follows:

- Over 50% are female
- Almost 50% come from Dublin
- Over 60% are living at home
- Aged about 19½ years old at the start of 1st year
- About half are entering the course they had as their 1st preference on the CAO form.

In academic terms:

- Average Leaving Certificate points for incoming students is about 450 (varies from year to year)
- 53 students entered with 600 points in 2006 (up from 20 in 1999)
- In 2007:
 - almost 60% had grades of Honours B3 or higher in English (up from 48.5% in 1999)
 - 25.4% had Honours B3 or higher in Maths (down from 32.6% in 1999)
 - 15.3% entered via alternative routes (up from 6.4% in 1999).

How many students withdraw prior to graduation?

In an international context, Ireland has both a high participation rate and a high retention rate: for the year 2004 the rates quoted in *Student Retention in Higher Education Courses*



*International Comparison*¹ are as follows: Australia 67%; Ireland 83%; Netherlands 76%; UK 78% and USA 54%. UCD's rate for this year is 83.7%

It is not surprising, therefore, that UCD's figures compare favourably with other institutions internationally.

Overall, averaging across all nine years of the survey 14.5% have left UCD altogether. However, excluding the more recent years in which students may still become non-completers, the true figure is in the region of 16-17.5%. The highest levels were recorded in 2000 and 2001 of 17.2% and 17.3% respectively (i.e. retention rate > 82%).

The Arts & Human Sciences programme group and Science programme group have had the highest non-completion rates. Business & Law have consistently had a very high retention rate. The Engineering & Architecture and Health Science programme groups have increased their retention rates considerably in recent years.

When do they leave?

There are two peak times for withdrawing. These are following first year exams (30% of those who left did so at this point) and before 1st February of 1st year (25%). The majority of those who leave (69%) do so within the first twelve months following entry.

Who leaves?

- Gender: The non-completion rate for female students is higher than that for males
- Accommodation: The highest retention rate was for those in living in campus accommodation.
- Home: Overseas students have the overall lowest non-completion rates. Dublin has a higher retention rate than surrounding counties.
- Preferences: For the years 2003-2006², students taking up their first preference course at UCD, the non-completion rate was only 11.7% overall.

¹ Van Stolk, Tiessen, Clift and Levitt 2007

² Data not available prior to this except via net acceptances



In academic terms statistically significant relationships were noted on several criteria.

- The non-completion rate is higher for the lower leaving certificate points ranges.
- There is a statistically significant relationship between results in Leaving Certificate English and non-completion – those with weaker results are more likely to be non-completers.
- A similar statistically significant correlation with Mathematics result was also identified.
- In general most of the alternative entry routes (such as mature years, access, etc) have lower (or similar) non-completion to school-leavers.

Why do they leave?

Similar to the previous retention studies undertaken at UCD, most students state that the strongest factor influencing their decision to leave is “wrong course choice”.

Other factors contributing to students withdrawing are:

- Did not know anyone/difficulty making friends
- Unfriendly campus environment or atmosphere
- Poor sense of community
- Lack of interaction with staff
- Size/scale of campus
- The group of students who entered UCD in 2006 were the first to report “couldn’t get modules I wanted” as a contributing factor to withdrawing.

Students seek advice or support from parents, siblings or friends before making the decision to withdraw and only minimally seek advice from Programme Offices and Student Advisers.

Orientation, the First Year Experience and Student Retention

Orientation Week takes place the week prior to the start of the lecturing term. It is the time when the university focuses its efforts on welcoming new students and getting them prepared for their first year of university studies. The project looked for the relationship, if any, between students attending orientation and their retention. There were interesting differences between students who entered UCD in 2005 and those that entered in 2006.



For students entering in 2005:

- 75% attended some or all of the orientation activities prescribed for their programme
- Tended to be negative about the helpfulness of orientation: 28.7% reported it was neither 'helpful' nor 'not helpful'.

Students who started UCD in 2006 had different experiences:

- Nearly 88% of respondents attended at least some Orientation activity in September 2006.
- For 2006 entrants, there is a statistically significant relationship between attendance at orientation and high ranking of "wrong course choice" as a reason for leaving.
- There is a statistically significant relationship between students missing orientation and ranking "unfriendly atmosphere" or "poor sense of community" as a significant factor in deciding to withdraw.
- There is also a significant relationship between students attending orientation and speaking to staff prior to withdrawing.

Students were given the opportunity to comment on Orientation and make suggestions for future orientation activities. With the exception of one student from Business & Law, only students from the Arts & Human Sciences programmes and Science programmes made written suggestions for orientation.

Taking into account that university life is a daunting new experience for first year students, respondents were also asked to consider if they would have taken a module, if offered, on adapting to the university. 54.5% of 2005 and 58.3% of 2006 survey respondents would have taken a course if it had been offered. Both groups are most interested in academic planning and time management subjects being covered (27%), followed by over a quarter seeking personal development information, followed by writing and research skills.



"Early Walkers" – 1st year students leaving before Semester 1 Exams

First year students who leave university before completing one whole semester have special needs in terms of guidance, support and advice prior to leaving. Students who began studies at UCD in 2007 show similar behaviours and attitudes to the 2005 and 2006 entry classes:

- Report "wrong course choice" as the most influential factor in withdrawing. Other significant factors were "couldn't get modules I wanted", "size of campus", "didn't know anyone/difficulty making friends" and "poor sense of community".
- As found in the surveys of previous years, the 2007 entrants also sought advice outside of UCD prior to withdrawing.
- They found information in the prospectus helpful in making their decision to attend UCD, but they felt the UCD website was not as clear or informative.
- Most attended orientation and ranked its usefulness 3.3 out of 5 points.
- If a course had been offered about making the transition to university, the early walkers would have been most interested in personal development as the course topic.

Recommendations

A set of recommendations has been compiled from the study findings and from the input of other interested parties in UCD through the discussion at the Retention Forum. These cover the following broad categories, although some of the issues which caused problems for the survey respondents from 2005 and 2006 have already been addressed:

- Continuing to improve the standard of information available to applicants:
- Focussing on the first few months of attendance at UCD with regard to
 - Registration
 - Orientation
 - Proposed module on Student experience/Study Skills
 - Access to staff and advice
 - Peer mentoring
- Developing a more friendly environment
- Resourcing student support services and initiatives



- Attendance monitoring
- Transport to Belfield
- Exit Interviews with students withdrawing early and with students graduating
- Ongoing reviews of students' needs, expectations and satisfaction with university programmes and services.

Conclusion

No university should have, or should aim to have, 100% student retention. There will always be students who leave for various reasons.

All Universities have weak spots in terms of student experience and student retention. This study has highlighted some areas on which UCD could focus its efforts. The overall aim of retention efforts should be to ensure that all students, regardless of when they enter and leave UCD, have a positive student experience.



Chapter 1: Introduction

Background to Study

This report is a follow-on from a review of student retention previously been carried out at University College Dublin (Mathews and Mulkeen, 2002). The Mathews and Mulkeen report investigated retention rates in UCD for students who registered and entered from 1999 to 2001.

The research found that the students who are most likely to leave are those who enter college with weak academic qualifications, both in terms of entry points and grades in Mathematics and English.

Other vulnerable groups were students in the larger, less vocational programmes of Arts, Philosophy and Sociology, Science and Agriculture; and students from outside Dublin, and in particular those within commuting distance of Dublin and those from other EU countries.

Following the recommendations made in the Mathews and Mulkeen report, an additional focus of this proposal was to investigate the impact of attendance at orientation on student retention as UCD's orientation programme for new undergraduates had been considerably developed.

The proposal was submitted to the Higher Education Authority for funding under the Special Funding for Targeted Initiatives Scheme, and funding was allocated for the duration of the study.



Methodology

Data Analysis

Data about all full-time undergraduate entrants to UCD since 1999 was analysed, covering demographic and academic background information; this provides a dataset of 34,671 records. All entrants were then classified based on their current status:

- Continuing student/Degree Complete (i.e. still registered in the same college which he/she originally entered or has graduated from that college)
- Non-completer (i.e. did not complete degree and is not currently attending UCD)
- College Non-completer (i.e. did not continue or complete within the College originally entered but subsequently entered a different College in UCD³)
- Deceased
- Withdrew/re-entered same College
- Leave of Absence (i.e. students currently taking a year out from their studies, but expected to return)

Those who had left were further categorised by time of leaving and exam status at leaving. The statistics were then analysed to determine which demographic and academic factors correlated with the various status categories.

This dataset was brought up to date to 11 February 2008 – as with all information drawn from a Student Information System, it is a snapshot as data is constantly changing. Indeed many of the students who were categorised non-completers in the earlier study had subsequently re-entered to complete their degrees.

Questionnaire Survey

The Mathews and Mulkeen report drew on data obtained from a questionnaire survey. A similar methodology was adopted for this study. A questionnaire was prepared, comprised mostly of closed questions or scaled answer questions (Likert Scale). These were combined with a number of open-ended questions, where more detailed information on experiences or further comments were sought. A number of questions were the same, or similar, to those used by Mathews and Mulkeen, to enable comparison with the previous

³ Such students may appear twice in the dataset with an entry for each of the years in which they entered UCD



study where appropriate. Additional questions about orientation and a proposed support structure, in this case a module on managing university life, were added.

The questionnaires were posted, along with a letter from the Registrar, outlining the purpose of the research and how the information received was to be used.

Those who entered UCD in 2005 and 2006 and were not continuing in March 2007, were surveyed. The responses were analysed both numerically for the closed questions and their comments were reviewed from the open questions.

A further survey of those who entered in September 2007 and had left by the end of October was carried out – this is a small cohort and the findings are treated separately.

Consultative Forum

Data were compiled, following which, a forum was held with representatives from all programme offices, student advisors, Programme Deans, Teaching & Learning Fellows and relevant central administrative offices attending in February 2008. A summary of the survey findings was presented and a discussion followed which assisted in the collation of recommendations for future university developments which might alleviate the problem of non-completion. The feedback from the Consultative Forum is included in Chapter 9.

Practice in Other Institutions

Higher Education institutes treat student retention as a serious issue. To this end, nearly \$10,000 is spent, on average, annually by American colleges and universities on attending retention conferences, educational materials and hiring specialist consultancy firms to address retention issues. Similar to many of the Irish Institutes of Technology who have specific retention officers, 65% of universities surveyed in America had a specific staff member responsible for student retention.⁴ The mean retention rate for the Autumn semester 2006 to the Autumn semester 2007 for the colleges in the sample was 73.8%; the median was almost the same at 74%. The range was quite extraordinary; it went from 45% to 98%. Most researchers note that it is difficult to come up with a 'one size fits all' model, or initiative, to address the student experience and retention.

⁴ Primary Research Group, *The Survey of Student Retention Policies in Higher Education*, New York, 2008.



Chapter 3: The Changing Face of UCD

There have been many significant changes in UCD since the previous study carried out by Mathews and Mulkeen, many of which have a potential impact on student retention.

Modularisation and Semesterisation

In 2005 UCD launched a new system of learning which saw the implementation of modularisation for taught degrees at UCD. Students entering UCD in September 2005 were the first cohort to study in this way.

UCD Horizons is the name given to the structure for taught degrees at UCD. The UCD Horizons programme is modular and based on credits. This is much more flexible than traditional degree structures and allows students to individualise their studies.

Applicant students select their preferred degree as usual, through the CAO system, but when they arrive at UCD they have greater flexibility and choice in how and what they study within their chosen degree.

Each full-time student takes 12 modules each year, over two semesters. Generally, 10 of the 12 modules will be in the core area of study; some may be compulsory, others will be optional modules chosen from a list of modules in the subject.

In addition, students generally also have a choice of two 'elective' modules (subject to module entry requirements, timetable and availability of places), which can either be taken from within the main subject area to deepen learning, or from outside it to broaden learning.

In September 2006, 47% of first-year students opted to deepen their knowledge by choosing electives within their own core study areas – for example, students of Economics and Finance chose non-core modules in such areas as Business Studies. Some 53% preferred to spread their knowledge and opted for electives in completely different areas outside of their core area of study, e.g. some Science students chose Philosophy or Psychology, while a number of Medicine students took modules from Applied Languages and Psychology.



In tandem with modularisation, semesterisation was also introduced. The academic year now operates on two twelve-week semesters, each followed by a study and exam period (usually 3 weeks in total). Module co-ordinators have been encouraged to use alternative means of assessment as well as or instead of traditional examinations. Most modules now award part of the final results for continuous assessment tasks.

Restructuring

In 2005, UCD changed its academic structures significantly, moving from 11 Faculties and almost 100 departments to 5 Colleges and 35 Schools. One of the aims of this re-organisation was to provide a straightforward mechanism for managing the delivery of modules. The School is responsible for the design, delivery, assessment and quality of modules, and the Head of School is accountable to the Head of the College. As most programmes are offered by more than one school and, in some cases, more than one college, 7 Programme Offices were established to provide a central point of contact for the students on the programmes within their area.

Recruitment Activities

In March 2006 UCD's first Director of Student Recruitment was appointed. This represented a further step towards more externally focussed communications. The Director is focussed on reaching out to a broader range of prospective students - meeting with them, listening to them and explaining what is on offer in UCD both in terms of courses and facilities and the unique aspects of the UCD student experience. The appointment embodies the university's commitment to creating a more student-focussed and student-friendly recruitment process.

An additional Open Day for 6th years was introduced in 2005. The March Open Days were held for the last time in 2006, being replaced with campus visits tailored to the needs of individual schools. A system of student ambassadors was also introduced to liaise with potential applicants and all publications were revised, including the prospectus and information on the UCD website.

Additional resources for guidance counsellors were also introduced including a Guidance Counsellors Manual, and an annual seminar.



Student Services

In 2002, six student advising posts were created and based at faculty (later to be programme) level, including advisers who specifically advise international students, students in the New ERA programme (access) and mature students. The Student Adviser's remit is to support students, particularly first years, during their university experience. Since 2006, this number has risen to ten advisers, and in 2007 this number stands at twelve. All undergraduate students have access to a student adviser during the course of their studies. Student Advisers act as a contact point for students and refer students to other campus services, such as student counselling, as needs arise.

In 2006, a peer mentoring programme was piloted with first year Science Students, New ERA Students (Students from non-traditional backgrounds), and Mature Students. The aim of the programme is to assist first year undergraduate students to successfully navigate the transition from second level to third level education. Twenty-five peer mentors were selected from among the three student groups who had previously completed their first year at University. Mentors were provided with a collaborative training programme, which was devised and delivered by the UCD Student Adviser and UCD Counselling Services. It was hoped that this venture would lead to a development of a sense of community for first year undergraduate students, a creation of an informal student support network, and early identification and amelioration of problems experienced by first year undergraduate students. Initial assessment of the programme has shown that both mentors (older students) and mentees (first years) benefit from participating in the project.

In the Tierney Building (central administration) a new Student Desk was implemented in 2005 with the aim of giving students a "one stop shop" for all their administrative enquiries. The Programme Office structure, set-up in conjunction with the restructuring initiative, also provides this "one stop shop" function across the university.

UCD has been actively increasing the numbers of students, both undergraduate and graduate, living in on-campus student residences. There are currently 2,650 spaces available for students to live on campus with 900 beds available for first year students. In October 2006, a new residence hall, Roebuck, opened in Belfield. It is anticipated that another 700 beds will be made available in an extension to the on-campus student residences in the future.



Orientation

Since 2003, increased resources have been targeted at improving the welcome students receive at the start of their UCD career. Orientation Week takes place the week prior to the start of lectures and is a time when the university focuses on the first-year experience. Students are expected to attend academic advisory meetings with their class, complete module registration and collect student cards. A system of student leaders, Orientation Guides, was introduced to assist with Orientation events and to help new students become familiar with campus and meet their new classmates. There was also a critical review of the messages students were receiving from UCD about the importance of attendance at Orientation events. After reviewing the materials students received in their acceptance packs, Orientation events were clearly marketed as a required element of the academic year for new students. The attendance at orientation events was markedly improved in September 2004.

For Orientation 2006, resources were increased which allowed for a doubling of Orientation Guides from 100 to 200, an Orientation schedule publication to be produced and additional social events, namely the now annual Orientation Kick-Off BBQ at the Student Centre. Resources were also directed towards increased communication with staff about Orientation planning. To this end, Dr. Tony Cook, from the STAR Project at the University of Ulster, gave a presentation on good practice in orientation planning. The UCD Library also increased their participation during Orientation Week and added a scavenger hunt activity to their new student information area to encourage students to engage with Library facilities early in the academic year.

In 2007, the UCD Sports Centre introduced an extensive series of tours and "taster" events for all new students. A parents crèche was also located in the Student Centre for parents of new students which offered tea, coffee, reading material, UCD literature and a slide show specifically for parents of new students. The chaplaincy organised an open house in St. Stephen's for the first time during Orientation. A central orientation team of experienced Orientation Guides was introduced to give students more leadership opportunities. September 2007 was also the first time when all incoming students, regardless of their academic discipline, received a campus tour. Regular updates on orientation plans were given, as part of official workshops by central administration, to university staff over the course of summer 2007. Temporary administrative staff and new residential hall assistants also received presentations about the importance of Orientation



prior to the week. Plans for Orientation 2008 include expanding the range of information sessions to encourage good financial management and time management. It is also envisaged that the restaurant basement “Rendezvous” room, which is specifically designated as an alcohol-free zone, can be used for a wide range of social events.

Input from Orientation stakeholders is needed for a dynamic programme to remain so. Feedback on Orientation is gathered regularly, from staff and students. In 2006 and 2007, an on-line survey to students provided valuable information and suggestions for Orientation planning in the future. Focus groups of staff, Orientation Guides, and first year students also meet annually to exchange ideas and review Orientation activities. Following feedback from students, a special orientation meeting was organised in October 2007 for students receiving late CAO offers as a result of Leaving Certificate upgrades.

Other changes

The number of degree programmes on offer has increased significantly since the Mathews and Mulkeen report. In 2001, UCD had 43 entry routes for school-leavers listed in the CAO Handbook. In 2007 there were 73 (plus 4 for mature applicants and 1 graduate entry route).

There have been major changes to the registration system, largely to facilitate modularisation. Prior to 2005 only continuing students had registered online. In 2005 first years also completed online registration, not only completing personal details but also selecting modules, tutorials and practicals.

From 2005, for the first time, the number of places in modules was rigidly capped. This meant that some students were unable to register for their chosen modules – this was a particular issue in Arts where there was a long tradition of students' being able to select any subjects permissible within the timetable. The student experience of this “capping” is evident in the responses given to the retention questionnaire.



Chapter 4: Profile of UCD Entrants

In order to identify who leaves, one must first identify who comes to UCD. A brief profile of the UCD undergraduate population follows.

General Demography – Full Time courses

The annual intake to full-time first year undergraduate courses in UCD has increased over the years from about 3,500 in 1999 to just over 4,000 in 2007. A summary of the demographic profile of entrants follows:

	1999	2000	2001	2002 ⁵	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Number admitted	3512	3718	3701	3972	3907	3869	3848	4068	4076
% Female	57.5%	57.2%	54.9%	55.6%	55.1%	53.8%	56.2%	53.8%	54.3%
Average Age at 1 October following entry	18.92	19.00	19.13	19.59	19.44	19.47	19.58	19.69	19.79
Age range	16.67-65.17	16.58-65.08	16.50-67.58	16.83-63.92	17.00-67.08	16.42-66.83	17.00-62.33	16.83-75.83	16.50-62.42
Median age	18.58	18.58	18.67	18.67	18.75	18.67	18.75	18.75	18.75
% Living at home	65.0%	67.8%	63.0%	56.9%	58.4%	59.7%	66.1%	63.5%	48.9% ⁶
% with home address in Dublin	45.8%	47.7%	47.6%	46.3%	47.8%	50.0%	49.1%	47.0%	48.3%
% Socio-Economic Group 3: Higher Professional	27.3%	29.5%	29.3%	28.8%	26.2%	29.1%	21.5%	26.7%	N/A ⁷
% Irish Students in receipt of funding	20.6%	20.8%	23.0%	24.4%	23.7%	23.0%	20.0%	19.0%	N/A ⁸
% First preferences⁹	48%	50%	50%	51%	48.8%	48.3%	48.8%	53.2%	50.3%

Table 1: Demographic Background of entrants

For all years, female students make up over half of all new entrants. This trend is becoming less marked in recent years. However the ratio is comparable to the ratio of male to female applicants. For example in 2007, 54.3% of the intake was female and 54.3% of the applicants in the CAO system were female. Interestingly, however, 57.7% of the applicants for UCD in 2007 were female.

⁵ Figures from 2002 onwards include entrants to the Nursing degree programme

⁶ 17.9% did not complete this field in 2007 (compare 0.9% in 2006). 59.6% of those who completed the field were living at home.

⁷ The method of collection of this information changed in 2007, at the request of the HEA. At time of writing it is currently uncoded.

⁸ Grant information incomplete at time of writing for 2007

⁹ Based on Nett Acceptances for 1999-2002. Based on registered students thereafter.



Not surprisingly Dublin is consistently the most represented county in the student intake; this peaked in 2004 when 50% of the intake listed Dublin as their permanent home address. This varies significantly from the pool of applicants: 22% of CAO applicants in 2007 listed a Dublin address; 36% of applicants for UCD were from Dublin. Census figures show that 28% of the population live in Dublin¹⁰. When the percentage coming from Dublin is considered in conjunction with the fact that a further 15-16% of the intake each year comes from the counties adjacent to Dublin and 12-13% from the rest of Leinster, the percentage living at home, which is unusually high in an international context¹¹, is somewhat explained. This is illustrated in the figure below.

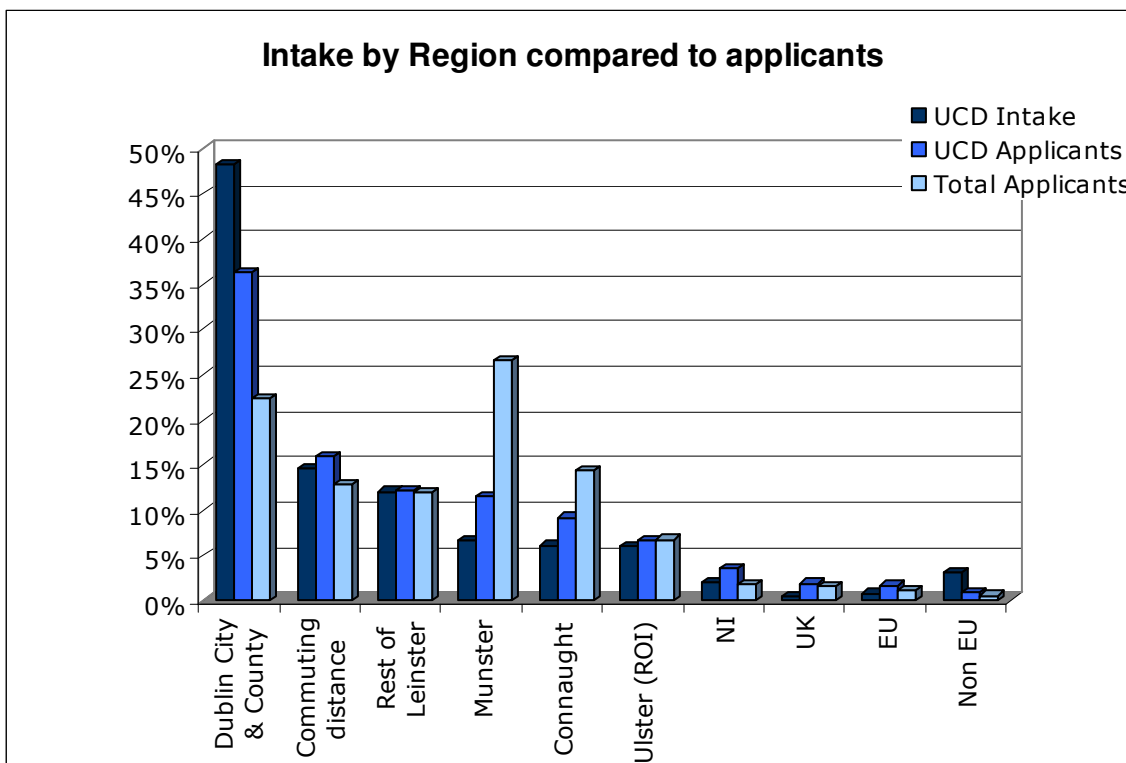


Figure 1: Intake by Region compared to applicants 2007

¹⁰ www.cso.ie 2006 Census

¹¹ For example, Suffolk University reported 33% of its student body living at home in 1998 “more here” must be better statistic than this!!



Academic Background – Full-Time Courses

The table below shows the academic achievements of UCD entrants.

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Number admitted on basis of Leaving Cert	3286	3451	3401	3448	3397	3389	3318	3500	3450
Average points	455.4	452.8	451.3	449.3	451.1	452.4	447.6	453.2	447.8
Median points	445	445	445	440	445	445	435	450	440
Range	320-600	255-600	275-600	225-600	285-600	285-600	310-600	300-600	300-600
Number with 600 points	20	21	25	27	23	44	43	53	47
% with HB3+ in English	48.5%	48.2%	54.9%	57.7%	58.0%	58.9%	58.0%	58.1%	59.3%
% with HB3+ in Mathematics	32.6%	30.4%	32.6%	26.2%	24.8%	27.6%	27.2%	28.0%	25.4%

Table 2: Academic Background of entrants

In terms of overall points, the percentage entering on lower points has increased in recent years (Figure 1). In 1999, 81.6% of entrants had over 400 points. In 2007 only 67.6% have over 400 points.

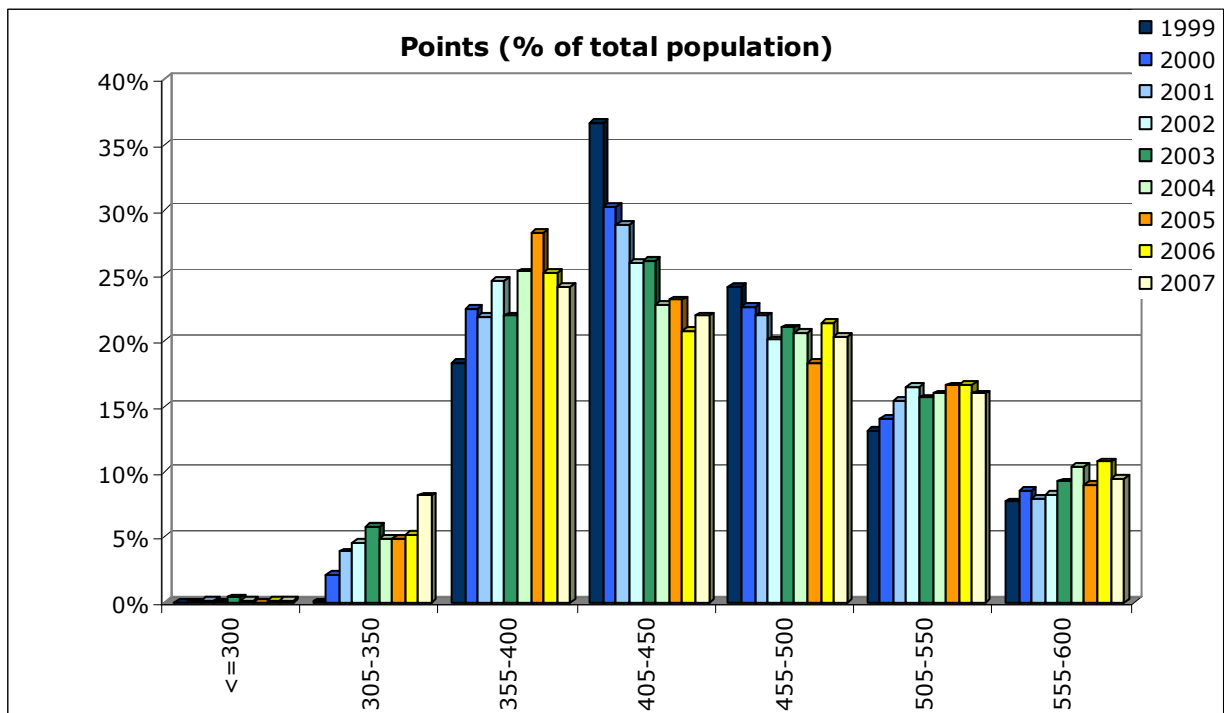


Figure 2: Points comparison over eight year period



The percentage of entrants achieving a grade A or B in higher-level English has increased over the eight-year period. The percentage of UCD entrants with these grades is consistently more than twice the national percentage¹² (national figures not available pre-2001)

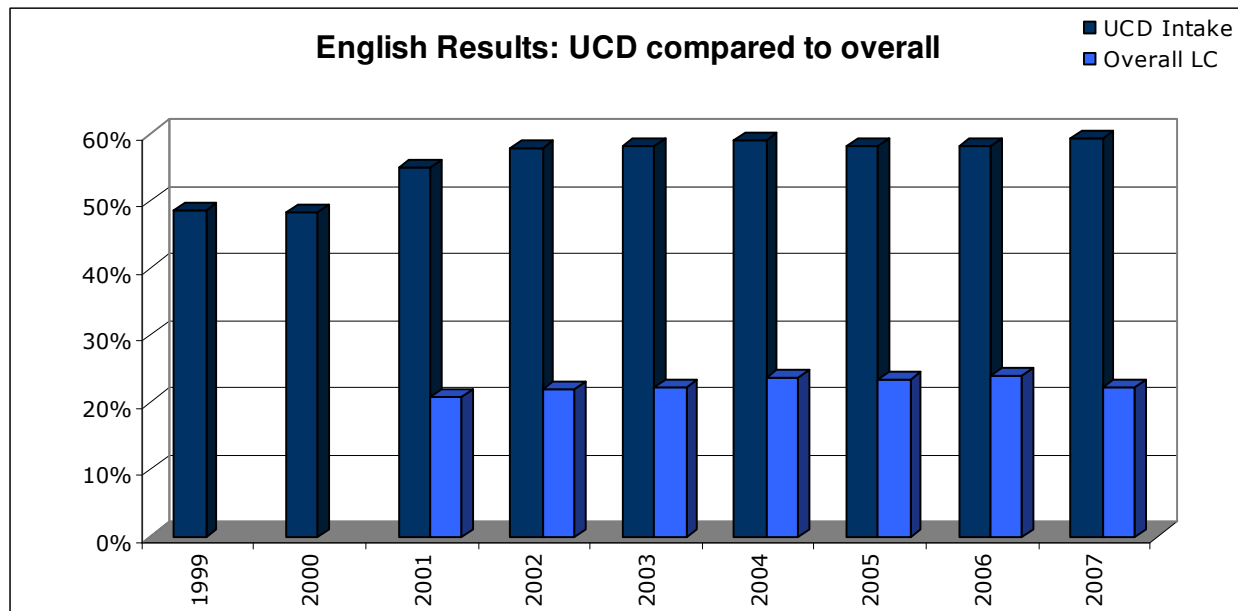


Figure 3: English results: UCD entrants compared to Leaving Certificate population

In contrast the percentage of UCD entrants who have attained a grade A or B in higher-level Mathematics has fallen. This somewhat matches the overall trend. However there has been some variation in the percentage of the pool of those achieving higher level of grade A or B (HA/HB) coming to UCD. The peak year was 2002 when 23.1% of those with HA/HB entered UCD. In contrast, the lowest year was 2006 with just 19.4%.

¹² Figures Available from State Examinations Commission



The graph below compares the percentage UCD entrants with grade HA/HB in Mathematics to the percentage of the Leaving Certificate population (national figures not available pre-2001).

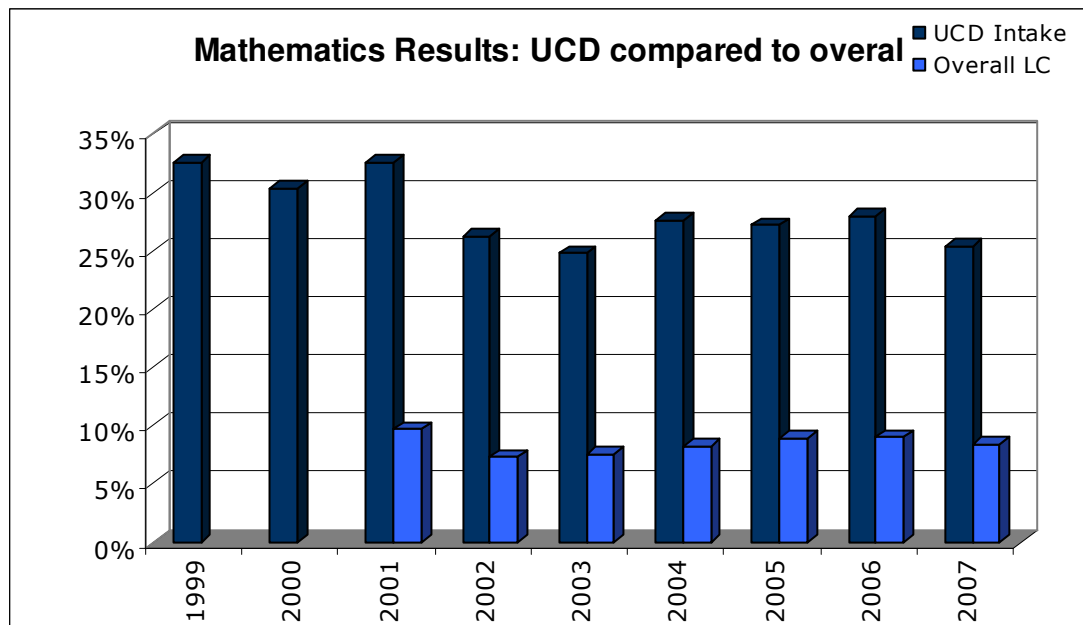


Figure 4: Mathematics results: UCD entrants compared to Leaving Certificate population

Entry outside the Points System

While the majority of students are admitted on the basis of the Irish Leaving Certificate, each year a small number of students are admitted outside the points system. UCD has a long history of promoting access and operates special entry routes for students with a disability, mature students, FETAC progression and students from disadvantaged areas (New ERA). Students who apply under these categories may gain admission on the basis of their school leaving qualifications, in the normal way, while still availing of the support available.

University College Dublin does not use the points system for those presenting qualifications gained outside Ireland.

Overall the percentage being admitted through alternative routes has increased over the nine-year period of study: from 6.4% in 1999 to 15.3% in 2007.



Figure 5 shows students admitted through the various non-points entry routes.

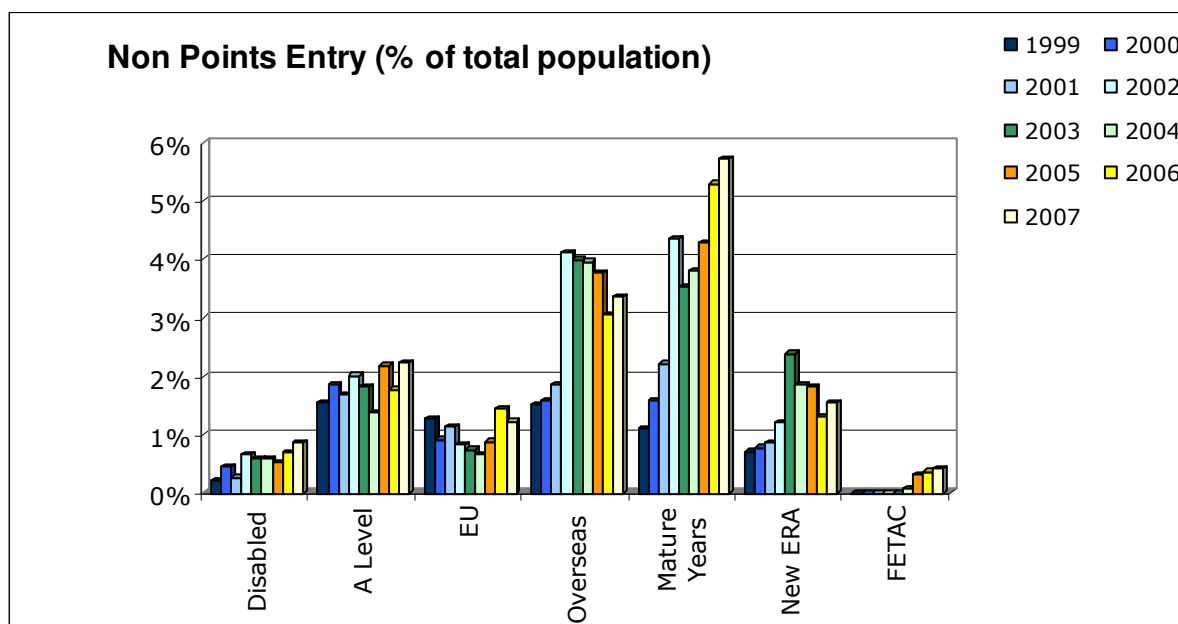


Figure 5: Non-points Entry

The increase is most noticeable in the "mature years" category. The decrease in the number of entrants via the New ERA route may be accounted for by extra supports in place at second level and/or by students in disadvantaged areas achieving better results. In conjunction with the fact that the entry levels for many of the courses has fallen increased numbers are gaining admission on the basis of their school leaving results rather than through the special route.

Programme Group Analysis

The Mathews and Mulkeen report compared students by faculty. As previously explained, the faculty system was replaced by colleges in 2005. However, as, for example, the main schools involved with teaching the BSc Science Programme may belong to either the College of Life Sciences or to the College of Engineering Mathematical and Physical Sciences, grouping programmes by the programme office which administers them gives a more accurate analysis. Also for purposes of this report, students who entered UCD prior to 2005 have been categorised retrospectively.



Figure 6 shows the percentage of entrants from each Programme Office area.

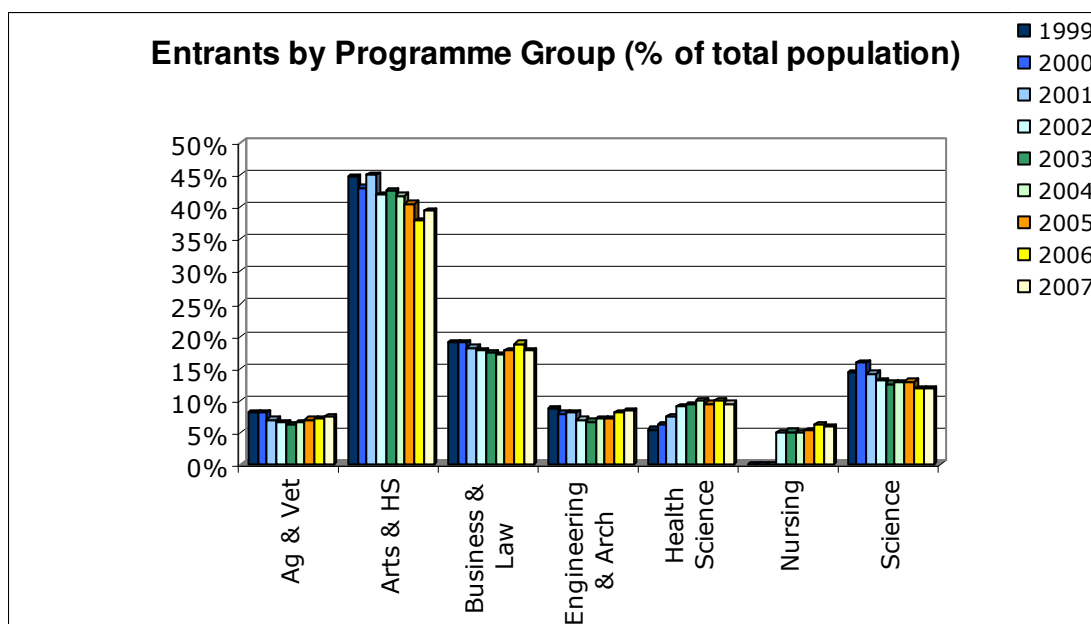


Figure 6: Entrants by Programme Group

The Arts and Human Sciences Programme Office has responsibility for the largest number of students (39.4% in 2007), followed by Business and Law (17.7% in 2007).

Demographic Differences by Programme Office

A significant bias by Programme Office was noted and there were slight variations by year. Engineering and Architecture has the highest percentage of males of any area; greater than 70% in all of the years studied. The Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine and Science Programme groups were slightly male dominated in most years. Business & Law also had a slightly greater number of male than female students in three years. There has never been more than 10% male representation in nursing.

An analysis of age by programme group also reveals differences between programmes. Students in nursing have the highest average age (20.8) – probably due to large numbers of mature students entering nursing programmes. The lowest average age is in the Science programme group (18.9).

The percentage living away from home also varied significantly by programme group. Only two programme groups had less than 50% of their student living at home (when combined across all eight years); Health Sciences and Agriculture & Veterinary Medicine.



In Agriculture & Veterinary Medicine only 21.4% listed Dublin as their home address. The comparable figure for Health Sciences was 26.5%, with 25.9% being non EU. This contrasts with 54.9% of the students in Arts & Human Sciences and 54.6% in Business & Law being from Dublin.

Only students from Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine returned a socio-economic group other than "Higher Professional" as the most represented one; in this case it was "Farmers" (35.2%). Nursing had an unusually high rate of students not answering this question (20.9%)¹³. It is not unreasonable to assume that this is related to the high numbers of mature students in these programmes.

The percentage entering a first preference course varied significantly by programme group¹⁴. Engineering and Architecture students have the highest percentage of first preference entrants every year since 2000, followed closely by Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine.

¹³ 2007 is excluded from these percentages as socio-economic group information is not available

¹⁴ Based on CAO net acceptances



Overall, as is illustrated in Figure 7, there is very little variation between student intake over the last 8 years.

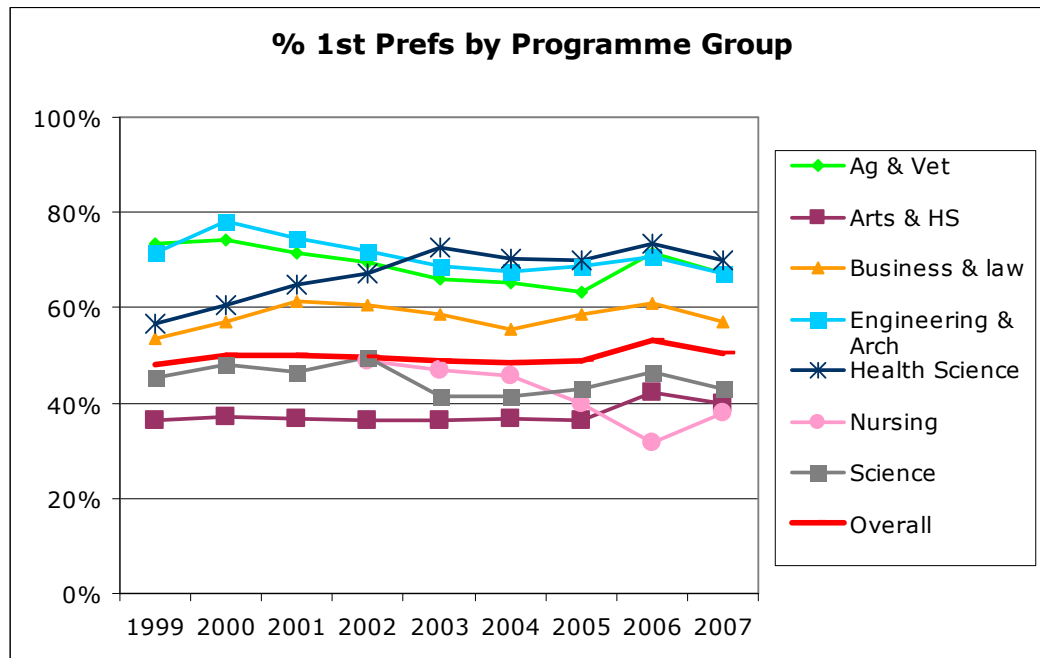


Figure 7: Percentage of First Preference Entrants by Programme Group¹⁵

A slight increase shows for 2006, possibly corresponding to a major advertising campaign about UCD Horizons. Interestingly, Nursing had a drop in the percentage of first preference entrants in that year.

Academic Background by Programme Group

When comparing programme groups, the academic background of entering students varied significantly. The larger programmes have lower Leaving Certificate cut-off points. However the average points for the programme groups containing these programmes is also lower as they tend to attract fewer applicants in the top points ranges.

¹⁵ Based on Nett Acceptances for 1999-2002. Based on registered students thereafter.



Figure 8 shows that overall the average points have fallen slightly over the eight-year period. Nursing has shown a significant increase in average points. The trend also seems to be towards an increase, although less significant, in Engineering & Architecture and Business & Law.

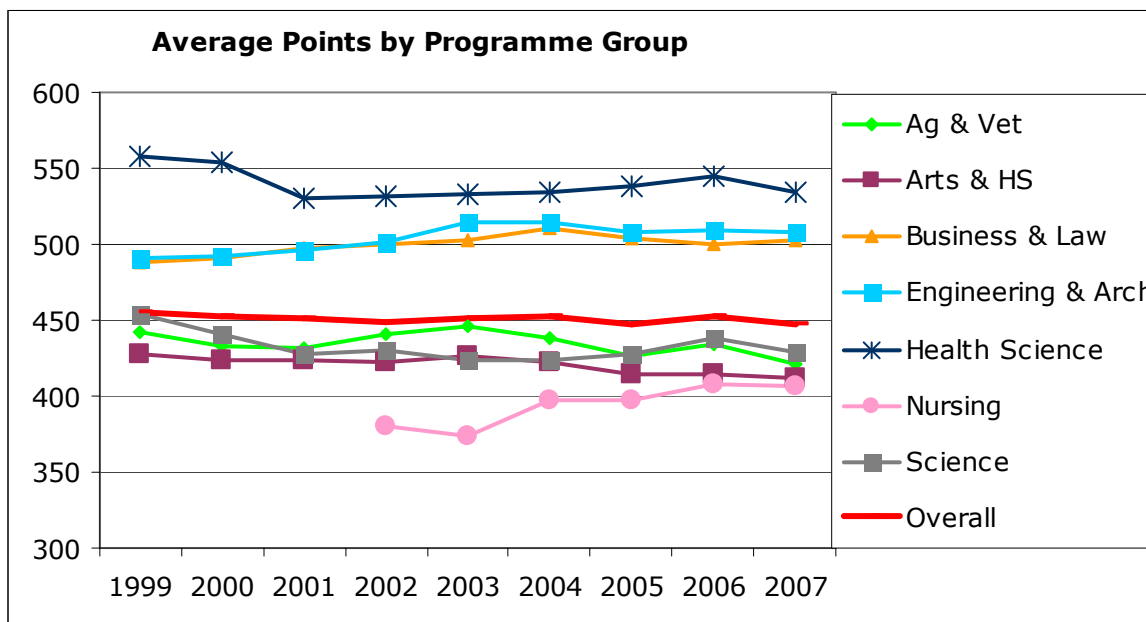


Figure 8: Average points by programme group¹⁶

English and Mathematics results also vary significantly by programme group with those with the higher average points tending to get a greater percentages of the students with the top grades in the subjects.

It should be borne in mind that many courses have minimum Mathematics requirements. At present, no course has an English requirement greater than pass (i.e. minimum D3 at ordinary level in the Leaving Certificate). These percentages are calculated across applicants presenting the leaving certificate only.

¹⁶ Calculated from net acceptances for 1999-2002 and from registered students thereafter



Figure 9 shows the percentage of leaving certificate entrants with a grade of B3, or better, in higher level English over the nine year period, by programme group. As can be seen the overall percentage is increasing and this holds true for most of the programme groups.

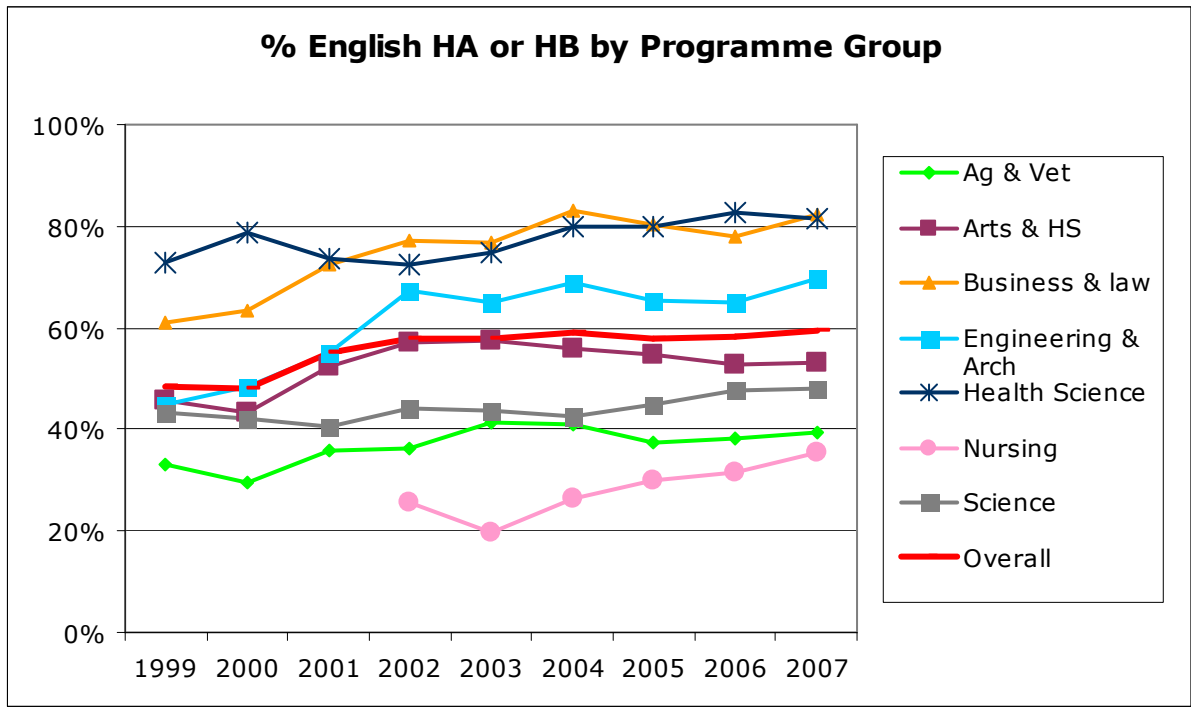


Figure 9: Percentage with English HB3+by programme group

The significant difference in the percentage attaining the top grades in Honours Mathematics by programme group is partly explained by the different entry requirements, particularly with respect to Engineering and Architecture¹⁷. However, it should also be noted that Health Sciences which requires only a pass in Mathematics also has a high percentage of top achievers in this subject. This contrasts with Nursing, which has the same entry requirement for Mathematics but only 0.6% of its entrants had a Higher-Level grade A or B in this subject in 2005.

¹⁷ Prior to 2001, the Mathematics requirement for entry to Engineering was HB3. In 2001 to requirements changed to HC3 for all branches except Electrical and Electronic Engineering.



The figure below illustrates the varying percentages over the nine-year period. As previously noted the overall has decreased slightly.

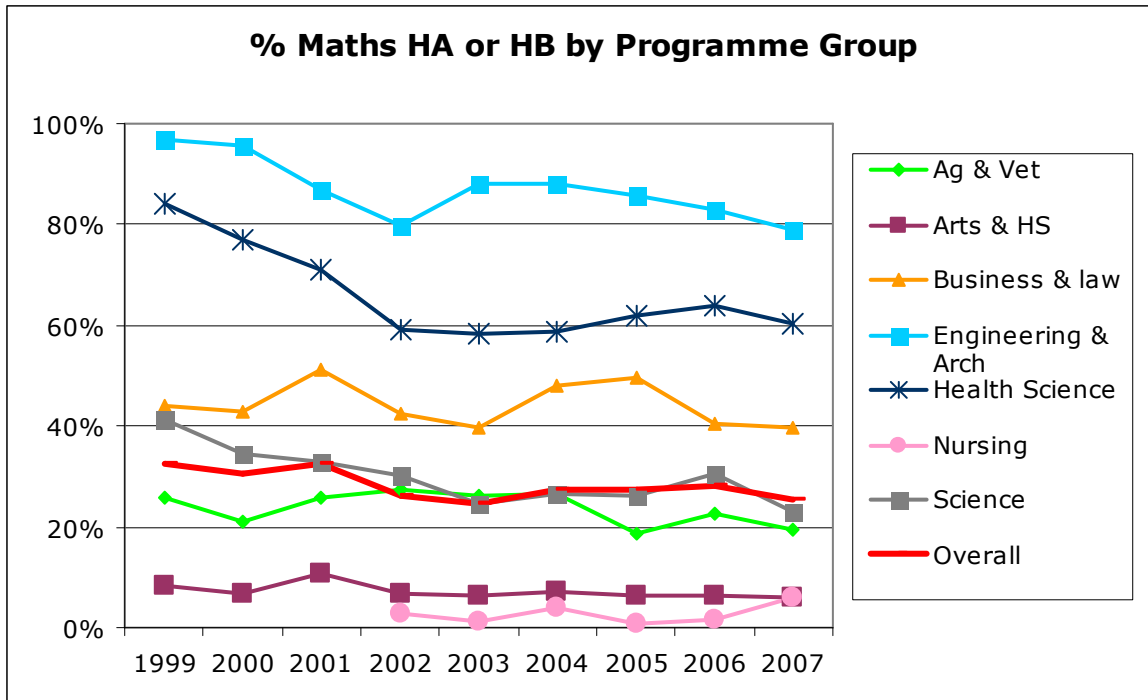


Figure 10: Percentage with Mathematics HB3+ by programme group



Chapter 5: Overview of Progression/Non-Completion

UCD's rate of student retention is very healthy; over 80% of each year's cohort covered in this study have either graduated or are still continuing in the college they initially entered.

For example, 81.4% of those who entered in 1999 have graduated from the same College/Faculty in UCD and 0.3% are still studying in the same College. Obviously for the more recent years the proportions of those who have graduated relative to those continuing changes: for the 2002 cohort, 76.2% have graduated and 5.3% are continuing in the same College; for 2004, 38.6% have graduated and 42.1% are continuing.

Some students change from one college to another within UCD (< 3%). There are further small numbers accounted for who are currently on leave of absence but who are expected to continue with their studies, or withdrew from the original course but re-entered the same college.

Overall, averaging across all nine years of the survey, 14.5% of students who began their studies at UCD have left the university completely without graduating. However, excluding the more recent years in which students may still become non-completers, the true figure is in the region of 16-17.5%. The highest levels were recorded in 2000 and 2001; 17.2% and 17.3% respectively (i.e. retention rate > 82%).

In an international context, Ireland has both a high participation rate and a high retention rate: for the year 2004 the rates quoted in "Student Retention in Higher Education Courses International Comparison"¹⁸ are as follows: Australia 67%; Ireland 83%; Netherlands 76%; UK 78% and USA 54%. UCD's rate for this year is 83.7%

It is not surprising, therefore, that UCD's figures compare favourably with other institutions internationally.

For example, Coventry University Law School quotes figures which have improved from 57% in 1996/97 to 78% in 2000/01¹⁹ following extensive efforts.

¹⁸ Van Stolk, Tiessen, Clift and Levitt 2007

¹⁹ <http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/interact/lili/2002/johnson.html>



Nationally the UCD rate compares favourably to the rate in Trinity College Dublin, for example: "The overall retention rate in 2003/04 was 80% and represented a significant improvement on the previous year."²⁰

Overall Figures

For each year the current status of the entrants has been categorised. Students may be:

- Continuing/qualification complete,
- have left UCD ('University non-completer'),
- have changed College ('College non completer')²¹,
- deceased,
- have withdrawn and subsequently re-entered the same College or
- currently on leave of absence but expected to resume.

		(a) Continuing/ Qual Complete	(b) University Non- Completer	(c) College non Completer	(d) Deceased	(e) Withdrew/ re-entered same College	(f) Leave of Absence	Non- Completion rate (b+c/total)
1999	N	2858	571	58	3	22	0	3512
	%	81.4%	16.3%	1.7%	0.1%	0.6%	0.0%	100.0%
2000	N	2948	639	97	2	31	1	3718
	%	79.3%	17.2%	2.6%	0.1%	0.8%	0.0%	100.0%
2001	N	2961	640	78	6	16	0	3701
	%	80.0%	17.3%	2.1%	0.2%	0.4%	0.0%	100.0%
2002	N	3226	656	72	1	10	7	3972
	%	81.2%	16.5%	1.8%	0.0%	0.3%	0.2%	100.0%
2003	N	3160	641	71	2	11	22	3907
	%	80.9%	16.4%	1.8%	0.1%	0.3%	0.6%	100.0%
2004	N	3091	632	69	2	11	64	3869
	%	79.9%	16.3%	1.8%	0.1%	0.3%	1.7%	100.0%
2005	N	3111	601	74	4	19	39	3848
	%	80.8%	15.6%	1.9%	0.1%	0.5%	1.0%	100.0%
2006 ²²	N	3474	474	60	2	13	45	4068
	%	85.4%	11.7%	1.5%	0.0%	0.3%	1.1%	100.0%
2007	N	3889	186	0	0	1	0	4076
	%	95.4%	4.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Overall	N	28718	5040	579	22	134	178	34671
	%	82.8%	14.5%	1.7%	0.1%	0.4%	0.5%	100.0%

Table 3: Overall Completion figures

²⁰Trinity College Dublin: Broad Curriculum Initiative.
http://www.tcd.ie/Broad_Curriculum/pdf/BCReport2004/mainreport2003-04.pdf

²¹ In 2005, UCD restructured its 12 faculties to become 5 Colleges. Entrants have been coded to the College to which the programme they entered now belongs

²² Figures for recent years are obviously incomplete and a direct comparison with previous years cannot, therefore, be inferred.



In the previous study, retention rates were quoted as non-completion rate based on those who left UCD and those who did not continue in the same faculty (as colleges were then known). While the College non-completion rate is of interest when comparing the rates between different colleges, the group most of interest is the "non-completer" left UCD entirely (i.e. column b above).

The non-completion rates for recent years of the study can be compared with the 1992 figure of 14.43% published in a HEA report (Morgan, 2001). This report quotes a non-completion rate for UCD in 1985 of 19.7%, indicating a significant improvement in retention rates between 1985 and 1992. The comparable figure on the above table is University non-completer which shows some worsening in retention since 1992.

Because these figures have been compiled so early in the 2007/08 academic year the 2007 entrants are excluded from the comparisons which follow as there would be a risk that their inclusion would skew the results. The overall non-completion rate for 1999-2006 is 15.9%.

Comparison by Programme Group

There is a statistically significant difference between non-completion rate and the programme group. The Arts & Human Science programme group and Science programme group had the highest non-completion rates, as can be seen from the figure below.

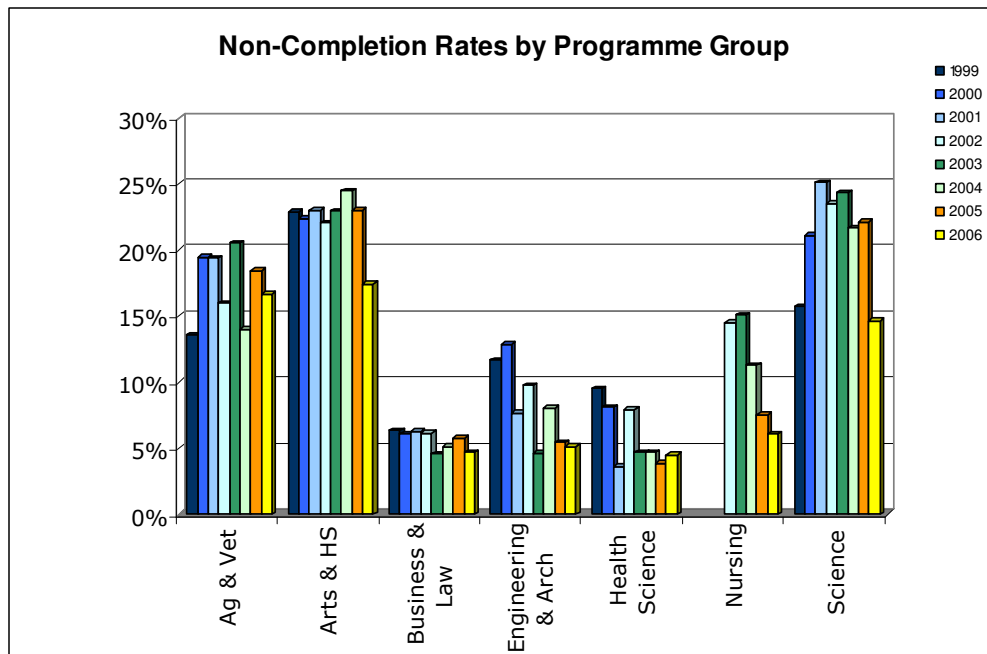


Figure 11: University Non Completion Rates by Programme Group



Business & Law have consistently had a very low non-completion rate. The Engineering & Architecture and Health Science programme groups have reduced their non-completion rates considerably in recent years.

The percentages of College Non-completers (i.e. those who changed to a different College within UCD) by programme group are much smaller. In this case there is no statistically significant difference by programme group, although the Science programme group has most College non-completers.

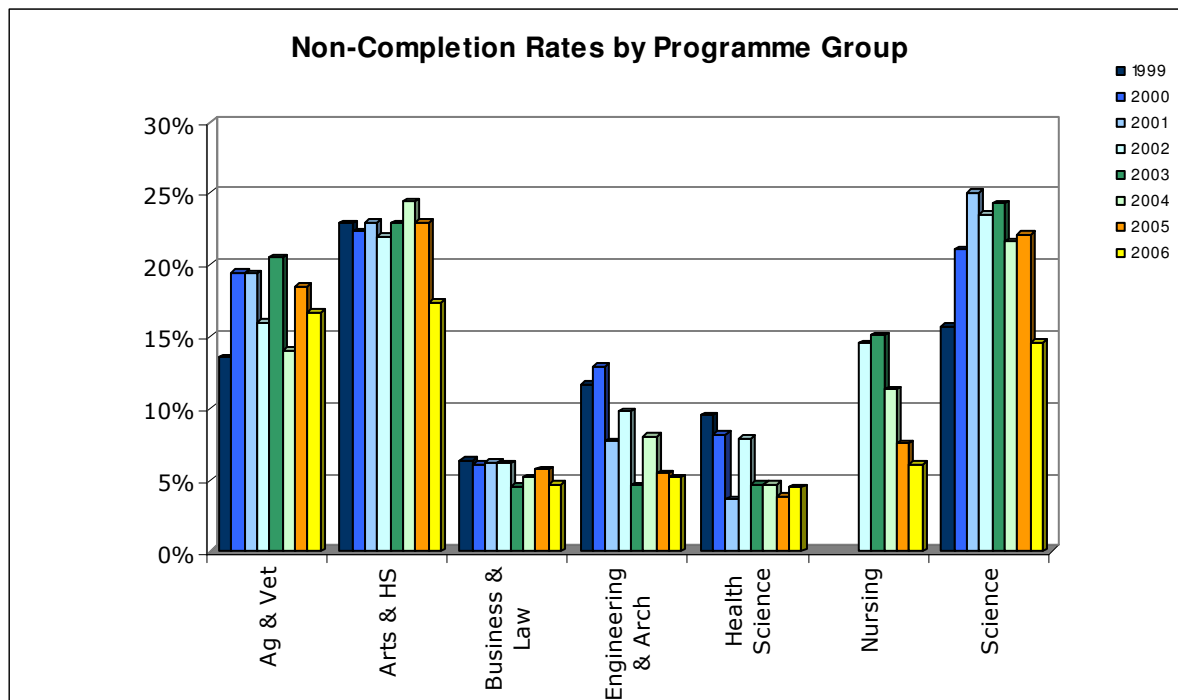


Figure 12: College Non-completion Rate by Programme Group

Tables in Appendix 2 show the status of the entrants for each year at 11 February 2008.



Time of Leaving

For the overall picture the years 1999-2002 should be considered initially as, for the majority of courses these students should have now completed. For these years, the two peak times for leaving are following first year exams (30% of those who left did so at this point) and before 1st February of 1st year (25%).

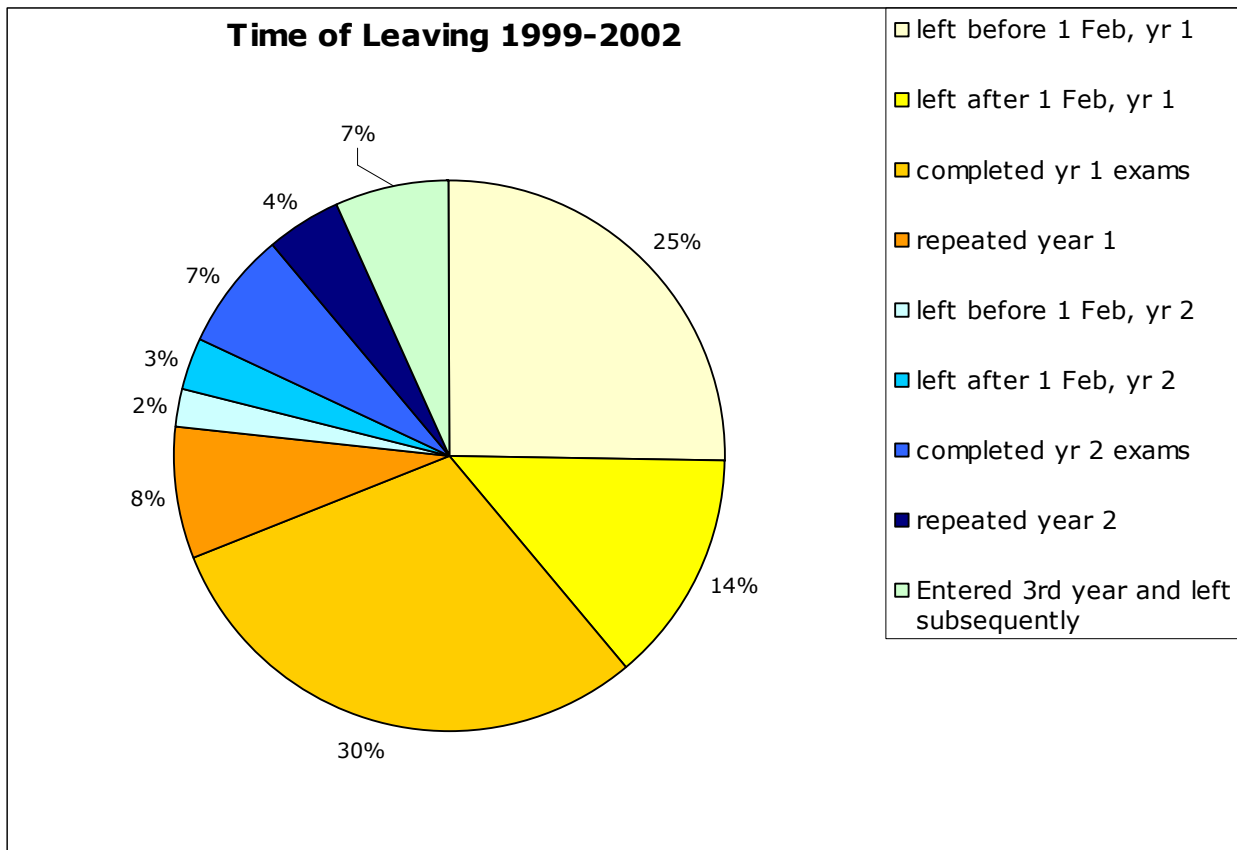


Figure 13: Time of Leaving 1999-2002

The majority (69%) of those who leave do so within the first twelve months following entry. A further 8% repeat first year but do not proceed to second year. Less than 25% of those who left had successfully entered second year. Less than 5% of those who entered 2nd year are non-completers (3.96% in 1999 - 4.99% in 2002).

Of those who left after 1st February, 60% did not officially withdraw but were simply absent from exams. This is a particularly worrying group as it means UCD has no opportunity of contact with these students before they leave – they just drift away. The peak year for this was 2000 when 80 students left in this way.



It is interesting to note that, whereas the UCD overall retention rate compares favourably to US institutions, the time of leaving seems to be somewhat different. University of California San Diego which has an overall completion rate in the period 1994-1999 of 78%-83% has a retention rate at 1-year from start of 94%²³. The UCD rate for that period is 87%.

Accommodation

When comparing time of leaving with accommodation type, a statistically significant relationship is found. Considering the group who did not proceed to second-year, the graph which follows shows the percentage from each accommodation type who left without proceeding to second-year. What is most striking is that 57.8% of those in campus accommodation, who did not proceed to second-year, completed their exams and then left (compared to 30% overall).

Also 45.8% of those whose term accommodation was unknown, and who did not proceed to second year, left before 1 February; this could be because accommodation issues were a problem for them or the fact that they did not inform UCD of their accommodation could indicate that they never engaged with university fully.

It is not surprising that a link exists between students living in student residences surviving first year. An Australian study (James & McInnis, 1997) focussed on student adjustment to, and affiliation with, university life. Survey data were collected from three student groups: students living on campus, students living at home and students living in other accommodation. Students living on campus were reported to be more satisfied with their college experience and felt more integrated into the life of the institution than off-campus students.

²³ Retention and Graduation Rates, University of California San Diego Annual Report



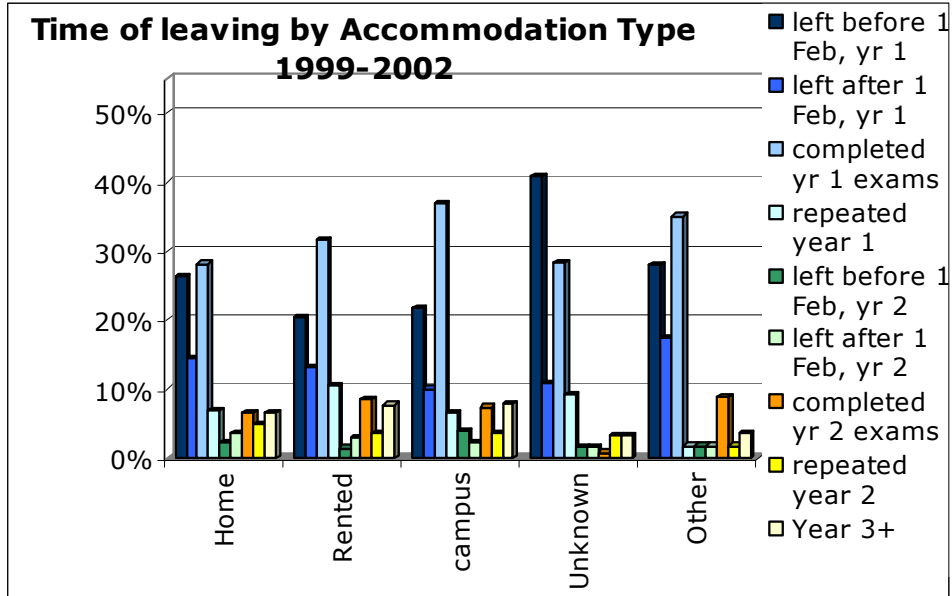


Figure 14: Time of Leaving by Accommodation Type

Gender

When comparing across all years there is a statistically significant relationship between gender and time of leaving, it would appear that of the female students who leave, a greater percentage do so before 1st February of first-year than their male counterparts.

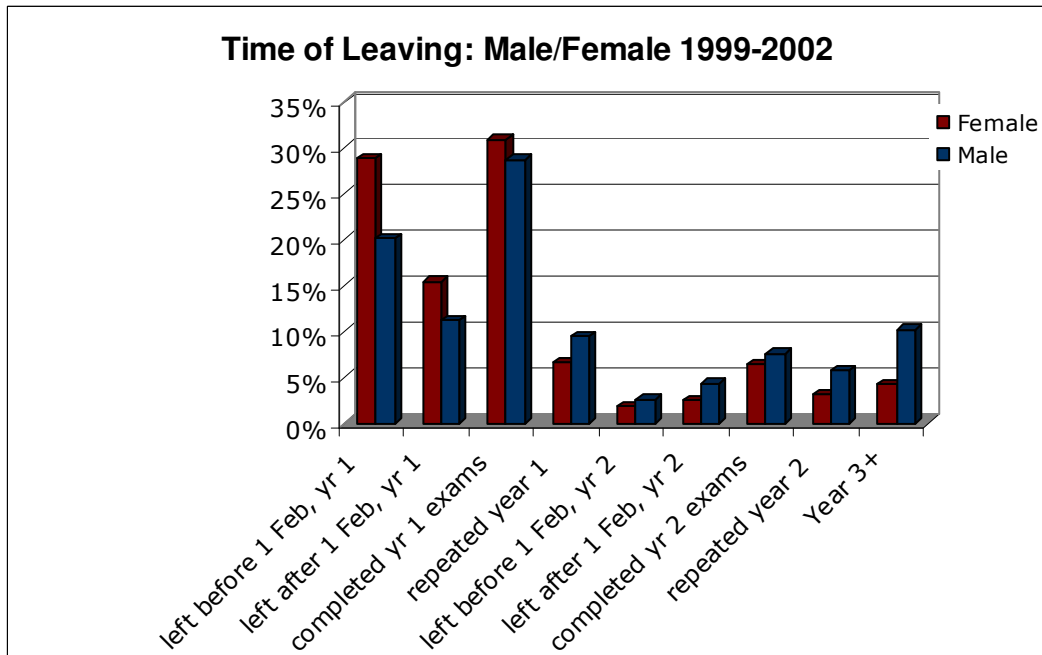


Figure 15: Time of Leaving: Gender Comparison



Mature Years age

There was a statistically significant difference in time of leaving when comparing applicants by age:

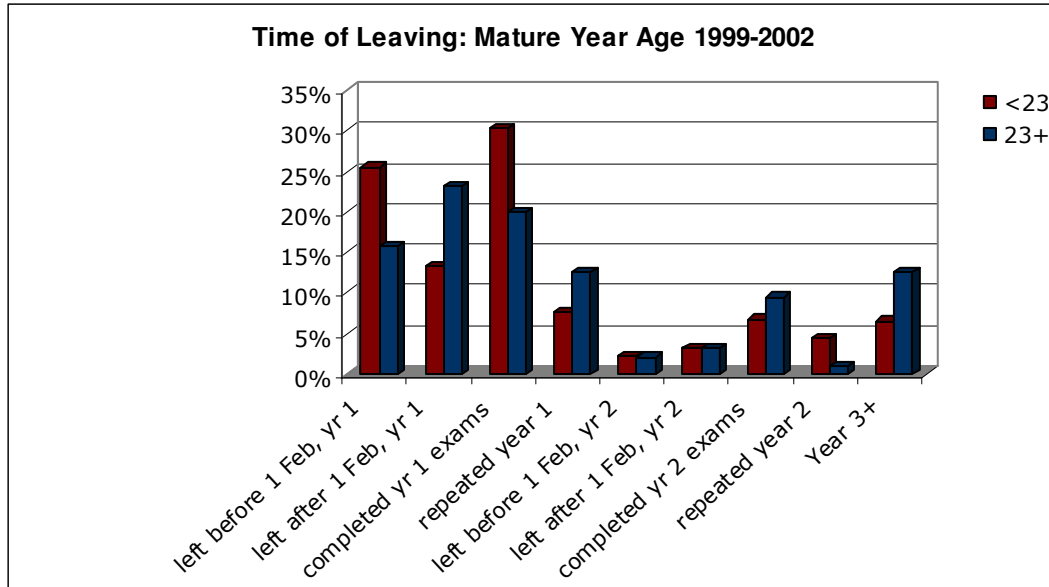


Figure 16: Time of Leaving: Mature Years Age (comparison)

Programme Area

The time of leaving also varied significantly by programme area. In the Health Science area, 30.7% of those who left did so before the first February of first year; this contrasts with Nursing which had the lowest percentage leaving in this period (14.3%). Of those who left from the Science area, 36.7% left having completed first-year exams. The area with the highest percentage of non-completers leaving in year three or later is Business and Law with 19.4%



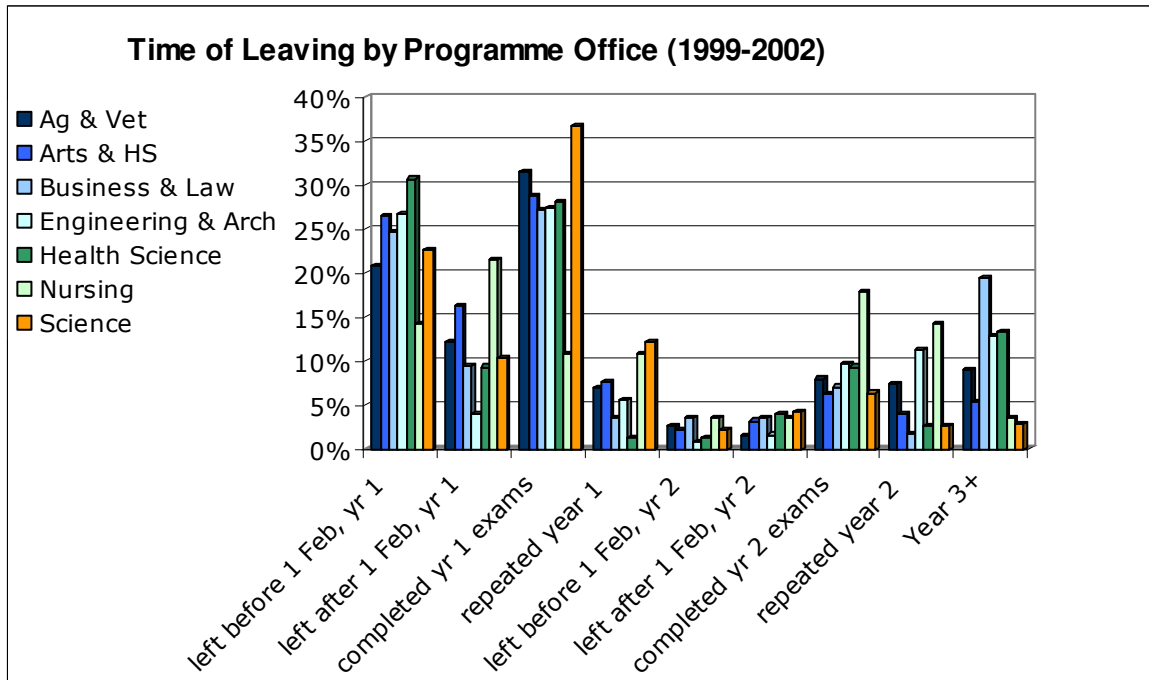


Figure 17: % of the non-completers from each programme area leaving in each time period

Time of Leaving 1999-2006

Those who entered in 2006 and, to a lesser extent, 2005 have passed fewer of the critical dates at which students withdraw. However chronologically, data for the first three categories of time of withdrawal (the horizontal axis of Figure 17) is complete for 2006 and for the first six for 2005.



The figure shows numbers rather than percentages to aid comparison for the recent years.

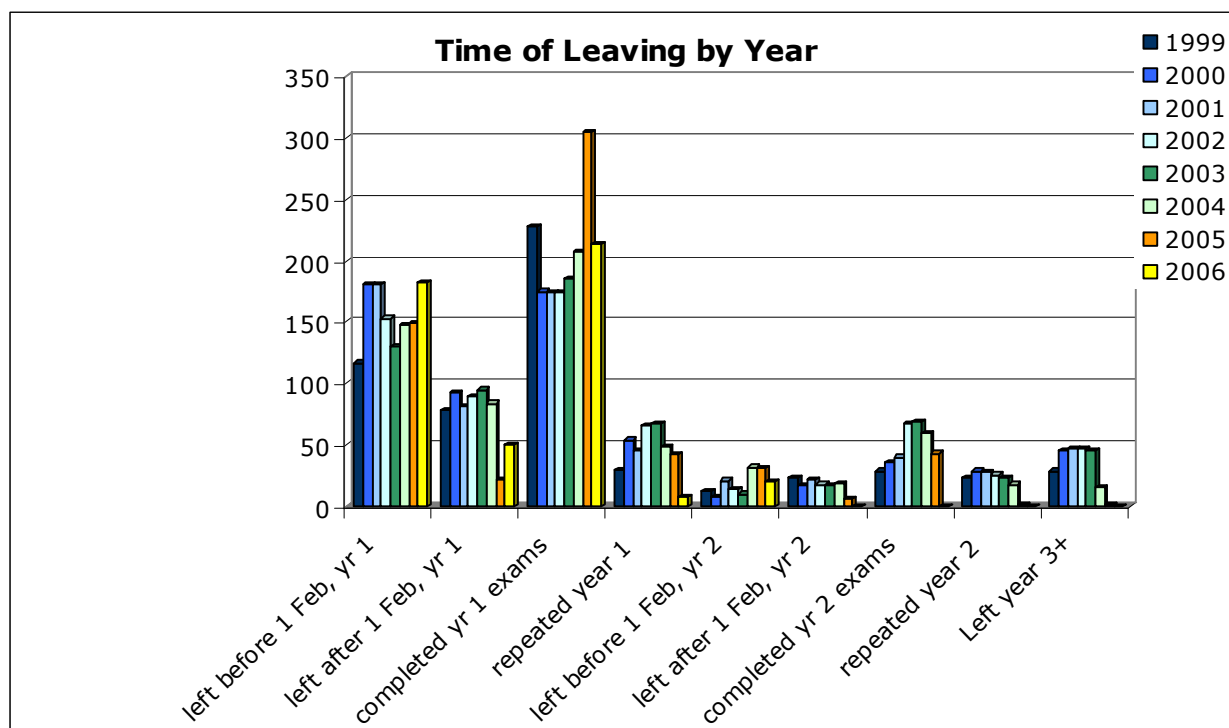


Figure 18: Percent of entrants who left at different times

There is a significant difference between the 1999-2002 period and the more recent years in terms of the percentages who left within each time period. It appears that the trend is for students to make the decision to leave earlier in their academic career. The numbers who withdrew before 1st February in 2005 and 2006, indicate an increase on the previous two years. The biggest single group is 305 students who entered in 2005 and left following first year exams.

Of those who did not register for 2nd year having completed 1st year examinations, up to 25% (2001) were eligible to proceed to second year.



When looking at the number of withdrawals of first year students by month, a more detailed pattern emerges²⁴

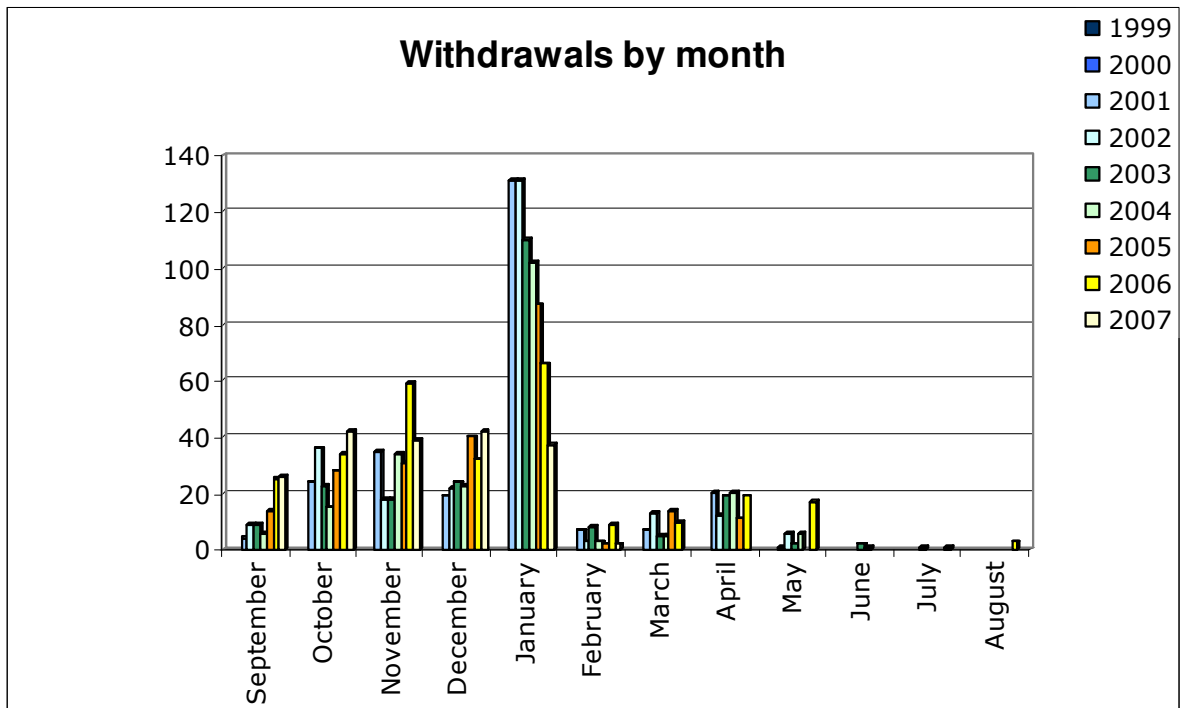


Figure 19: Withdrawals by first-year undergraduates by month

It is interesting to note the apparent increase in earlier withdrawals in recent years.

Conclusions

Although the UCD non-completion rate, which is not higher than 17.3% for any of the years of the study, is low relative to other universities internationally, it is a cause for concern, particularly in certain programme groups and it is important that steps are taken to improve this rate, where possible.

It is also clear that the first 12 months of a student's career at UCD are critical but that different groups of students take the decision to leave at different times.

²⁴ Figure is only available from 2001 onwards, 2007 figure is correct to 11 February 2008



Chapter 6: Comparative Analysis- Continuing Students/Non- Completers

Demographic Comparison

Statistically significant relationships were found between some of the demographic factors and non-completion when looking at all nine years combined (throughout this section University non-completers only are considered and 2007 entrants are excluded. The term continuing is used to encompass both continuing students and those whose qualification is already complete).

Gender

Overall there is a statistically significant relationship between gender and likelihood of non-completion. When looking at the figures across all years, female students are more likely to be non-completers than males: 56.7% of non-completers were females compared with 55.3% female in the total population for these years. The overall non-completion rate for males was slightly lower than that for females. However this relationship was not statistically significant for all years, and in some years the rate for males was higher than that for females.

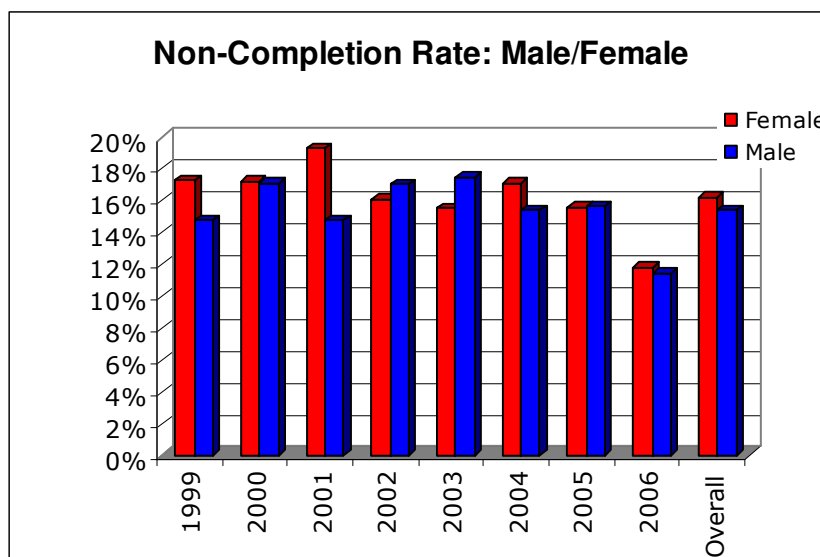


Figure 20: Non-completion Rate by Gender



Interestingly, despite the overall statistical significance, when looking at each programme group the only areas which had a statistically significant relationship between gender and non-completion were Nursing and Agricultural Science and Veterinary Medicine. In both cases the non-completion rate is higher for males than for females. The figure below shows the relationship between gender, academic programme and non-completion

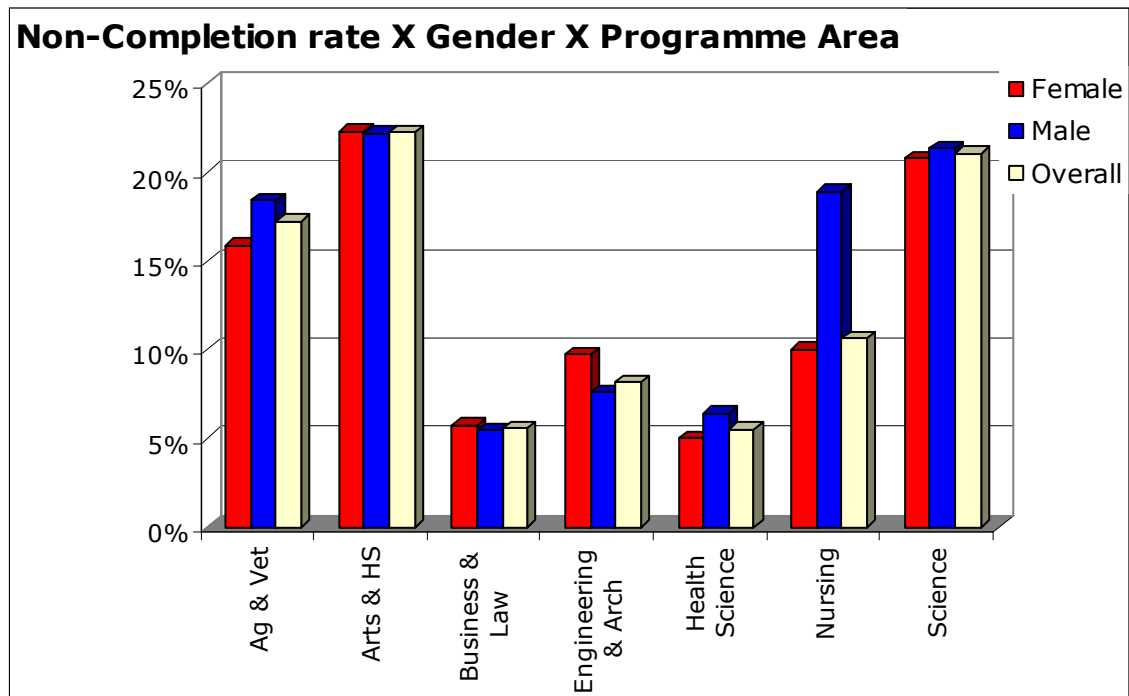


Figure 21: Non-completion Rate by Gender by Programme Group

Accommodation

A statistically significant relationship exists between location of home address and non-completion. However, the correlation was not to the level of statistical significance in all years, nor was it statistically significant across all programme groups (Engineering & Architecture and Nursing being the two exceptions where a statistically significant relationship did not exist).

Students with home addresses in Dublin City and County had a lower non-completion rate (15.2%) than students in the adjacent counties (18.5%) or elsewhere in Leinster (15.8%), Munster (16.0%), Connaught (16.5%) or the 3 counties of Ulster in the Republic of Ireland (16.7%). Students from Northern Ireland (12.9%) had the lowest non-completion rate on this island. Overseas students²⁵, have the overall lowest non-

²⁵ Overseas students are those from countries outside of the European Union.



completion rates (8.5%) in sharp contrast to their counterparts from the EU and UK whose non-completion rate is higher than normal (24.2% and 21.3% respectively).

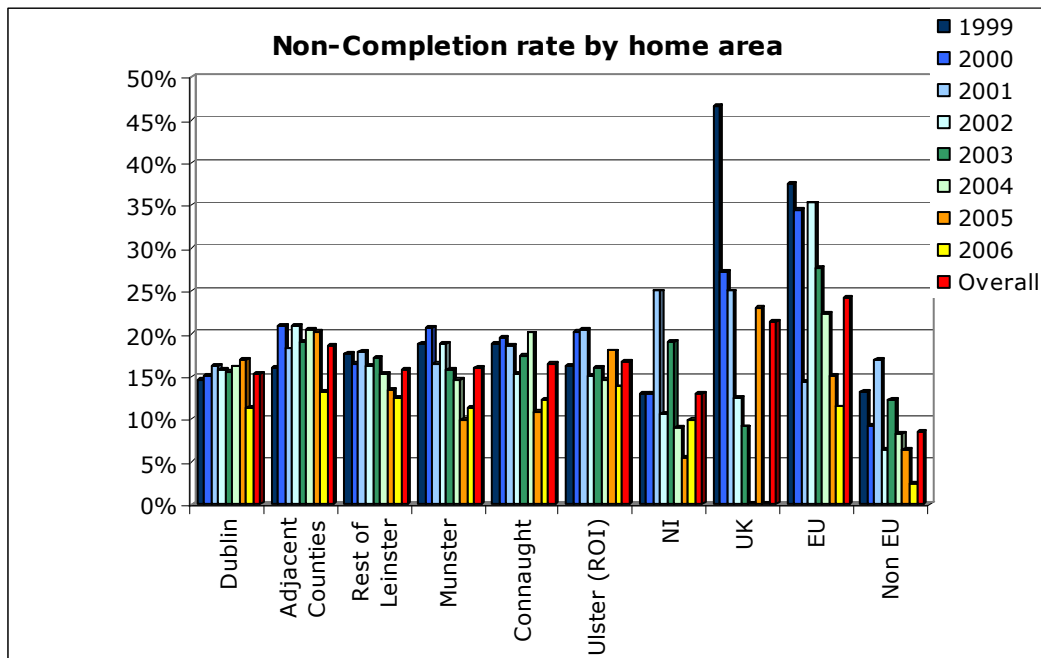


Figure 22: Non-Completion Rate by Permanent Home Address

Overall there was a statistically significant relationship between accommodation type and non-completion although this was not the case for 2002, 2003 or 2006²⁶ nor was it statistically significant for all programme groups. The lowest non-completion rate was for those in campus accommodation (13.0%). The highest rate was for those whose term accommodation was "other"; usually this means living with relatives or in lodgings (22.4%).

²⁶ Changes in coding of accommodation type to meet HEA requirements may have affected results.



Socio-Economic Group

A statistically significant relationship between Socio-Economic Group and non-completion was identified.²⁷

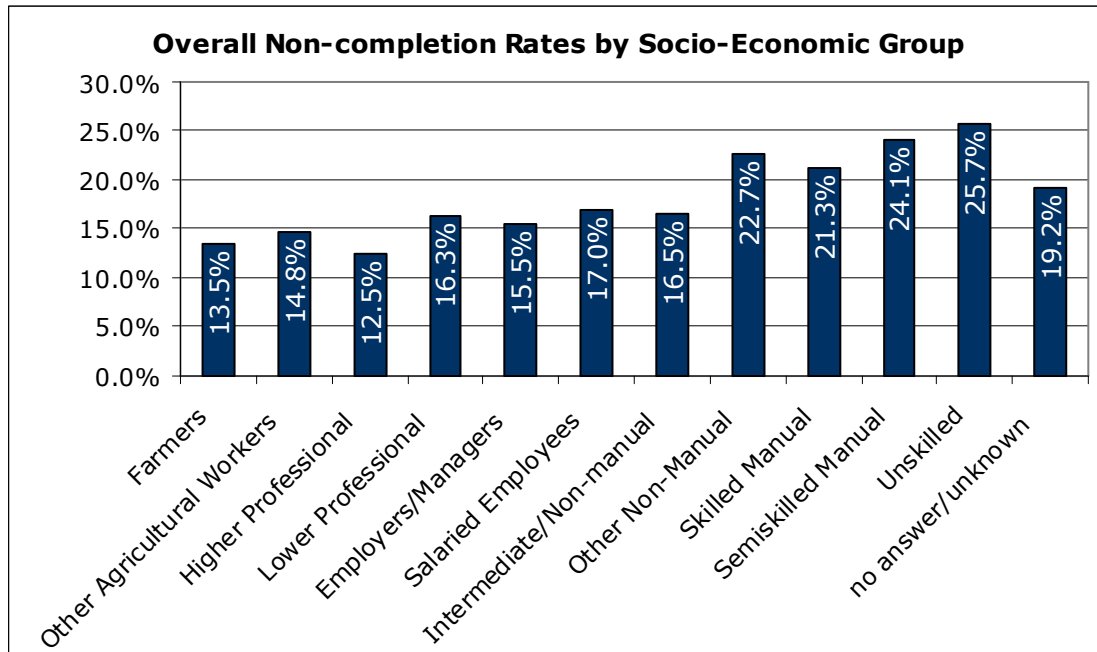


Figure 23: Overall Non-completion Rates by Socio-Economic Group

Research from the UK has shown that socio-economic background of students does matter in terms of how they cope with the transition to university learning. While socio-economic background has little influence on how students perceive teaching and learning, differences do exist between a student's socio-economic status and academic coping skills. Yorke and Longden (2007) found that students from higher socio-economic backgrounds may have better coping skills for academic work and may therefore become more engaged socially with university life. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds were found to be less well informed about their institution and academic programme prior to entry, which led to students not engaging with the university.

The more integrated, academically and socially to the university, the more likely students will be retained in the institution. Time spent on campus is also an important factor in students engaging with their institution, both academically and socially. Tinto (1973) has found that the more time students spend in part-time employment off campus, the less

²⁷ 2007 data is omitted in this case as a new system of collecting socio-economic data was introduced and the coded data has not been returned.



time they spend on campus which, in turn, makes them more likely to withdraw prior to graduation. This might explain why, at UCD, there is a link between lower socio-economic class and early withdrawal.

Age

Overall, there was a correlation between age and non-completion but this was not to the level of statistical significance for all years. The highest rate of non-completion was for those in the 26-30 age group (19.7%)

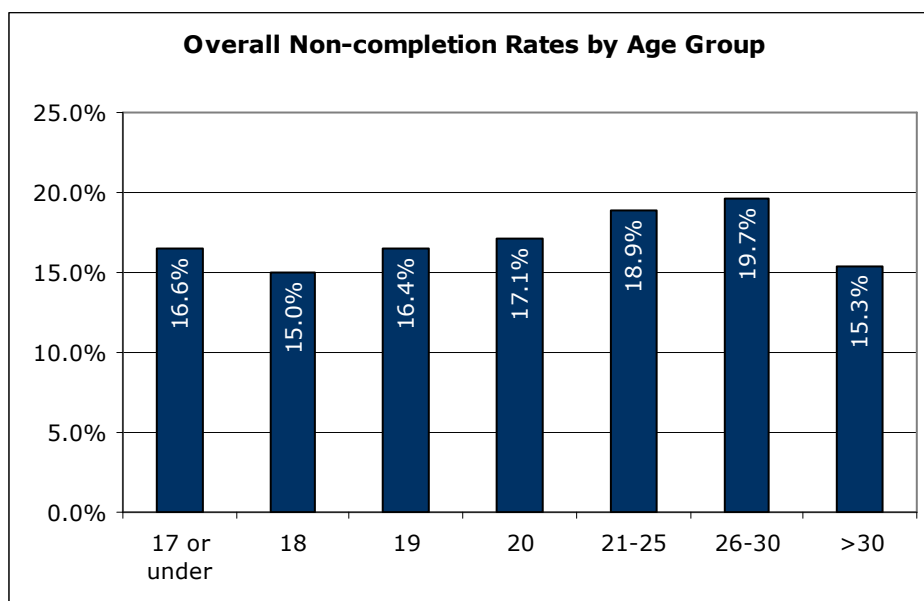


Figure 24: Overall Non-completion Rates by Age Group

The average age of non-completers was slightly higher than that of continuing students (19.38 compared to 19.36). The non-completion rate for mature students²⁸ was higher than for those under 23 but not to the level of statistical significance (17.0%:15.8%).

Preferences

For the years 2003-2007²⁹ there was a correlation between preference and non-completion. For those who entered their first preference course the non-completion rate was only 11.7% overall.

²⁸ i.e. 23 on or before 1st January preceding entry, regardless of entry route

²⁹ Data not available prior to this except via net acceptances



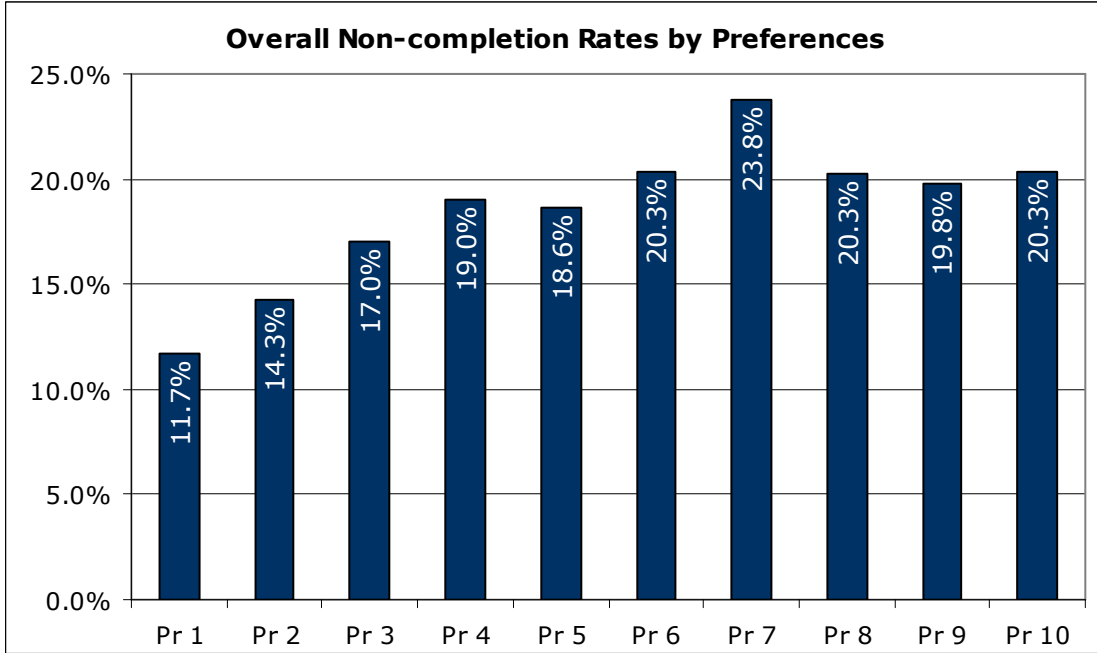


Figure 25: Non-Completion Rate by Preference

The correlation was not statistically significant for all programme groups with the Arts & Human Sciences, Business & Law and Nursing programme groups being the exceptions.

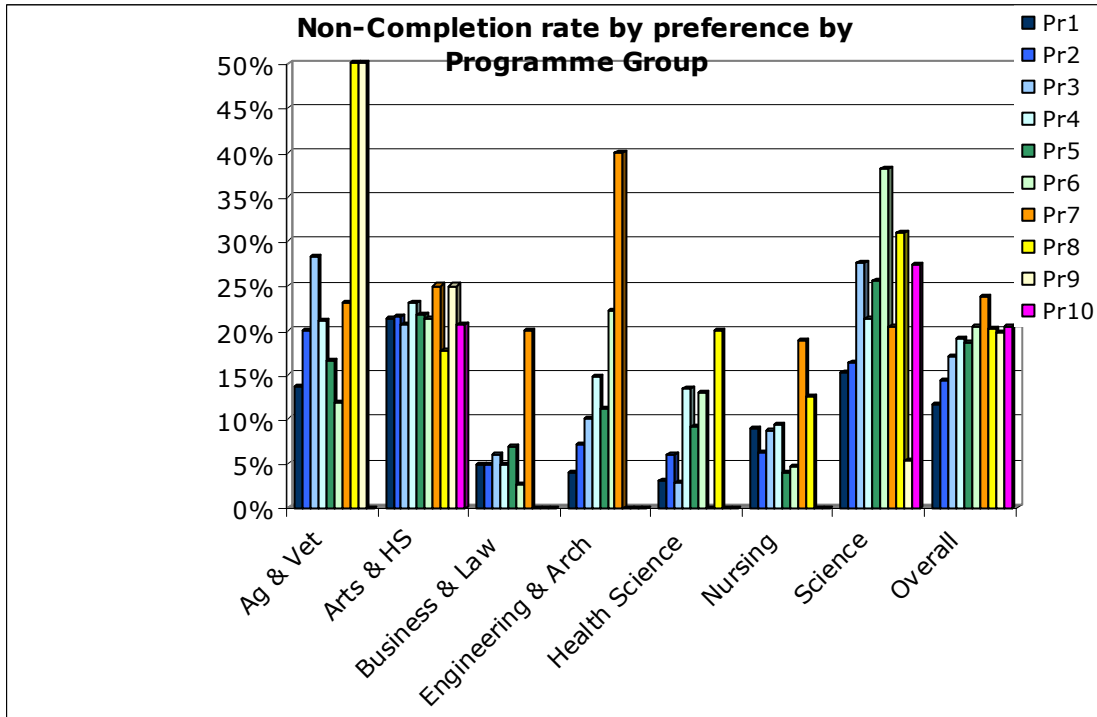


Figure 26: Non-Completion rate by preference by Programme Group



Academic Predictors

Statistically significant relationships were found relating to students' academic performance.

Points

The non-completion rate is higher for the lower points ranges varying from 62.5% for those with points less than 300 to <10% for every points score greater than 475. The lowest rate for an individual points score is 2.3% for students at 600 points. The difference in points scores is illustrated in the graph below.

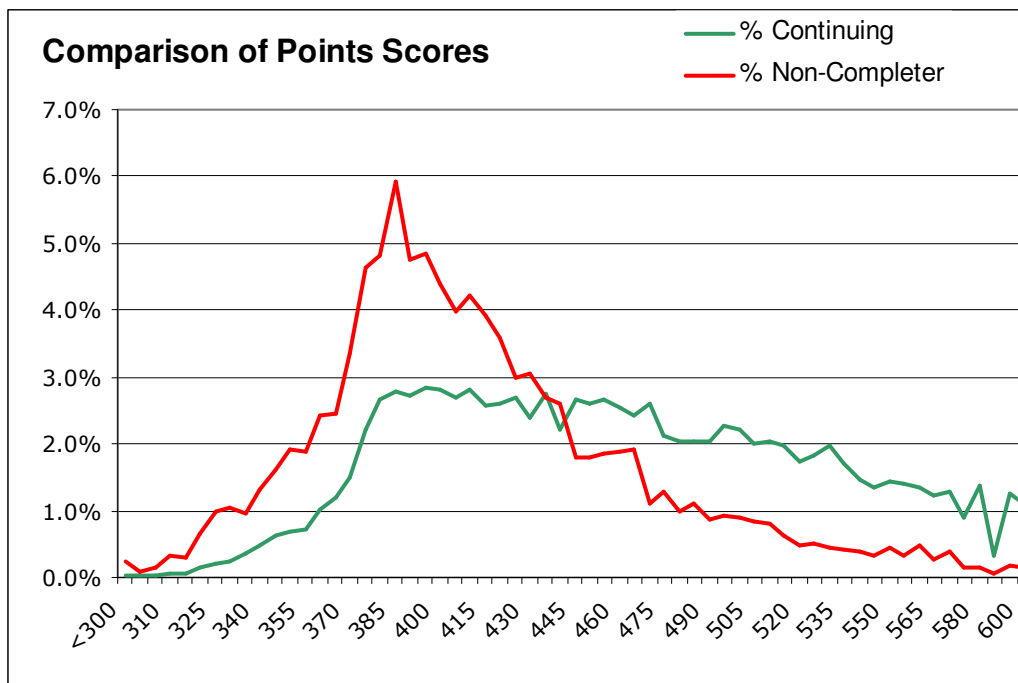


Figure 27: Comparison of Points Scores

Of those who entered on the basis of the Irish Leaving Certificate, the average points score of continuing students is 459.0 compared to 413.1 for non-completers.

This difference can also be seen when the rate at each points level is examined, which is illustrated in the figure which follows.



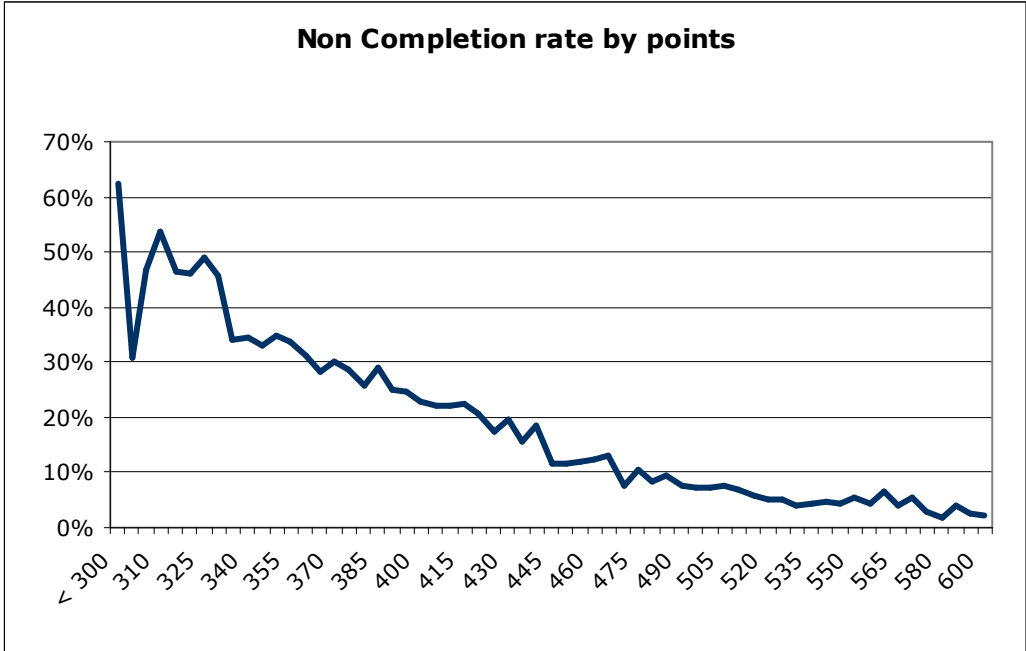


Figure 28: Non Completion rate at each points level

There was also a statistically significant difference in time of leaving by points:

	<=300	305-350	355-400	405-450	455-500	505-550	555-600
left before 1 Feb, yr 1	20.0%	19.7%	22.7%	25.6%	29.7%	41.4%	40.0%
left after 1 Feb, yr 1	20.0%	11.6%	14.0%	13.6%	14.5%	7.5%	8.6%
completed yr 1 exams	20.0%	34.0%	30.4%	31.9%	27.7%	25.6%	17.1%
repeated year 1	20.0%	18.4%	9.7%	6.9%	2.6%	1.5%	0.0%
left before 1 Feb, yr 2	0.0%	2.0%	2.1%	2.4%	1.3%	3.8%	0.0%
left after 1 Feb, yr 2	20.0%	2.7%	3.4%	3.0%	3.3%	6.0%	0.0%
completed yr 2 exams	0.0%	5.4%	6.5%	6.9%	8.9%	4.5%	5.7%
repeated year 2	0.0%	4.8%	4.7%	4.2%	3.6%	3.8%	2.9%
Year 3+	0.0%	1.4%	6.5%	5.4%	8.3%	6.0%	25.7%

Table 4: Time of Leaving by Points range 1999-2002

Interestingly a higher percentage of those who left in the 555-600 points range did so during third year, or later, more so than for any other points range.



English

There is a statistically significant relationship between the result in Leaving Certificate English and non-completion.

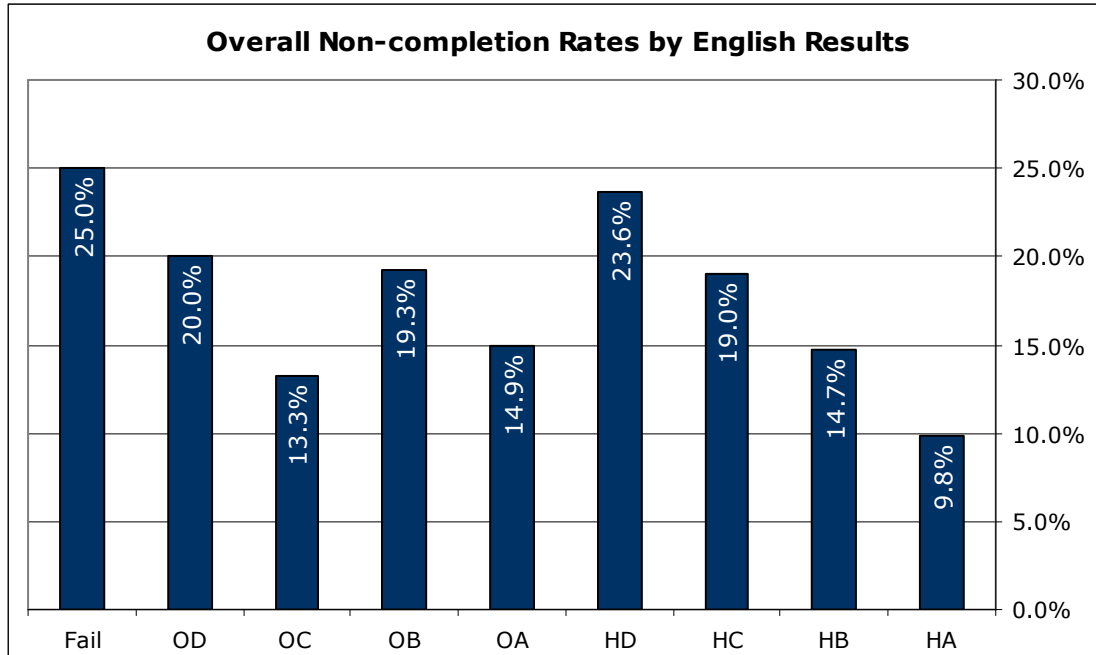


Figure 29: Non-Completion Rate by English Grade

The non-completion rate for those with honours English grade A1 was 9.8%. The highest non-completion rates were for those who failed (25.0%)³⁰.

The relationship between performance in English at Leaving Certificate and completion is not statistically significant for the Health Sciences and Nursing programme groups

³⁰ Although English is a required subject for entry to all courses in UCD, it is possible to compensate a fail grade at higher-level.



Mathematics

A statistically significant correlation with Mathematics result was also identified, with rates varying from 52.9% for those not presenting any Mathematics result to 4.6% for those with a higher-level grade A1.

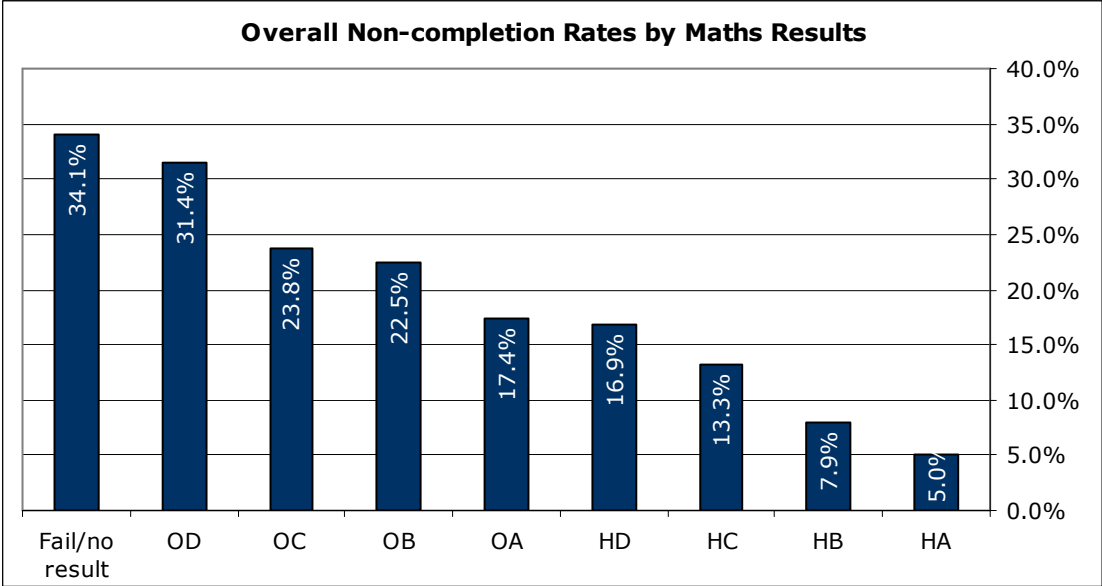


Figure 30: Non-Completion Rate by Mathematics Grade

The relationship was statistically significant for all programme groups except Health Sciences and Nursing



Alternative Admissions Routes

Each year many students are admitted through various special routes such as mature years entry. When comparing across all years there is a statistically significant relationship between entry route and completion.

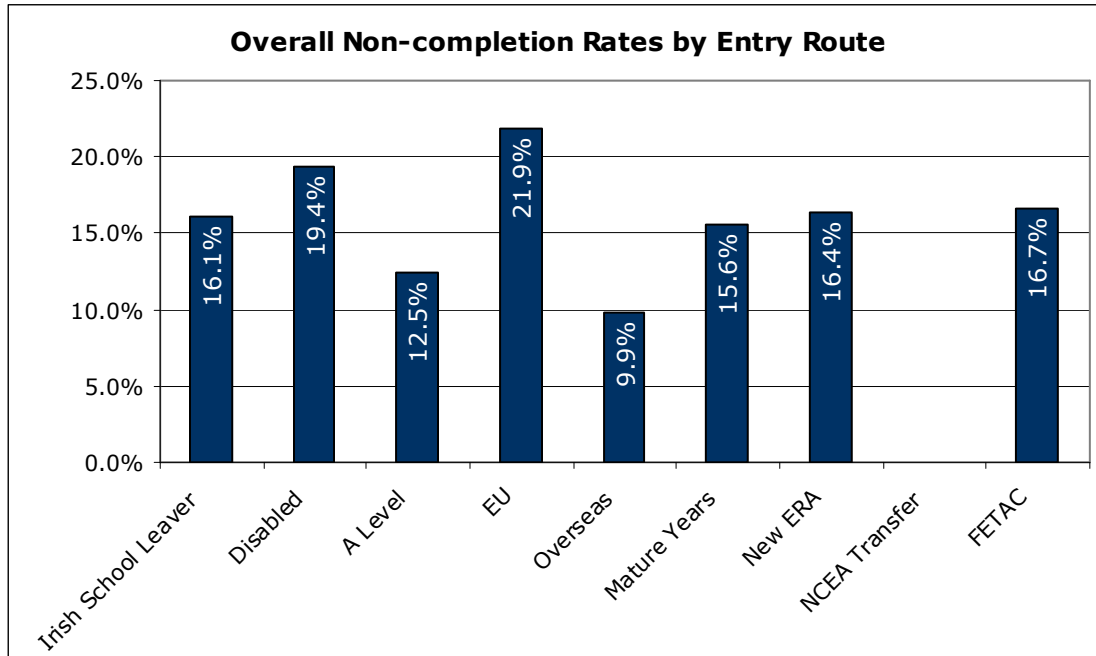


Figure 31: Overall Non-Completion Rates by Entry Route

Although numbers admitted to first-year via the NCEA transfer route are admittedly small, all students in this category are continuing. Most of the other groups have lower non-completion rates than school-leavers or comparable rates. The exception is EU students where the rate is 21.9%.

These figures refer only to students admitted on special grounds; for example many students of mature years age may gain admission on the basis of their leaving certificate results. Interestingly for those of mature years age who were admitted on points the non-completion rate is 22.0% which compares to 15.8% for those granted a special place on grounds of mature years.

There was also a statistically significant difference in time of leaving amongst those who left from the various groups (comparing 1999-2002 only)



	Irish School Leaver	Disabled	A Level	EU	Overseas	Mature Years	New ERA	FETAC
left before 1 Feb, yr 1	25.8%	18.8%	31.0%	19.5%	4.8%	20.3%	22.2%	25.2%
left after 1 Feb, yr 1	13.3%	6.3%	11.9%	17.1%	16.7%	23.4%	18.5%	13.7%
completed yr 1 exams	30.3%	6.3%	28.6%	39.0%	33.3%	20.3%	25.9%	30.0%
repeated year 1	7.8%	25.0%	2.4%	2.4%	7.1%	15.6%	0.0%	7.8%
left before 1 Feb, yr 2	2.2%	6.3%	4.8%	0.0%	7.1%	0.0%	0.0%	2.2%
left after 1 Feb, yr 2	3.3%	6.3%	2.4%	4.9%	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	3.2%
completed yr 2 exams	6.8%	25.0%	2.4%	12.2%	7.1%	7.8%	3.7%	6.9%
repeated year 2	4.3%	0.0%	7.1%	2.4%	4.8%	1.6%	7.4%	4.3%
Year 3+	6.3%	6.3%	9.5%	2.4%	16.7%	10.9%	22.2%	6.7%

Table 5: Time of Leaving by Entry Route 1999-2002

Conclusions

The results of the demographic comparison are very similar to those found in the Mathews and Mulkeen retention report. In academic terms it is clear that the student is more likely to be a non-completer if he/she entered with below average points and weaker grades in Mathematics or English.

Mathews and Mulkeen stated that the non-completer was most likely to be living away from home. The results above indicate that students in campus accommodation have the lowest non-completion rate but students living away from home in other types of accommodation have higher non-completion rates.

Those living in the counties adjacent to Dublin and from the EU or the UK have high non-completion rates.

Students studying on their first CAO preference course are more likely to be retained compared to their classmates studying a course which was a lower CAO preference.



Chapter 7: Survey response: Entrants 2005 & 2006

Introduction

All undergraduate students who entered full-time programmes in UCD in sessions 2005/2006 and 2006/2007 who were no longer continuing in the degree programme they entered were surveyed. Responses were received as follows:

	No. Surveyed	Response	Response Rate
2005	555	101	18.2%
2006	182	48	26.4%
Total	737	149	20.2%

Table 6: Survey responses

Although female students responded more than their male counterparts, there is no statistical significance for either 2005 or 2006 cohorts in the gender distribution of respondents.

The survey responses were also validly distributed across programme groups with no statistically significant variations in either year.

Why students choose to leave

In the first section of the questionnaire (see Appendix), students were asked why they chose to leave their course, the reasons behind their decision and how they felt having finally left. Students were asked to answer mainly five-point (Likert) scaled questions combined with a number of open-ended questions where more detailed information was gathered. The survey responses received from non-completers are shown first for 2005 and then for 2006. Students were asked to rate factors which may have contributed towards their decision to leave. The rating scale was from 1 (not relevant) to 5 (highly relevant); 21 different factors were suggested. The top ranking responses are shown in table 7.



2005		2006	
Wrong course choice	46.5%	Wrong course choice	58.3%
Didn't know anyone/difficulty making friends	22.8%	Poor sense of community	22.9%
Unfriendly environment	22.8%	Unfriendly environment	20.8%
Poor sense of community	21.8%	Didn't know anyone/difficulty making friends	18.8%
Lack of interaction with faculty/staff	20.8%	Couldn't get modules I wanted	12.5%

Table 7: Top ranking reasons for leaving 2005 and 2006

In both years, "Wrong Choice of Course" was found to be the key factor. Mathews and Mulkeen make reference to the fact that 'Wrong Course Choice' was also found as the main reason in a study of Universities in the North East of England³¹ As mentioned previously, the most recent research on first year students in the UK shows that wrong course choice and financial difficulties are still prominent. The English study shows that the second and third factors were 'having exams/assessment' and 'financial concerns'. In this UCD survey 'Failed Exams' ranked 9 for the 2005 cohort and 11 for 2006, and 'Financial Difficulties' ranked 13 for the 2005 and 9 for the 2006 cohorts showing differences in attitudes.

For this UCD study, the second noteworthy factor students cited as the main reason for non-completion was 'Did not know anyone/Difficulty making friends' and 'Unfriendly Environment/Atmosphere'- both tied in second place for the 2005 cohort.

2006 survey respondents cited 'Poor sense of community' in second place and "Unfriendly Environment/Atmosphere" followed in third place. "Couldn't get modules" appeared for the first time in 2006 with students ranking this as one of their top five reasons for withdrawing.

While Yorke and Longden (2004) show that students at British universities are more concerned with factors such as failing the course and financial concerns, the results below demonstrate that UCD students were more concerned with the social and environmental aspect of college life.

³¹ Dodgson and Bolam



	5 Highly relevant	4	3	2	1 not relevant	No Answer
Wrong course choice	46.5%	11.9%	16.8%	5.9%	16.8%	2.0%
Did not know anyone/difficulty making friends	22.8%	11.9%	9.9%	9.9%	41.6%	4.0%
Unfriendly environment/atmosphere	22.8%	13.9%	9.9%	11.9%	35.6%	5.9%
Poor sense of community	21.8%	12.9%	17.8%	7.9%	35.6%	4.0%
Lack of interaction with faculty/staff	20.8%	17.8%	14.9%	4.0%	37.6%	5.0%
Size/scale of campus	17.8%	7.9%	13.9%	14.9%	42.6%	3.0%
Lack of orientation	16.8%	8.9%	13.9%	13.9%	41.6%	5.0%
Other	15.8%	1.0%	0.0%	1.0%	5.9%	76.2%
Location of UCD/Transport problems	12.9%	5.0%	7.9%	7.9%	62.4%	4.0%
Failed exams	10.9%	5.9%	13.9%	7.9%	55.4%	5.9%
Needed a year out	9.9%	8.9%	7.9%	3.0%	67.3%	3.0%
Couldn't get wanted modules	6.9%	5.9%	16.8%	12.9%	55.4%	2.0%
Lack of access to social activities (clubs/societies)	5.9%	8.9%	9.9%	7.9%	62.4%	5.0%
Course too difficult	5.0%	13.9%	15.8%	12.9%	48.5%	4.0%
Financial Difficulties	5.0%	3.0%	5.0%	9.9%	73.3%	4.0%
Poor standard of facilities	5.0%	4.0%	5.0%	10.9%	69.3%	5.9%
Problem adjusting 3rd level	4.0%	8.9%	15.8%	10.9%	55.4%	5.0%
Accommodation difficulties	4.0%	2.0%	5.0%	5.0%	81.2%	3.0%
Personal or family problems	4.0%	7.9%	3.0%	4.0%	76.2%	5.0%
Wanted to repeat leaving Cert for 1st preference	2.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	90.1%	5.0%
Course not challenging	2.0%	6.9%	7.9%	7.9%	69.3%	5.9%
Offered job opportunity	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%	5.0%	86.1%	3.0%

Table 8: Factors contributing to decision to leave 2005 ranked from 5(highly relevant to 1(not relevant))



	5 Highly relevant	4	3	2	1 not relevant	No Answer
Wrong course choice	58.3%	18.8%	2.1%	6.3%	8.3%	6.3%
Poor sense of community	22.9%	6.3%	18.8%	4.2%	41.7%	6.3%
Unfriendly environment/atmosphere	20.8%	8.3%	12.5%	14.6%	37.5%	6.3%
Did not know anyone/difficulty making friends	18.8%	6.3%	6.3%	14.6%	50.0%	4.2%
Size/scale of campus	14.6%	12.5%	14.6%	12.5%	41.7%	4.2%
Couldn't get wanted modules	12.5%	8.3%	8.3%	10.4%	56.3%	4.2%
Location of UCD/Transport problems	12.5%	6.3%	14.6%	6.3%	56.3%	4.2%
Wanted to repeat leaving Cert for 1st preference	10.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	83.3%	6.3%
Accommodation difficulties	10.4%	4.2%	2.1%	4.2%	75.0%	4.2%
Needed a year out	10.4%	0.0%	10.4%	16.7%	56.3%	6.3%
Lack of orientation	10.4%	12.5%	10.4%	2.1%	60.4%	4.2%
Lack of interaction with faculty/staff	10.4%	10.4%	14.6%	14.6%	45.8%	4.2%
Personal or family problems	8.3%	0.0%	6.3%	6.3%	75.0%	4.2%
Other	8.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.1%	89.6%
Financial Difficulties	6.3%	4.2%	6.3%	4.2%	72.9%	6.3%
Course too difficult	4.2%	10.4%	12.5%	16.7%	50.0%	6.3%
Problem adjusting 3rd level	4.2%	6.3%	12.5%	18.8%	52.1%	6.3%
Failed exams	2.1%	4.2%	6.3%	4.2%	75.0%	8.3%
Lack of access to social activities (clubs/societies)	2.1%	4.2%	8.3%	6.3%	75.0%	4.2%
Course not challenging	0.0%	4.2%	2.1%	4.2%	83.3%	6.3%
Offered job opportunity	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%	0.0%	87.5%	6.3%
Poor standard of facilities	0.0%	2.1%	12.5%	4.2%	77.1%	4.2%

Table 9: Factors contributing to decision to leave 2006 ranked from 5 (highly relevant) to 1 (not relevant) -2006

Students were asked if "other", to fill in the blank. Generally the responses related to difficulties in choosing modules both due to technical problems and to modules being full.

Students were also asked, as a separate question, to indicate which factor was the most critical in causing them to drop out of their course.

'Wrong Course Choice' was listed as the most significant factor in both years. In 2005 this factor was listed by 25.7% and in 2006 by 39.6% of students. The next most frequently occurring reason in 2005 was 'Lack of friends/Difficulty making friends' with 7.9%.

For 2006 respondents, the following frequently occurring reasons after 'Wrong Course Choice' were tied on 4.2% and these were 'Unfriendly Atmosphere', 'Lack of



Friends/difficultly making friends', 'Transport/distance from home/location UCD', 'Repeating leaving cert for different course' and 'Online enrolment/Module enrolment'.

Taking these reasons into account, it was noted that 2005 and 2006 had some distinguishing differences in respondents' reasons for leaving UCD.

Respondents who entered in 2005, when compared to 2006 entrants did not cite online enrolment or module enrolment as a critical factor in leaving whilst for 2006 entrants this reason amounted to 4.2% of respondents reasons. It should be noted that the registration process was improved significantly for 2007 entry.

Wrong Course Choice

The most common reason cited in both years for leaving college prior to completion of the first year was the wrong choice of course with 46.5% of survey respondents from 2005 and 55.3% from 2006 citing it as a major reason they left college. There was no statistically significant relationship between response to this question and programme group in either year.

Some students felt that they didn't make the right decision about their choice of course for a variety of reasons. In some cases immaturity was cited. Many students also indicated that they had received inadequate or misleading information about the course either through their school or directly from UCD.

Thus, many of the reasons cited for choosing the wrong course had to do with misinformation on their course. Some students combined wrong course choice with another reason for leaving; 'wrong course and horizons', 'wrong course and family problems', 'wrong course and location', 'wrong course and unfriendly atmosphere' and 'physical problem compounded by poor course choice'.

Did not know anyone/Difficulty making friends/Unfriendly Environment and Poor sense of Community

The 2005 entrants who answered this survey had 'Did not know anyone/Difficulty making friends' and 'Unfriendly Environment/Atmosphere' as the second most critical factor contributing towards non-completion; both tied at 22.8% of results.

2006 respondents cited 'Poor sense of Community' in second place taking 22.9% of results and in third place at 20.8% was 'Unfriendly Environment/Atmosphere'.



Students who have come to college without school friends find it most difficult to make new friends especially within densely populated courses, in particular Arts where on average, 1,250 students enter each year. In the comments the difficulty with not being with the same group of students for consecutive lectures was cited.

Loneliness and poor sense of community were mentioned due to the size and scale of the campus and lecture and class sizes. From the comments this was frequently mentioned in relation to Arts.

Also mentioned was the students' belief that lecturers were unapproachable and the feeling that no one cared if they dropped out; which again only serves to promote loneliness and isolation.

Another factor is those students who commute to UCD each day from outside Dublin. Students who did so felt it was harder to make friends because they had to travel such distances each day and thus could not wait around after lectures for social reasons.

Thus, what could be postulated from these comments is that the difficulty making friends in college is interlinked with the large lecture sizes.

Looking here at a graphical expression for 2005 whereby the second most critical factor cited by respondents for non completion was 'Unfriendly environment/atmosphere' and 'Did not know anyone/Difficulty making friends', it can be seen that students studying densely populated programme areas such as those in the Arts and Human Sciences group were the highest percentage citing both reasons.



	4 & 5 Combined	5 Highly relevant	4	3	2	1 not relevant	No Answer
Arts & Human Sciences	44.8%	32.8%	12.1%	10.3%	10.3%	29.3%	5.2%
Business & Law	42.9%	0.0%	42.9%	14.3%	0.0%	42.9%	0.0%
Overall	36.6%	22.8%	13.9%	9.9%	11.9%	35.6%	5.9%
Health sciences	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%
Agriculture & Veterinary Med	28.6%	14.3%	14.3%	0.0%	14.3%	57.1%	0.0%
Science	22.2%	5.6%	16.7%	16.7%	16.7%	33.3%	11.1%
Engineering & Architecture	16.7%	16.7%	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	50.0%	16.7%
Nursing	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%

Table 10: Rankings of 'Unfriendly Environment/Atmosphere' by College – 2005

Of the respondents from Arts & Human Sciences, 44.8% ranked Unfriendly Environment/Atmosphere 4 or 5. However there is no statistically significant correlation between ranking of this question and programme group.

Table 10 shows the 2005 respondents' second critical factor for non completion; that being the theme of 'Did not know anyone/Difficulty making friends'. Again here, the Arts & Human Sciences Group has most respondents ranking this 4 or 5, followed again by Business and Law. The correlation was not to the level of statistical significance.

	4 & 5 Combined	5 Highly relevant	4	3	2	1 not relevant	No Answer
Arts & Human Sciences	41.4%	31.0%	10.3%	8.6%	12.1%	32.8%	5.2%
Overall	34.7%	22.8%	11.9%	9.9%	9.9%	41.6%	4.0%
Health sciences	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	66.7%	0.0%
Agriculture & Veterinary Med	28.6%	14.3%	14.3%	14.3%	0.0%	57.1%	0.0%
Business & Law	28.6%	0.0%	28.6%	0.0%	0.0%	71.4%	0.0%
Science	27.8%	16.7%	11.1%	22.2%	5.6%	38.9%	5.6%
Engineering & Architecture	16.7%	0.0%	16.7%	0.0%	33.3%	50.0%	0.0%
Nursing	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%

Table 11: Ranking of 'Did not know anyone/Difficulty making friends' by College - 2005



For 2006 respondents, the second most critical factor causing students not to complete their course is 'Poor sense of Community'. Presented in the table which follows are the percentage rankings of this factor within the various programme bands.

	4 & 5 Combined	5 Highly relevant	4	3	2	1 not relevant	No Answer
Health sciences	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%
Agriculture & Veterinary Med	40.0%	40.0%	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	40.0%	0.0%
Arts & Human Sciences	36.4%	31.8%	4.5%	22.7%	4.5%	27.3%	9.1%
Overall	29.2%	22.9%	6.3%	18.8%	4.2%	41.7%	6.3%
Science	22.2%	22.2%	0.0%	22.2%	0.0%	44.4%	11.1%
Business & Law	14.3%	0.0%	14.3%	28.6%	0.0%	57.1%	0.0%
Engineering & Architecture	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Nursing	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%

Table 12: Rankings of 'Poor sense of Community' with Programmes – 2006

There was no statistically significant relationship between ranking of this factor and programme group.

Other Factors

Students were given the opportunity to mark 'other factors' as relevant to their decision to withdraw from UCD. For 2005 entrants, these are represented by the following comments deriving themes such as: poor Guidance in second level, elective problems, hospital placement, tutors unapproachable and the feeling that no one noticed when they left their course, amongst others.

The students' expectations of the course not being met, in academic terms, was another factor which led to non-completion in some cases. Some students felt the course material was too easy (for example having to do beginners language course), others that it was too difficult. Respondents also mentioned that they did not see the relevance of a particular subject which was compulsory for a course.

Some students also commented on their unease attending social events on campus as there was too much focus on alcohol consumption and too many of these events being held in bars.



From 2006 respondents, students cited reasons such as timetable and elective problems and online registration among others as determining factors leading to non completion. Online registration and elective choice in particular were commented upon in the surveys of 2006 more than respondents who entered UCD in 2005.

It would also appear from some of the comments that the marketing of UCD Horizons caused some confusion and in some cases students felt misled by it.

Employment while studying

The Euro Student³² report states that the employment rate for Irish students is 58%. The average time spent working by students in Ireland is 11 hours or less per week according to the report – this is the highest rate in the EU, jointly with Austria, Finland, Italy and the Netherlands.

From 2005 entrant survey respondents 54% of students were working. Looking at the following table, 2% of these respondents worked over 24 hours a week.

	2005		2006	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
No Answer	29	28.71%	17	35.42%
Didn't work	17	16.83%	9	18.75%
8 Hours or less	10	9.90%	6	12.50%
9-16 hours	31	30.69%	11	22.92%
17-24	12	11.88%	4	8.33%
25-32	2	1.98%	1	2.08%

Table 13: Working Hours per Week 2005 and 2006

For 2006, 48% of students were working part-time. 1 student worked more than 24 hours a week.

Research in Ireland shows that nearly 60% of Leaving Certificate students have regular part-time employment to finance short-term lifestyle purchases, such as holidays and mobile phones³³. The university needs to be aware that it is increasingly likely that incoming university students will continue to work part-time, spending less and less time on campus and are at a greater risk of withdrawing early.

³² 'Euro Student, Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe 2000', (2002).

Synopsis of Indicators and National Profiles for Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy and The Netherlands.

³³ Selina McCoy and Emer Smyth, *At Work in School: Part-Time Employment Among Second-Level Students* (Dublin: The Liffey Press in Association with the ESRI, 2004) 103-105.



What could UCD have done?

Students were asked whether there was anything UCD could have done to support them at the time when they were having doubts about their course. With regards to 2005 survey respondents 46.5% said 'no' with a further 9.9% failing to answer the question. In 2006, 56.3% said 'no' and 12.5% failed to answer the question.

Some students justified this response by indicating that UCD had, in fact, been very helpful and in some cases individuals or offices were commended. Other students indicated that it was simply wrong course choice so there was no point remaining for the rest of the year.

The remaining 43.6% of students from 2005 and 31.2% from 2006 had various suggestions regarding what the university could have done. The most prevalent reason was that students felt they had no one to talk to regarding their decision to leave and they did not know where to seek this help or if it was even available.

Another emerging factor was the recurring sense that when the students did seek out advice, the services they received were poor and inefficient. This varied from students being sent to different people and misdirected to students being given insufficient advice and counselling, and evidently resulted in them never receiving the essential support and guidance they required.

Problems with horizons and computer and technical difficulties were more evident with the 2006 cohort.

A few factors can be identified as areas that need to be worked on: a better tutoring and mentoring system, a better guidance system and in general more cooperative and communicative response regarding students facing these kinds of problems. Most importantly perhaps, that staff are well informed and able to give student correct advice promptly and efficiently.

Reaction to Leaving

When students were asked whether they had considered deferring their college course until the next academic year, 79.2% of 2005 and 72.9% of 2006 entrants said No which was not surprising, given the numbers of students from both years who ranked course choice as their main reason for leaving.



Students were asked how they felt having left their respective courses. They had the choice of ticking more than one option with choices of "Relieved", "Nothing in Particular", "Disappointed" and "Frustrated". Some students ticked two cohorts for example "Disappointed and Frustrated".

	2005 Non Completion Entrants	2006 Non Completion Entrants
No Answer	-	2.1%
Relieved	55.4%	68.8%
Nothing in Particular	9.9%	6.3%
Disappointed	19.8%	8.3%
Frustrated	9.9%	10.4%
Disappointed and Frustrated	4.0%	-
Nothing in Particular and Frustrated	1.0%	-
Relieved, Disappointed and Frustrated	-	4.2%

Table 14: Students feelings having Left Course

Advice on Leaving

Students were asked if they had spoken to UCD staff before deciding to leave with 45.5% of 2005 entrants and 72.9% of 2006 entrants stating "yes" meaning they had spoken to a member of UCD staff before withdrawing. It is not obvious why, for students entering in 2006, more chose to make contact with university staff. However, for the 2006 cohort, they were also more likely to have attended orientation. A statistically significant relationship exists between attending orientation and contacting a member of staff prior to withdrawing for the 2006 cohort. No significance was found between orientation attendance and contacting staff prior to leaving for the 2005 group.



Students were then asked who they spoke to before they made their final decision to leave college. The majority of students in both years approached their parents and friends with 36.6% of 2005 non completion respondents ranking 5 (strongly agree) for parents or siblings and 45.8% of 2006 non completion respondents also ranking 5. This information can be interpreted more effectively in the following two graphs.

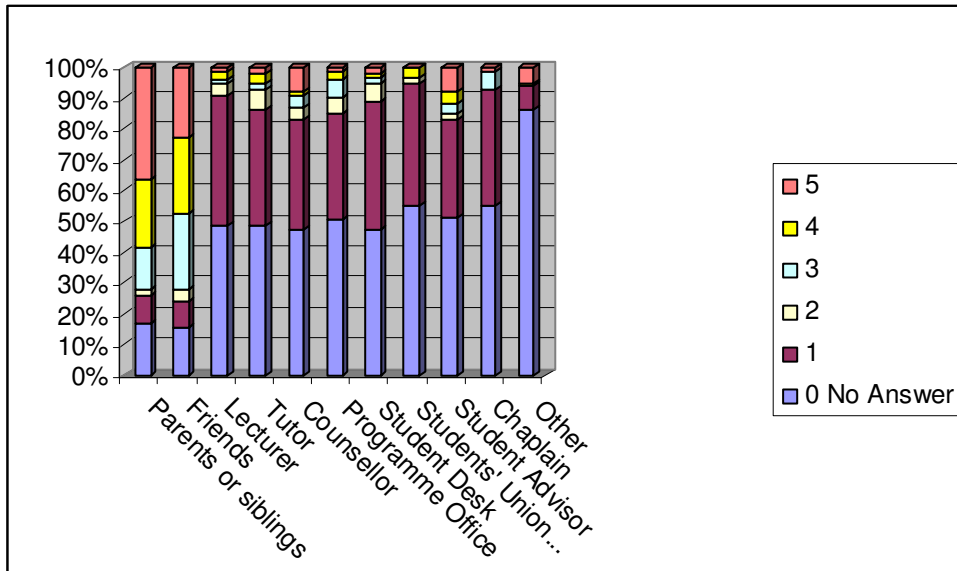


Figure 32: Ranking of Sources of advice prior to leaving college 2005

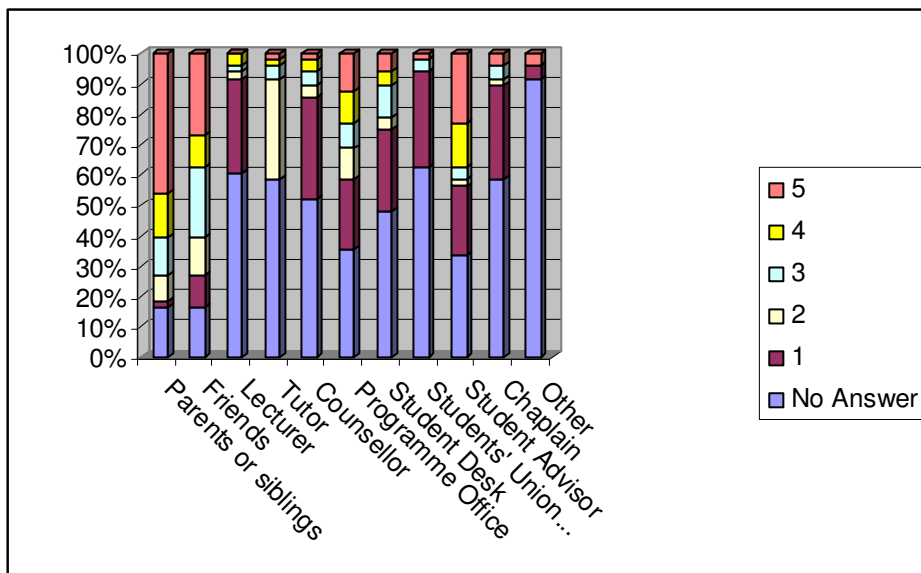


Figure 33: Ranking of Sources of advice prior to leaving college 2006

Very small percentages rank sources within UCD highly in either year.



Career since leaving and Current Aspirations

2005 survey respondents were asked what they had been doing since leaving UCD. Of the 101 students who answered the survey, 52.48% of students had re-entered third level.

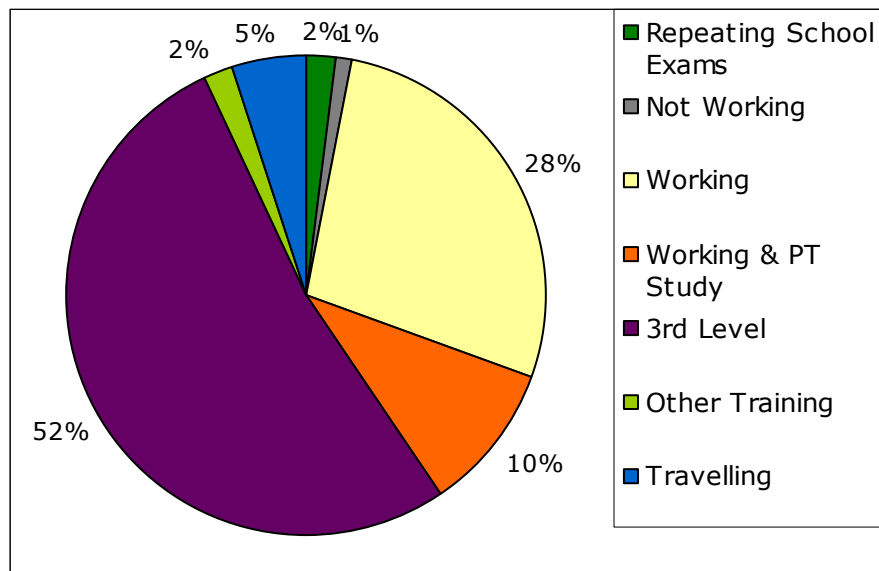


Figure 34: Occupation of 2005 Students since Leaving UCD

Since the time lapsed between leaving UCD and the issuing of the questionnaire was too short for students to have embarked on another course or career in the interim, this question was not asked of the 2006 cohort.

Students who had not re-entered education were asked whether they would consider studying full or part-time in the future. Of the 38 students who answered this question, 94.7% said 'yes'. For 2006 non completion respondents, out of 36 students who answered this question 94.5% said 'yes'.

Respondents were asked whether they would consider returning to UCD in the future. This question, while intended for those not currently in education, was answered by many students who had already returned to education. With regards to 2005 respondents, 92 students answered this question out of the 101 total number of respondents of which 50% said they would consider returning to UCD for future study. Of those who ranked "wrong course choice" 4 or 5 as a factor in reason for leaving 44% said they would not consider UCD for future study.



With 2006 respondents, only one person did not answer this question. Of the remaining 47 students 53.2%.said they would consider returning to UCD in the future. In this case 40.5% of those who ranked "wrong course choice" 4 or 5 as a factor in reason for leaving responded negatively.

The fact that nearly half the respondents said they would not consider UCD for future study is significant. It indicates that while "wrong course choice" may be the most significant factor the students are not generally happy with their UCD experience. It must also be borne in mind that not only are these students lost to UCD but it is likely that they are discouraging friends and relatives from applying.

Factors Affecting Choice of Course and University

Decision-making Process

Course Choice

The second section of the questionnaire investigated why students selected their courses and why they choose to attend UCD in particular. Students were given 8 factors which influenced their course choice and asked to rank them in order of relevance from not relevant (1) to highly relevant (5). Most students picked a certain course because they liked the subject at school and ranked this factor highly relevant; undertaking a course which qualified a student for a particular field of work was also rated as highly relevant.

	5 Highly relevant	4	3	2	1 not relevant	No Answer
Liked the subject at school	35.6%	13.9%	17.8%	4.0%	21.8%	6.9%
Course qualified for work wanted to do	20.8%	7.9%	20.8%	6.9%	33.7%	9.9%
Other	20.8%	3.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.0%	71.3%
Previous CAO points levels	17.8%	9.9%	20.8%	9.9%	34.7%	6.9%
Parents or older siblings	6.9%	14.9%	11.9%	7.9%	51.5%	6.9%
Good reputation of course	6.9%	14.9%	18.8%	8.9%	41.6%	8.9%
Friends	5.0%	5.0%	16.8%	15.8%	49.5%	7.9%
Second-level teacher(s)	4.0%	15.8%	16.8%	7.9%	43.6%	11.9%
Guidance Counsellor	1.0%	9.9%	21.8%	5.0%	52.5%	9.9%

Table 15: 2005 Factors which influenced course choice



	5 Highly relevant	4	3	2	1 not relevant	No Answer
Liked the subject at school	29.2%	22.9%	8.3%	0.0%	27.1%	12.5%
Course qualified for work wanted to do	16.7%	14.6%	14.6%	10.4%	27.1%	16.7%
Previous CAO points levels	14.6%	8.3%	14.6%	12.5%	39.6%	10.4%
Other	12.5%	2.1%	0.0%	2.1%	4.2%	79.2%
Good reputation of course	8.3%	14.6%	16.7%	8.3%	41.7%	10.4%
Guidance Counsellor	8.3%	6.3%	6.3%	10.4%	56.3%	12.5%
Parents or older siblings	6.3%	4.2%	6.3%	6.3%	60.4%	16.7%
Second-level teacher(s)	2.1%	12.5%	12.5%	2.1%	54.2%	16.7%
Friends	2.1%	4.2%	4.2%	8.3%	64.6%	16.7%

Table 16: 2006 Factors which influenced course choice

Under 'other' some students indicated the course was the only option they had when they received their CAO offer, as well as poor decision-making:

Factors such as the influence of Guidance Counsellors, families and friends are all seen here to be less influential than the other factors. What is interesting to note is the difference between these responses and statistics from 1999, 2000 and 2001 compiled by Mathews and Mulkeen. They found that the previous points level was less influential, with 9.3% ranking it highly relevant. Yet for 2005, 17.8% ranked it highly relevant with the figure for 2006 being 14.6% which is a significant increase and indicative of changing attitudes.

Choice of University

To determine the factors contributing to a student's choice of UCD as their place of study, again a number of factors were listed and students were asked to rate them from not relevant (1) to highly relevant (5). The good general academic reputation, the good social/sports life in UCD and the closeness to home are rated as highly relevant regarding the choice of UCD as a place to study over other institutions by non completion students who entered in 2005.



For 2006 entrants, a difference was seen in the emerging relevance of UCD being the only option for the particular course which was highly relevant at 22.9% compared to 9.9% of 2005 entrants.

	5 Highly relevant	4	3	2	1 not relevant	No Answer
Good general academic reputation	20.8%	37.6%	15.8%	4.0%	16.8%	5.0%
Good social/sports life	13.9%	18.8%	14.9%	10.9%	33.7%	7.9%
Close to home	12.9%	10.9%	12.9%	5.9%	51.5%	5.9%
Friends	11.9%	15.8%	17.8%	8.9%	40.6%	5.0%
Good facilities	11.9%	22.8%	24.8%	5.0%	27.7%	7.9%
Other	11.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.0%	86.1%
Only option for particular course	9.9%	5.9%	12.9%	13.9%	50.5%	6.9%
Parents or older siblings	8.9%	11.9%	6.9%	6.9%	57.4%	7.9%
Horizons options	8.9%	14.9%	6.9%	8.9%	52.5%	7.9%
Did not want to be too close to home	4.0%	5.9%	6.9%	5.0%	68.3%	9.9%
Guidance Counsellor	3.0%	8.9%	11.9%	8.9%	59.4%	7.9%
Second-level teacher(s)	1.0%	10.9%	11.9%	8.9%	58.4%	8.9%

Table 17: Factors which influenced course choice 2005

	5 Highly relevant	4	3	2	1 not relevant	No Answer
Good general academic reputation	29.2%	33.3%	18.8%	4.2%	10.4%	4.2%
Only option for particular course	22.9%	12.5%	8.3%	6.3%	31.3%	18.8%
Good facilities	14.6%	20.8%	22.9%	6.3%	25.0%	10.4%
Good social/sports life	12.5%	16.7%	25.0%	6.3%	29.2%	10.4%
Horizons options	10.4%	18.8%	20.8%	6.3%	31.3%	12.5%
Close to home	6.3%	8.3%	8.3%	4.2%	58.3%	14.6%
Parents or older siblings	4.2%	4.2%	16.7%	4.2%	62.5%	8.3%
Friends	4.2%	4.2%	20.8%	10.4%	50.0%	10.4%
Guidance Counsellor	4.2%	4.2%	6.3%	2.1%	68.8%	14.6%
Other	4.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.2%	91.7%
Did not want to be too close to home	2.1%	6.3%	8.3%	2.1%	66.7%	14.6%
Second-level teacher(s)	2.1%	4.2%	8.3%	4.2%	66.7%	14.6%

Table 18: Factors which influenced course choice 2006

Other Influences and Factors in the decision-making process

The UCD prospectus and website serve as important sources of information for prospective students, when they are considering their choice of university. The UCD Open Day also serves to effectively show prospective students around the college to gauge not



only the physical presence of UCD but also to explore the different courses offered within the college buildings.

Of the 2005 entrants 84.2% indicated that they had consulted the UCD prospectus when making their choice of college. The comparable figure for 2006 was 77.1%.

There was no statistically significant relationship found between students' ranking of reading the UCD prospectus with the ranking of 'Wrong Course Choice' as a reason for leaving for the 2005 cohort. However a statistically significant relationship was found for students who entered UCD in 2006 and withdrew.

When asked if they had read the UCD website when making their choice of college, 73.3% of 2005 and 64.6% of 2006 non completion students said Yes.

Students were then asked to rate both the prospectus and website under three headings: 'User-friendliness', 'Clarity' and 'Quality of Information'.

The results can be seen in Tables 19 and 20:

	5 High	4	3	2	1 low	No Answer
Prospectus User-friendliness rating	25.7%	29.7%	22.8%	3.0%	4.0%	14.9%
Prospectus Clarity rating	15.8%	31.7%	22.8%	9.9%	3.0%	16.8%
Prospectus Quality of Information rating	15.8%	20.8%	27.7%	8.9%	9.9%	16.8%
Website User-friendliness rating	25.7%	22.8%	14.9%	8.9%	6.9%	20.8%
Website Clarity rating	17.8%	19.8%	21.8%	11.9%	6.9%	21.8%
Website Quality of Information rating	16.8%	24.8%	15.8%	5.0%	15.8%	21.8%

Table 19: 2005 Rating of the UCD Prospectus and Website



	5 High	4	3	2	1 low	No Answer
Prospectus User-friendliness rating	25.0%	29.2%	16.7%	8.3%	0.0%	20.8%
Prospectus Clarity rating	14.6%	31.3%	16.7%	8.3%	6.3%	22.9%
Prospectus Quality of Information rating	12.5%	27.1%	22.9%	14.6%	0.0%	22.9%
Website User-friendliness rating	18.8%	16.7%	20.8%	2.1%	10.4%	31.3%
Website Clarity rating	14.6%	12.5%	25.0%	6.3%	10.4%	31.3%
Website Quality of Information rating	12.5%	16.7%	25.0%	8.3%	6.3%	31.3%

Table 20: 2006 Rating of the UCD Prospectus and Website

When asked about Open Days, 80.2% of 2005 and 68.8% of 2006 survey respondents said they had attended a UCD Open Day before they started their course here. Following on from this, students were asked how attending the UCD Open Day influenced their decision to attend UCD using the ranking system again of (1) not relevant to highly relevant (5).

With 2005 survey respondents, 13.5% of students rated this as not relevant and 8.5% of students rated this as highly relevant with most students ranking the middle factor at 28.4% indicating it was neither highly relevant nor irrelevant in their choosing a college.

2006 survey respondents again followed this pattern with 18.1% not relevant and 15.1% highly relevant and 33.3% ranking this factor in the middle.

There was no correlation for either cohort between Open Day attendance and ranking of 'Wrong Course Choice' as a reason for leaving.

Orientation and Participation

The survey of non completers included questions to determine whether the students had engaged with orientation. Orientation is very important for incoming students as it is the students' first experience of college life and serves to induct and introduce them to aspects of their course, as well as to get them used to finding their way around the UCD campus amongst other things.

Orientation Meetings and Activities

In response to whether they had attended 'Orientation Meetings and Activities' when starting UCD, 44.6% of 2005 non completion entrants said they 'Attended a few' and 31.7% said they 'Attended most of them'. 47.9% of 2006 entrants 'Attended a few' and



41.7% 'Attended most of them' showing an improvement in student attendance between the years.

Students were then asked if they found the support and information services involved in Orientation helpful in making the transition to University.

With rankings from (1) not helpful to (5) very helpful, 2005 respondents tended towards the negative end. The majority of these students choose a middle ranking of neither helpful nor unhelpful at 28.7% with the next prominent grouping at 16.8% 'not helpful'.

This pattern changed slightly regarding 2006 entrants who again had the majority of ratings at the middle rank at 29.2%. However the next majority was at the positive end this time. At rank 4, 27.1% of these students indicated they found the support and information services helpful.

There was no statistically significant relationship between students' ranking of attending Orientation Meetings and Activities with the ranking of 'Wrong Course Choice' as a reason for leaving for the 2005 cohort. While the numbers are small, there is a relationship between students entering in 2005, not attending orientation activities, picking "unfriendly atmosphere" as a significant reason for withdrawing and leaving UCD early. Similar results are found when looking at this group and drawing a relationship between choosing "poor sense of community" and missing orientation meetings.

However, a statistically significant relationship was found for the 2006 cohort regarding this. Of those who indicated that they had attend all orientation events, 70% ranked "Wrong Course Choice" 4 or 5 (i.e. a significant factor). As mentioned previously, the orientation programme was significantly improved between September 2005 and September 2006.

Students were then asked for their suggestions for future orientation events. For 2005 entrants, 45.5% of students didn't answer and a further 18.8% said they had no suggestions for future events. For 2006 survey respondents, 50% of students failed to answer and a further 29.2% had no suggestions.



The most frequent suggestion, from fourteen students, related to social events and proactive programming to encourage students to meet each other:

Get students to mingle together, make friends, put into groups for projects, separate from original friends to stop cliques developing.

Organize an event for everybody in the class to meet each other and go out together early (1st week) so we get to know each other.

Another suggestion was that there be more awareness projected to the students about Orientation events and a better system of communication overall. Six students suggested that a stronger emphasis needs to be given about the importance of attending Orientation activities:

The orientation events are very well organized and provide an unmissable opportunity for students to make friends. My only suggestion would be that new students be strongly advised to attend as many of these events as they can!

Make sure hand-outs are given to every student making sure he knows where to go and when to go and inciting him to go.

Some students also stressed the necessity of a tour to be given to new students around the campus. It should be noted that since these students entered UCD, campus tours were made available to all first year students. Prior to September 2007, some student groups were still not being given campus tours during Orientation Week. These quotes highlight the importance of first impressions on campus:

Others felt that Orientation should last more than one week.

Instead of it only being just one week at the start of term maybe it should be spread out through semester 1.

Two comments were from mature students. While the university does deliver a specific mature student orientation programme, these students wanted to remind staff about their needs, too:

I am 26 years. Although I was a mature student at UCD there should be thought put into [students in] my age bracket. I (and others I met my age) felt in limbo between kids and OAPs.

Proposed Module on Dealing with University Life

Taking into account that university life is a daunting new experience for first year students, a question was put forward to students asking them if a module for first year students, dealing with university life, had been available, whether they would have taken



it. Then a following question was asked to assess what topics students would find most interesting in such a module.

Of the survey respondents for 2005, 54.5% survey respondents said they would have taken such a module had it been available (58.3% in 2006). Then students were asked which topics would interest them in such a module. Although students who said they would not have been interested in taking the module were instructed to skip this question, many continued to answer. The following two tables are representative of the responses:

	5 very interesting	4	3	2	1 no interest	No Answer
Academic planning and time management	27.7%	10.9%	13.9%	3.0%	2.0%	42.6%
Personal development	25.7%	9.9%	12.9%	6.9%	3.0%	41.6%
Career exploration and professional development	24.8%	14.9%	13.9%	2.0%	4.0%	40.6%
Presentation skills	24.8%	16.8%	8.9%	6.9%	2.0%	40.6%
Writing and research skills	22.8%	18.8%	11.9%	4.0%	2.0%	40.6%
Study skills	17.8%	16.8%	12.9%	4.0%	8.9%	39.6%
Campus resources	12.9%	12.9%	17.8%	10.9%	4.0%	41.6%

Table 21: Rankings of topics for a module dealing with University Life – 2005

	5 very interesting	4	3	2	1 no interest	No Answer
Personal development	31.3%	8.3%	12.5%	6.3%	0.0%	41.7%
Academic planning and time management	27.1%	10.4%	18.8%	2.1%	0.0%	41.7%
Career exploration and professional development	27.1%	16.7%	10.4%	2.1%	0.0%	43.8%
Writing and research skills	27.1%	25.0%	4.2%	4.2%	0.0%	39.6%
Presentation skills	22.9%	20.8%	14.6%	2.1%	0.0%	39.6%
Study skills	18.8%	22.9%	12.5%	2.1%	0.0%	41.7%
Campus resources	18.8%	14.6%	20.8%	0.0%	2.1%	43.8%

Table 22: Rankings of topics for a module dealing with University Life – 2006



For the 2005 cohort, academic planning and time management ranks highest as a topic students would be interested in taking at 27.7%, whilst for 2006 personal development ranks first at 31.3%.

Participation

Students were asked one last question to gauge participation through extra curricular activities. They were asked whether they had joined any clubs or societies while at UCD.

77.2% of students who dropped out of UCD in 2005 had joined clubs and societies and 72.9% of 2006 non completion students also said they had joined.

Generally, it is believed that students who actively engage in university life, such as joining campus clubs and societies, are more integrated into the life of the university and therefore are less likely to withdraw. Three-quarters of students completing the retention survey had joined clubs and societies, suggesting that the link between student engagement with university sports and social clubs and retention needs deeper investigation.

Further Suggestions

The last question students were asked on the non completion survey was an open-ended question asking for further comments or suggestions. Free form responses generally provide a rich set of data and former UCD students provided this.

For 2005 survey respondents 47.5% did not answer this question and a further 6.9% had no further comments. 27.1% of 2006 survey respondents did not answer the question with a further 16.7% saying they had nothing else to comment on.

Of those students who did have comments and suggestions, there were many varied and detailed answers. All student written feedback was coded and further analysed. There were broad themes which emerged and occurred regularly through student comments. The table below shows frequencies of most commonly occurring student comments:

Student Suggestion	Frequency
Smaller class size	14
Improve and increase elective offerings and/or guidance on choosing electives	13
More support and encouragement during studies	10
Improved flexibility in the curriculum	9
Improvement in range of social activities on campus	9

Table 23: Most commonly occurring suggestions



Some students felt that smaller class sizes would be an improvement as this would improve communication, friendship making and diminish impersonality. Also they felt lecturers were unapproachable. The whole feeling of the physical 'bigness' of UCD's campus can be diminished if a more friendly atmosphere is adopted. Students are aware of the challenges the university faces:

I think it's difficult to make the arts building more personal and friendly because of its huge volumes. But if there was some way of improving it, e.g. making classes smaller.....attendance would improve and one would feel part of something.

The expression to "feel part of something" came through in many of the responses students wrote. A challenge all large universities face is trying to make the student experience more personal. As noted in the table above, students longed for more support and encouragement during their time in Belfield. These students convey many of these feelings:

UCD is a great university and I am very sorry that I didn't complete the course. I would have liked to have had some more support/encouragement-I think it would have helped me.

UCD is an amazing college but due to its size I felt so unimportant.

...It may be a lot to ask but just a small bit more of a personal touch would help others like me, smaller lectures (sometimes there wasn't enough seats in the class).

Many students reported confusion about Horizons and elective choices. Also regarding information on particular courses and options, student felt this was badly communicated. Compared to the traditional system of degree delivery, in which all aspects of an academic programme were prescribed, in a modularised system in which students have decisions to make regarding their module choice, students require much more guidance. Guidance in third level is something many students feel is essential and should be improved in UCD. Guidance is not just about clear information in print and on-line, but also guidance in person.

Provide more info for students on individual courses. I chose psychology and I loved it but a few weeks later I found out by word of mouth that I couldn't continue with it in 2nd year. I might have chosen a different subject if I had known this.



Many students thought that more and better events were needed to be encouraged and introduced. One challenge the university faces is providing more variety of social events for a diverse student population. This gives the university an opportunity to encourage and enhance students' social skills and students recognise this as well:

Encourage inter faculty events in order for people from different areas of study to mix. It adds greatly to the whole college experience

I spoke to other 17 year olds when I was there (not that there were many), and all had the same problem, as soon as you started making friends they would always ask to go out drinking with them as most SU events, the climax would be a nightclub, it was very disheartening, more events not involving having to be 18 is urgently required

On the one hand, students reported the size of campus and lecture theatres as "too big" which led to difficulties making friends. On the other hand, smaller classes and geographic location can be an issue as well. Often it is assumed that the smaller the number of students, the easier it is to make friends and the less likely it is for students to drop out. The process of making friends is different for each individual and for some students the dynamics of a smaller class can be challenging:

The law school in Roebuck is quite isolated from the rest of campus meaning we often didn't find out about social events until it was too late...

We did not feel that it left any time for extra curricular activities, with some students regularly spending from 8am to 10pm in studio, with few breaks. Apart from the intense strain on well-being, this led to a feeling of exclusion from the main campus, making us feel as though we were in the Richview College of Architecture as opposed to UCD.

Other suggestions included improvements in on-campus accommodation (5 comments), making on-line registration more user friendly (4 comments), improvements and increased activities in orientation and peer mentoring projects (3 comments) and increased contact between staff and students (2 comments). What is interesting to note is that 2005 and 2006 survey respondents differ in their comments on one subject: online registration. Whilst it was not mentioned by the 2005 entrants, 2006 students saw it as a significant problem:

I found on-line registration confusing and frustrating, and was not able to get the modules I wanted because the system failed.



It is also important to note that not all students who withdraw early have wholly negative experiences during their time at UCD. Five students were particularly positive about their UCD experience and praised the support staff. Two of these students say:

I would just like to say how helpful the New Era programme has been for me. At all times staff went beyond the call of duty to ensure I was managing college life, they offered me financial support, organised free grants and made my time in UCD a very enjoyable one. It's a pity I had to leave.

...My leaving was a purely personal decision, and I appreciate all the help and education I received during my brief time at your college. Thank you.

Ideally, all students who enter UCD should leave the university on a positive note. This idea is discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.

Conclusions

Reasons for Leaving

Students are most likely to leave UCD because they feel they have made a wrong course choice. However, the difficulty students find in making friends, Unfriendly atmosphere and Poor sense of Community are also significant factors. Prior to leaving they are most likely to seek advice from sources external to UCD i.e. family and friends. It is estimated that less than 5% have left the educational system completely – of the 101 respondents to the 2005 survey, 95 students (94%) had either already re-entered 3rd level education or said they would in the future.

Pre-Entry Advice and Orientation

Despite the fact that the students who leave have researched their course choices by reading UCD literature and attending Open Days, they are not happy with the choices they make. Both the students who left, and those who are continuing, feel that the information they receive could give more detailed, or a different type of information. UCD must, therefore, review its input into the applicants' decision-making process.

The majority of students who left had attended welcome and 'orientation to campus' events. However they did not feel that these were adequate.

Participation and Integration

The majority of respondents who leave UCD had made efforts to integrate into the University by joining clubs and societies. Notwithstanding this, their expectations were not met. Respondents felt that their course did not meet their expectations but UCD itself did.



The main issues which respondents wished to address further at the end of the survey were class size, socializing events, counselling and advice services, and the improvement of online registration and module enrolment and better information about course content transmitted.

Many students had constructive suggestions for improvements which will be discussed further in the recommendations of this report.



Chapter 8: Survey Response 2007

As the results of the survey from 2005 and 2006 were being analysed, it was decided to survey all those who had already left in 2007. The objective of this was twofold: to get a sense of whether anything had changed since the previous surveys and to pilot a survey with a view to using it as an exit survey of students as they leave.

The questionnaire was a shortened version of that previously used. Thirty-seven students were surveyed and 19 responses were received giving a response rate of 51.35%. The responses did not cover all programme areas – there were no responses from students in the Business & Law or in the Nursing programme areas. Obviously the numbers involved are too small for a full statistical analysis but a brief summary of the results follows.

Reason for Leaving

The reason for leaving was still most commonly listed as "Wrong Course Choice" with 10 out of 19 students ranking it as 5 (highly relevant), which seven students listing it as the most critical factor. "Couldn't get modules I wanted" was also a significant factor with nine students ranking it 4 or 5. Nine respondents also ranked "size/scale of the campus" 4 or 5. "I did not know anyone/difficulty in making friends" and "poor sense of community" were also frequently highly ranked.

The Decision to Leave

The majority of students (11) had not considered deferring before leaving including some who cited the main reason for leaving as wanting a year out.

Fourteen of the respondents had spoken to a member of UCD staff before deciding to leave. However parents and older siblings still rated the most helpful in this decision (with an average rating of 4.47), followed by friends (3.11). This was followed by Programme Offices (average 2.74) and Student Advisers (average 2.05). It is worrying that the two most highly ranked sources of information in UCD have average usefulness ranking less than the midpoint – this is possibly because students are not aware of these services or do not avail of them.

Seven of the respondents said they would not consider studying at UCD in the future and one indicated that s/he was unsure. Overall 58% said they would consider studying in UCD again, which is slightly higher than the response from previous years.



Course Choice

As with previous years, most students picked a certain course because they liked the subject at school and ranked this factor highly relevant; undertaking a course which qualified a student for a particular field of work was also rated as highly relevant.

	5 Highly relevant	4	3	2	1 not relevant	No Answer
Liked the subject at school	42.1%	15.8%	15.8%	0.0%	21.1%	5.3%
Course qualified for work wanted to do	21.1%	21.1%	26.3%	10.5%	15.8%	5.3%
Previous CAO points levels	10.5%	10.5%	15.8%	15.8%	42.1%	5.3%
Parents or older siblings	10.5%	5.3%	5.3%	15.8%	52.6%	10.5%
Other	10.5%	10.5%	0.0%	0.0%	5.3%	73.7%
Friends	5.3%	10.5%	5.3%	15.8%	52.6%	10.5%
Guidance Counsellor	5.3%	0.0%	21.1%	10.5%	52.6%	10.5%
Second-level teacher(s)	5.3%	10.5%	10.5%	5.3%	57.9%	10.5%
Good reputation of course	5.3%	21.1%	15.8%	5.3%	42.1%	10.5%

Table 24: 2007 Factors which influenced course choice

Choice of University

The good general academic reputation and "only option for particular course" were the two factors most frequently listed as highly relevant.

	5 Highly relevant	4	3	2	1 not relevant	No Answer
Only option for particular course	26.3%	5.3%	5.3%	0.0%	52.6%	10.5%
Good general academic reputation	26.3%	31.6%	15.8%	5.3%	21.1%	0.0%
Good facilities	21.1%	15.8%	21.1%	10.5%	21.1%	10.5%
Close to home	10.5%	0.0%	10.5%	0.0%	73.7%	5.3%
Guidance Counsellor	10.5%	0.0%	5.3%	15.8%	57.9%	10.5%
Horizons options	10.5%	15.8%	15.8%	5.3%	36.8%	15.8%
Did not want to be too close to home	5.3%	5.3%	5.3%	0.0%	68.4%	15.8%
Parents or older siblings	5.3%	5.3%	10.5%	10.5%	57.9%	10.5%
Good social/sports life	5.3%	21.1%	21.1%	10.5%	26.3%	15.8%
Friends	0.0%	5.3%	15.8%	10.5%	52.6%	15.8%
Second-level teacher(s)	0.0%	10.5%	0.0%	10.5%	63.2%	15.8%
Other	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.3%	94.7%

Table 25: Factors which influenced course choice 2007



Other Influences and Factors in the decision-making process

Only one student had not read the prospectus prior to making application. Seven students had not used the website as a source of information. Curiously this would indicate a higher percent reading the prospectus and a lower percent consulting the website than in previous years.

Students were then asked to rate both the prospectus and website under three headings: 'User-friendliness', 'Clarity' and 'Quality of Information'.

The results can be seen in the following table:

	5 High	4	3	2	1 low	No Answer
Prospectus User-friendliness rating	31.6%	36.8%	15.8%	0.0%	0.0%	15.8%
Prospectus Clarity rating	21.1%	31.6%	21.1%	10.5%	0.0%	15.8%
Prospectus Quality of Information rating	26.3%	42.1%	10.5%	5.3%	0.0%	15.8%
Website User-friendliness rating	5.3%	21.1%	26.3%	10.5%	15.8%	21.1%
Website Clarity rating	10.5%	15.8%	15.8%	15.8%	21.1%	21.1%
Website Quality of Information rating	15.8%	21.1%	31.6%	5.3%	5.3%	21.1%

Table 26: 2007 Rating of the UCD Prospectus and Website

When asked about Open Days, 11 of 2007 respondents said they had attended a UCD Open Day before they started their course here. The average ranking of open days amongst the students who had attended was 3.18.

It must be noted that both the prospectus and website have been considerably reviewed and enhanced since the decision-making period for the students surveyed here, with the introduction of the myucd portal.

Orientation

Most of the respondents had attended Orientation and: 11 said they had attended most of the events; 4 said they had attended a few. Amongst those who had attended most of the Orientation events the average ranking, in terms of usefulness, was 3.27.



Proposed Module on Dealing with University Life

Most of the respondents (12) said they would have taken a module on dealing with university life had same been available. Their ranking of the various proposed topics follows:

	5 very interesting	4	3	2	1 no interest	No Answer
Personal development	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%	8.3%	16.7%	8.3%
Study skills	25.0%	50.0%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Academic planning and time management	25.0%	33.3%	25.0%	8.3%	8.3%	0.0%
Career exploration and professional development	25.0%	41.7%	8.3%	8.3%	8.3%	8.3%
Writing and research skills	25.0%	41.7%	8.3%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Campus resources	16.7%	50.0%	8.3%	16.7%	0.0%	8.3%
Presentation skills	16.7%	41.7%	25.0%	0.0%	8.3%	8.3%

Table 27: Rankings of topics for a module dealing with University Life – 2007

Those who said they would take such a module seemed very positive towards most of the suggested elements. Campus Resources and Presentation Skills had the lowest percentage ranking them 5, but in both cases they had high percentages ranking them 4.

Most of the suggestions for improvements for orientation related to assistance in making friends. Students would also like more information on course content and choices:

They [orientation activities] should contain more relevance to course content e.g. what we will actually be studying or some practical demonstrations.

Conclusion

Although the sample was, admittedly, very small, it tends to indicate that the issues are similar to those of the students in 2005 and 2006.



Chapter 9: Conclusions and Recommendations

"At Risk" Students

The statistical analysis of who leaves versus who stays has enabled us to compile a profile of the "at risk" student. It is clear that, in academic terms, those entering on lower points and with weaker results in Mathematics and English are more likely to be non-completers.

In demographic terms, female students are more likely to be non-completers than males. Overseas students and students from Dublin are more likely to be continuing; there is also a lower rate of non-completion amongst those in on-campus accommodation. High non-completion rates were particularly noted for the counties surrounding Dublin, from which students are not eligible for campus accommodation and are likely to be commuting.

Some programme areas, particularly the larger ones, have higher non-completion rates than the smaller professional programmes.

Survey Findings

The questionnaire surveys have shown that most students rank "wrong course choice" as the main reason for leaving. This is followed by issues around making friends. However, a large percentage indicated that they would not return to UCD for future study which suggests that, for these students, there are other problems with UCD involved in their decision to leave.

Recommendations

Based on research into best practice, combined with the feedback from those who responded to the survey and from the forum held in UCD on student retention, the following recommendations are suggested:

Applicants

UCD should aim to reduce the numbers who leave feeling that they have made a wrong course choice by working with Guidance Counsellors and providing clear information. Many improvements have been made since the decision-making period of those surveyed and these should be monitored to ensure they have been successful.



Particular areas mentioned at the forum were as follows:

Website

The website has been enhanced and www.myucd.ie was launched in late 2007. UCD needs to continue this work to ensure that

- A clear interpretation of Horizons is available for potential applicants
- There is an easy interface between Horizons and applicants/students, presenting course/programme structure in terms of modules
- prospective students are adequately equipped with useful pre-entry information, e.g. what kind of skills may be needed - IT Skills, Library Skills etc. particularly for mature students.

Recruitment

The Student Recruitment Office was established in 2006 and is part of UCD's Registry. Its work will not have impacted on the 2005 cohort surveyed and only slightly on the 2006 entrants. The Recruitment Office needs to be included in discussions on retention since it is clear that recruitment and retention are closely linked.

Starting at UCD

The first few months of attendance at UCD are critical as many students who leave take the decision to do so early on. Recommendations focussing on this period are:

- The registration season is very pressurised and short, making supporting effective decision-making very difficult. A pre-registration system to induct applicants into registration, including module choice, should be introduced. Ideally this should be available to them at the course choice stage.
- The development of an "Introduction to the Student Experience at UCD" module should be considered. This could be delivered during the Orientation week as an elective module that students may take for credit. It would include the typical Orientation week activities such as campus tours, IT introductions, academic advisory sessions and meetings with Programme Co-ordinators as aspects of such a module, with additional taught components on the items you listed in your "what if" module: study skills, presentation skills, personal awareness and so forth. Perhaps an element of a self-assessment report at the end of Semester One or



achievement of some Group learning/projects over the course of the Semester could be included as part of the module.

- UCD should establish a module with the outcome of acquisition of basic research skills. This should be available to all 1st year students during the 1st semester. This could possibly be in conjunction with the "Introduction to the Student Experience at UCD" module.
- Some Orientation follow-up sessions at the start of Semester Two - delivered for all students.
- There is an apparent need at times for better interaction with staff. New entrants are, generally speaking, coming from a school environment where it is easy to ask questions, either in class or by approaching the teacher afterwards. A large lecture theatre can be an intimidating environment in which to do this so students need to know that they can approach academic staff at other times.
- Peer-mentoring is now in place in two programme areas. Initial findings seem to indicate that it is having a positive effect. This should be rolled-out across campus.

Developing a more friendly environment

- Efforts should also be made to improve the sense of community in UCD. Indeed this is already underway with the inaugural UCD community musical taking place in 2008.
- Small group teaching is desirable but not always feasible. However where larger classes are necessary it is important that there are regular tutorials for smaller groups in the subject.

Resources:

There is currently an imbalance of student support resources, across campus, depending on academic discipline. More resources should go into areas where retention is an issue e.g. Arts, Science. By calculating the number of support staff (Student Advisers, Chaplains and Programme Office staff) with the number of first year students, the disparity is clearly seen. What should also be remembered, is that for many student groups, they share Student Advisers and Chaplains with other student cohorts.

So, while it may seem that, for example, students in Architecture have 3 support staff, in reality, they have a part-time Chaplain (.5) and they share a Student Adviser with



students in Engineering (.5) and a Programme Manager located at the opposite end of the campus. Only students studying Business and Science (incorporating Life Sciences) have Student Advisers and Chaplains solely dedicated to these student groups.

The following table shows the ratio of support staff (Programme Office staff, Student Advisers, Chaplains) to first year students. What is apparent is the varying differences between support first year students receive, as measured by staff numbers, and the average retention rate for these groups.

Programme Area	Office	Ratio support staff to first year students, 2007/2008	Average percentage of students retained, 1999-2007
Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine		1:43	80.63 (Agriculture) and 93.8 (Vet)
Architecture and Engineering		1:45	88.4 (Architecture) and 92.35 (Engineering)
Arts and Human Sciences		1:153	78.76 (Arts) and 87.11 (Social Science)
Business and Law		1:41	94.2 (Business) and 95.27 (Law)
Health Sciences		1:86	96.62 (medicine), 95.41 (physiotherapy), 89.37 (radiography)
Nursing		1:70	91.24
Science		1:53	80.47 (Science) 90.6 (Life Sciences)

Table 28: Support Staff by Programme

Attendance monitoring

There is a distinction between those students who actively withdraw and those who just stop attending. UCD needs to be more pro-active in supporting the latter cohort. Therefore UCD needs to implement an alert system to notify staff/student advisers of “missing” students. For example, students who miss two consecutive tutorials could be contacted.



Transport

UCD should explore possibilities of expanding bus services, especially late in the evenings. Other universities have negotiated with private bus services to run buses from longer distance commuting areas. UCD should look at areas which are geographically within in the catchment area but, because of the necessity of taking a bus into the city centre and out again, are causing commuting difficulties for students.

A study of commuting patterns as they relate to student engagement and retention would be valuable to inform this.

Exit Interviews

An enhanced questionnaire, based on the retention questionnaire, should be completed by withdrawing students as part of an exit interview. This would enable us to have constant and immediate data on the reasons for students leaving. Furthermore it would ensure that those leaving had a session with a member of staff at which their decision could be properly considered.

As part of the exit procedure assistance could also be offered to the students by, for example, providing them with documentation, such as certificates of attendance, which they will need if they are to apply again in future.

It would be hoped that these measures would ensure that those who leave would do so with a more favourable attitude towards UCD and might consider returning for future study.

Ideally an exit interview should also be conducted with graduating students, or a sample thereof, for comparison purposes but also students who spent longer in UCD may be in a better position to give recommendations as to how improvements could be made.

Ongoing reviews

UCD should convene a regular meeting of the interested parties (i.e. student advisers, programme deans, programme office directors, other student support services and recruitment personnel. This group should be a forum for discussion and should monitor best practice from other institutions, especially in Ireland, for comparative study.

Retention of postgraduate students would also be a potentially interesting study – particularly to compare the experiences of undergraduate and postgraduate students.



General

In order to encourage dialogue on this issue amongst all stakeholders it was recommended that this report should be sent to guidance counsellors and made available to all staff in UCD

Conclusion

No university should have, or should aim to have 100% student retention. There will always be students who leave for various reasons.

UCD has some areas on which to focus in order to improve retention with the aim that in future surveys, principle reasons for leaving would be personal reasons and that all those leaving would be happy to consider studying in UCD in the future.



Glossary

CAO

Most applicants for UCD apply via The Central Applications Office. Applicants may list up to ten degree and ten diploma/certificate choices in order of preference. Leaving Certificate results are scored on the 6 best subjects and points are awarded (maximum 600). Applicants are then ranked and places offered accordingly. The basic principle of the system is that applicants are offered the highest preference to which they are entitled. Both lists are assessed separately. For more information see www.cao.ie. Some applicants, such as Overseas Applicants, apply directly to UCD.

CHIU

Conference of Heads of Irish Universities. CHIU represents the Heads of the seven Irish Universities. It aims to promote the development of university education and research by formulating and pursuing sectoral policies and programmes.

Continuing Student

For the purposes of this report a continuing student is one who is still registered in the Faculty which he/she originally entered. It does not in anyway reflect on their performance in examinations.

Credit

Credit is essentially a way of measuring the amount of learning undertaken by a student. UCD uses the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), in which one ECTS credit corresponds to 20 to 25 hours of student learning time. Most modules will have a credit value of five credits, thereby giving 100 to 125 hours of student time per module.

EU (non-Irish) students

Applications are assessed outside the points system, but students must meet the matriculation requirements, and attain examination qualifications that match the entry standards of Irish students.

Horizons

Launched in 2005, UCD Horizons brings the University in line with leading international universities by providing flexible, modular learning degrees that offers the student choices rather than constraints. UCD is the first Irish university to adopt this type of system fully.



The UCD Horizons programme is modular and based on credits. This is more flexible than traditional degree structures and allows the students to individualise their studies.

IT transfer

Applicants who have obtained, or will obtain, a National Diploma/Certificate with a distinction, credit or merit from an Institute of Technology in Ireland are eligible to apply for admission to an appropriate course in UCD. In general, such students are admitted to the second year or third year of the course. However, in some cases first year admission is possible. Only those admitted to First year are included in the data presented in this report.

Majors and Minors

These terms refer to the proportion of credit allocated to each subject studied as part of the student's degree. Some degrees, such as the BA, can be configured into different combinations. For example, depending on the degree, a student may choose to configure their degree as a 'joint major'-where they study two subjects of equal credit value (normally 25 credits each per year). Alternatively, a student may choose a major/minor combination, where the major element attracts more credits than the minor (normally a 30/20 credit split per year).

Mature Student

Applicants who are 23 years of age or over at 1st January prior to the proposed entry date are deemed 'Mature Applicants' and are entitled to special consideration in terms of additional education/work experience. In 2002, 191 full-time students were offered places on this basis. Mature applicants are also entitled to consideration on the basis of their school-leaving qualifications in competition with other applicants (128 offers in 2002).

Module

A module is a learning unit, which is studied over a semester. Each module has a credit value. A five-credit module will require 100 to 125 hours of work. This includes lectures/seminars, course work, self-study and assessment.

Core modules: those which are mandatory for the course.

Option modules: which a student can pick from a list of possibilities, within their subject area

Elective modules: which a student can pick from across the UCD curriculum



New Era (Equal Rights to Access)

A scheme under which students from disadvantaged areas are encouraged to attend third level. Students may be admitted on a direct application basis outside the points system. In addition, students admitted on points may be part of the scheme in terms of financial assistance and support.

Non-Completer

For the purposes of his report a 'non-completer' is a student who is no longer registered for the degree programme which he/she originally entered.

Open Days

The annual UCD Undergraduate Open Days are held between late November and early December. They offer sixth-year students, parents and teachers, as well as mature students and families, a chance to discover more about UCD, the range of degree programmes and the career opportunities following these, as well as support services available at UCD. Approximately 4,000 prospective students/visitors attend these Open Days annually.

UCD also offers a number of subject-specific open events, e.g. Engineering Open Evenings, Science Open Evenings and UCD Quinn School of Business Open Events. The greatest benefit is the opportunity for prospective students to talk to UCD staff and current students about the degree programmes and career opportunities that interest them most.

Orientation

Every year before returning students come back to UCD and before the start of college term, new incoming students go through the process of an introduction, which serves to help students adjust and get used to the new surroundings as well as to induct them into their individual course. Activities that go on during orientation are: the collection of student cards, campus tours (which helps students find their way around, as well as sports centre activities and library scavenger hunts), introductory lectures, the Presidents Welcome, Library Orientation meetings and IT Induction sessions. Also, many social events take place during Orientation to help students adapt to the college atmosphere. For the incoming students who entered in September 2007 such activities included an Orientation Barbeque, Outdoor Movies and the Freshers' Ball.



Overseas students/Non-EU students

Applicants are individually assessed, but students must meet the matriculation requirements and attain examination qualifications that match the entry standards of Irish students. For some courses a separate quota for overseas students exists and students may be admitted with lesser qualifications.

Restructuring

UCD began an academic restructure in 2005 under the 'Strategic Plan 2005-2008'. UCD has moved the academic structure where the School has replaced the Department as the fundamental academic unit, and these Schools have been organised into a smaller number of Colleges. The most important educational action arising from the UCD Strategic Plan, 2005-2008, was the requirement for a fully modular, credit accumulation structure for all degree programmes. The September 2005 intake of UCD first year students was the first to enter into a fully modularised and semesterised environment, branded as *UCD Horizons*.

Semester

The academic year is broken down into two semesters: September to December, and January to June. Each semester is generally composed of 15 weeks: 12 weeks teaching and learning, one week revision and two weeks of assessments.

Students with a Disability

Applicants with disabilities are considered on the same academic grounds as other applicants. However, their disability is taken into account. An alternate entry system, known as the access programme, exists for those students who can provide evidence that their educational achievements have been directly affected as a result of their disability.



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Web Resources

The Right Choice – Universities UK

(<http://bookshop.universitiesuk.ac.uk/downloads/rightchoicereportmastertext.pdf>)

Garni, Kenneth F & Gabriel, Elliot *The Suffolk University Student: Past, Present And Future (1970-1998, and Beyond)*

http://suffolk.edu/files/Counseling_Center_PDF/suffolkstudents1970_1998.pdf

Retention and Graduation Rates, University of California San Diego Annual Report

<http://studentresearch.ucsd.edu/sriweb/retent/Retention0405.pdf>



Appendix I: Programmes Associated with Each Programme Group

Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine

Code	Description	Comments
DN005	Veterinary Medicine	
DN010	Agricultural Science	
DN040	Food Science	Started 2000
DN041	Landscape Architecture	Started 2000. moved to Engineering and Architecture programme group in 2007
DN042	Forestry	Started 2001
DN043	Food and Agribusiness Management	Started 2002
DN044	Agri-Environmental Sciences	Started 2002
DN045	Animal & Crop Production	Started 2002
DN046	Animal Science	Started 2002
DN047	Engineering Technology	Started 2002
DN048	Horticulture, Landscape & Sportsturf Management	Started 2002
DN049	Animal Science – Equine	Started 2007
DN105	Veterinary Medicine (Graduate Entry)	Started 2002

Arts & Human Sciences

Code	Description	Comments
DN007	Social Science	
DN011	Music	Last intake 2005
DN012	Arts	
DN050	Computer Science - Arts	
DN051	Economics	Started 2000
DN052	History	Started 2000
DN053	Philosophy	Started 2000
DN054	Psychology	Started 2000
DN055	English	Started 2005
DN056	Integrated BA/MA in Liberal Arts /MA	Started 2006
DN057	Arts (International) French	Started 2000
DN058	Arts (International) German	Started 2000
DN059	Arts (International) Spanish	Started 2000
DN061	History, Politics & International Relations	Started 2006
DN062	Economics & Politics	Started 2006
DN063	Geography, Planning & Environmental Policy	Started 2006



Business & Law

Code	Description	Comments
DN009	Law	
DN013	Business with Chinese Studies	Started 2006
DN014	Commerce with Modern Irish	Last intake 2005
DN015	Commerce	
DN016	Commerce International – German	
DN017	Commerce International – French	
DN018	Commerce International – Spanish	
DN019	Commerce International – Italian	
DN021	Business and Law	
DN025	Commerce International – Swedish	Last intake 1999
DN026	Economics & Finance	
DN028	BCL/Maîtrise	Started 2006
DN029	Law with French Law	
DN060	Law with History	Started 2006
DN065	Law with Politics	Started 2006
DN066	Law with Philosophy	Started 2006
DN067	Law with Economics	Started 2007

Engineering & Architecture

Code	Description	Comments
DN001	Architecture	
DN003	Engineering	Last intake 2000 – changed to denominated entry from 2001
DN041	Landscape Architecture	Part of this programme group from 2007
DN070	Agricultural and Food Engineering	2001-2003
DN071	Chemical or Bioprocess Engineering	Started 2001
DN072	Civil Engineering	Started 2001
DN073	Electronic Engineering or Electrical Engineering	Started 2001
DN074	Mechanical Engineering	Started 2001
DN075	Civil or Mechanical Engineering	2001-2003
DN076	Biosystems Engineering	Started 2004
DN077	Engineering – Undenominated Entry	Started 2004
DN078	Structural Engineering with Architecture	Started 2004
DN079	Bio Process Engineering	Started 2006
DN080	Engineering Science	Started 2006



Health Science

Code	Description	Comments
DN002	Medicine	
DN004	Radiography	
DN006	Physiotherapy	
DN024	Sports and Exercise Management	Started 2001
DN037	Biomedical, Health and Life Sciences	Started 2006
DN096	Health & Performance Science	Started 2007
DN102	Medicine (Graduate Entry)	Intake in 2006 only

Nursing

Code	Description	Comments
DN110	General Nursing	Started 2002 as Mater only – became general for all hospitals in 2003
DN111	General Nursing, Mature Applicants	As above
DN112	General Nursing, St Vincent's University Hospital	2002 intake only
DN113	General Nursing, St Vincent's University Hospital (mature applicants)	2002 intake only
DN114	General Nursing, St. Michael's Hospital	2002 intake only
DN115	General Nursing, St. Michael's Hospital (mature applicants)	2002 intake only
DN116	Children's & General Nursing	Started 2006
DN117	Children's & General Nursing, Mature Applicants	Started 2006
DN118	Midwifery	Started 2006
DN119	Midwifery, Mature Applicants	Started 2006
DN120	Psychiatric Nursing	Started 2002
DN121	Psychiatric Nursing, Mature Applicants	Started 2002

Science

Code	Description	Comments
DN008	Science	
DN020	Actuarial and Financial Studies BAFS	
DN030	Computer Science - Science	
DN031	Theoretical Physics	
DN032	Mathematical Science	Started in 2000
DN033	Physics with Astronomy & Space Science	Started in 2006
DN034	Pharmacology	Started in 2006
DN035	Medicinal Chemistry & Chemical Biology	Started in 2006
DN036	Neuroscience	Started in 2006
DN038	Climate and Earth System Science	Started in 2007
DN039	Biochemistry and Molecular Biology	Started in 2007



Appendix II: Current Status of Entrants for each year

	Agriculture & Veterinary Medicine	Arts & Human Sciences	Business & Law	Engineering & Architecture	Health Sciences	Nursing	Science	Total	
Entrants	281	1569	666	309	190		497	3512	
Withdrew before 1st Feb Year 1	8	78	10	9	3		9	117	
Withdrew after 1st Feb Year 1	0	18	3	2			3	26	
Absent from year 1 exams	3	36		1	1		11	52	
Left having failed year 1 exams	15	133	13	9	3		27	200	
Left having passed year 1 exams	1	32	3	2	4		16	58	
Changed to a different College	4	22	5	3	3		21	58	
Re-entered same college	1	12	5	2	0		2	22	
Successfully entered year 2 and subsequently left	11	62	14	13	7		12	119	
Deceased	1	2						3	
Currently on Leave of Absence								0	
Still studying in same college	1	7	2	1	5			16	
Graduate (interim or final degree)		236	1167	611	267	164		396	2841
	%	84.0%	74.4%	91.7%	86.4%	86.3%		79.7%	80.9%
Total Non Completers	N	38	359	43	36	18		78	572
	%	13.5%	22.9%	6.5%	11.7%	9.5%		15.7%	16.3%

Table 29: Status of 1999 entry cohort at 11 February 2008

	Agriculture & Veterinary Medicine	Arts & Human Sciences	Business & Law	Engineering & Architecture	Health Sciences	Nursing	Science	Total
Entrants	298	1597	706	295	234		588	3718
Withdrew before 1st Feb Year 1	14	107	5	8	8		39	181
Withdrew after 1st Feb Year 1	1	13	4	1	1		1	21
Absent from year 1 exams	6	54	4				8	72
Left having failed year 1 exams	23	92	14	9	2		44	184
Left having passed year 1 exams	2	28	2	2	3		8	45
Changed to a different College	3	38	14	5	0		37	97
Re-entered same college		19	5	4	1		4	33
Successfully entered year 2 and subsequently left	12	63	14	18	5		24	136
Deceased		1	1					2
Currently on Leave of Absence				1				1
Still studying in same college		4	1	1	19		1	26
Graduate (interim or final degree)	N	237	1178	642	246	195	422	2920
	%	79.5%	73.8%	90.9%	83.4%	83.3%	71.8%	78.5%
Total Non Completers	N	58	357	43	38	19	124	639
	%	19.5%	22.4%	6.1%	12.9%	8.1%	21.1%	17.2%

Table 30: Status of 2000 entry cohort at 11 February 2008

	Agriculture & Veterinary Medicine	Arts & Human Sciences	Business & Law	Engineering & Architecture	Health Sciences	Nursing	Science	Total	
Entrants	258	1671	673	300	276		523	3701	
Withdrew before 1st Feb Year 1	6	128	10	5	5		26	180	
Withdrew after 1st Feb Year 1	1	21	3	1	1		4	31	
Absent from year 1 exams	3	39	1				8	51	
Left having failed year 1 exams	17	78	6	8			56	165	
Left having passed year 1 exams	4	31	3	3	2		12	55	
Changed to a different College	2	28	7	14	5		22	78	
Re-entered same college	0	8	3	1	2		2	16	
Successfully entered year 2 and subsequently left	19	87	19	6	2		25	158	
Deceased	1	2	1	0	1		1	6	
Currently on Leave of Absence								0	
Still studying in same college	3	13	4	3	20		4	47	
Graduate (interim or final degree)	N	202	1236	616	259	238		363	2914
	%	78.3%	74.0%	91.5%	86.3%	86.2%		69.4%	78.7%
Total Non Completers	N	50	384	42	23	10		131	640
	%	19.4%	23.0%	6.2%	7.7%	3.6%		25.0%	17.3%

Table 31: Status of 2001 entry cohort at 11 February 2008

	Agriculture & Veterinary Medicine	Arts & Human Sciences	Business & Law	Engineering & Architecture	Health Sciences	Nursing	Science	Total
Entrants	263	1663	703	277	354	193	519	3972
Withdrew before 1st Feb Year 1	11	74	17	11	7	4	29	153
Withdrew after 1st Feb Year 1	1	18			1	3	6	29
Absent from year 1 exams	8	40	1		3	3	6	61
Left having failed year 1 exams	8	113	8	8	6	4	54	201
Left having passed year 1 exams	2	25	3		2	2	5	39
Changed to a different College	2	23	11	3	2	2	29	72
Re-entered same college	0	7	1	0	1	0	1	10
Successfully entered year 2 and subsequently left	12	96	14	8	9	12	22	173
Deceased	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Currently on Leave of Absence	0	0	0	4	1	0	2	7
Still studying in same college	11	15	9	7	157	3	5	207
Graduate (interim or final degree)	N	208	1251	639	236	165	360	3019
	%	79.1%	75.2%	90.9%	85.2%	46.6%	82.9%	69.4%
Total Non Completers	N	42	366	43	27	28	122	656
	%	16.0%	22.0%	6.1%	9.7%	7.9%	14.5%	23.5%

Table 32: Status of 2002 entry cohort at 11 February 2008

	Agriculture & Veterinary Medicine	Arts & Human Sciences	Business & Law	Engineering & Architecture	Health Sciences	Nursing	Science	Total
Entrants	244	1664	680	262	364	199	494	3907
Withdrew before 1st Feb Year 1	11	78	11	5	2	4	19	130
Withdrew after 1st Feb Year 1	1	21		1	2		6	31
Absent from year 1 exams	2	42	2			1	17	64
Left having failed year 1 exams	14	122	2		3	11	49	201
Left having passed year 1 exams	3	31	1	1	2	3	10	51
Changed to a different College	4	26	7	4	2	2	26	71
Re-entered same college	3	2	3	2	0	0	1	11
Successfully entered year 2 and subsequently left	19	87	15	5	8	11	19	164
Deceased	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Currently on Leave of Absence	2	7	2	8	0	0	3	22
Still studying in same college	89	61	29	17	222	24	37	479
Graduate (interim or final degree)	N	95	1186	608	219	123	307	2681
	%	38.9%	71.3%	89.4%	83.6%	33.8%	71.9%	62.1%
Total Non Completers	N	50	381	31	12	17	120	641
	%	20.5%	22.9%	4.6%	4.6%	4.7%	15.1%	24.3%

Table 33: Status of 2003 entry cohort at 11 February 2008

	Agriculture & Veterinary Medicine	Arts & Human Sciences	Business & Law	Engineering & Architecture	Health Sciences	Nursing	Science	Total	
Entrants	250	1617	660	274	383	195	490	3869	
Withdrew before 1st Feb Year 1	10	89	6	5	6	7	24	147	
Withdrew after 1st Feb Year 1		23	2			1	2	28	
Absent from year 1 exams	1	44	1	1	1		8	56	
Left having failed year 1 exams	3	135	10	1	4	6	42	201	
Left having passed year 1 exams	2	34	3	5	4	1	6	55	
Changed to a different College	1	33	8	8	2	0	17	69	
Re-entered same college	1	4	3	2	0	1	0	11	
Successfully entered year 2 and subsequently left	19	70	12	10	3	7	24	145	
Deceased	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	
Currently on Leave of Absence	2	9	4	43	2	2	2	64	
Still studying in same college	211	333	295	183	316	170	133	1641	
Graduate (interim or final degree)	N		842	316	15	45		232	1450
	%	0.0%	52.1%	47.9%	5.5%	11.7%	0.0%	47.3%	37.5%
Total Non Completers	N	35	395	34	22	18	22	106	632
	%	14.0%	24.4%	5.2%	8.0%	4.7%	11.3%	21.6%	16.3%

Table 34: Status of 2004 entry cohort at 11 February 2008

	Agriculture & Veterinary Medicine	Arts & Human Sciences	Business & Law	Engineering & Architecture	Health Sciences	Nursing	Science	Total
Entrants	271	1560	681	276	364	199	497	3848
Withdrew before 1st Feb Year 1	19	95	11	1	4	1	18	149
Withdrew after 1st Feb Year 1	1	13				1	4	19
Absent from year 1 exams		2		1				3
Left having failed year 1 exams	22	180	17	6	2	6	61	294
Left having passed year 1 exams	3	22	3	2	6	3	14	53
Changed to a different College	3	38	5	5	1	0	22	74
Re-entered same college	2	6	2	2	2	1	4	19
Successfully entered year 2 and subsequently left	5	46	8	5	2	4	13	83
Deceased	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	4
Currently on Leave of Absence	4	16	5	2	1	2	9	39
Still studying in same college	211	1141	629	252	346	181	351	3111
Graduate (interim or final degree)	N							
	%							
Total Non Completers	N	50	358	39	15	14	110	601
	%	18.5%	22.9%	5.7%	5.4%	3.8%	22.1%	15.6%

Table 35: Status of 2005 entry cohort at 11 February 2008

	Agriculture & Veterinary Medicine	Arts & Human Sciences	Business & Law	Engineering & Architecture	Health Sciences	Nursing	Science	Total
Entrants	294	1541	766	330	404	247	486	4068
Withdrew before 1st Feb Year 1	17	110	14	7	6	6	22	182
Withdrew after 1st Feb Year 1	5	26	4	1	1	2	7	46
Absent from year 1 exams		3		1				4
Left having failed year 1 exams	24	113	8	5	7	1	34	192
Left having passed year 1 exams	3	7	7	1	4	2	6	30
Changed to a different College	4	32	5	7	1	1	10	60
Re-entered same college	1	5	2	1	0	0	4	13
Successfully entered year 2 and subsequently left		9	3	2		4	2	20
Deceased	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
Currently on Leave of Absence	2	24	2	2	2	1	12	45
Still studying in same college	238	1212	720	303	383	230	388	3474
Graduate (interim or final degree)	N							
	%							
Total Non Completers	N	49	268	36	17	18	71	474
	%	16.7%	17.4%	4.7%	5.2%	4.5%	14.6%	11.7%

Table 36: Status of 2006 entry cohort at 11 February 2008

Appendix III: Sample Questionnaire

University College Dublin
An Coláiste Ollscoile, Baile Átha Cliath

Admissions Office

An Oifig Iontrálacha



**Non-Completion
Questionnaire**
2005 Entrants



**Admissions Office, Tierney Building,
UCD, Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland**
Telephone: +353-1-7161554
Fax: +353-1-7161070

Reasons for Leaving Course

1 What course did you register for in 2005?

- 2 When did you leave the course?
- Before 1 February of 1st year
- After 1 February but before the end of 1st year
- After 1st year exam results
- During 2nd Year

3 Which was the last exam session at which you sat exams (if any):

- Semester 1 2005/06
- Semester 2 2005/06
- Autumn 2006
- Semester 1 2006/07



4 Why did you choose to leave? Please rate the following factors.
[1 (not relevant)-5 (highly relevant)]

Wrong course choice	1	2	3	4	5
Couldn't get modules I wanted	1	2	3	4	5
Wanted to repeat Leaving Cert for 1 st preference	1	2	3	4	5
Course was too difficult	1	2	3	4	5
Course was not challenging enough	1	2	3	4	5
Failed exams	1	2	3	4	5
Problem adjusting to 3rd level teaching methods	1	2	3	4	5

Accommodation difficulties	1	2	3	4	5
Financial difficulties	1	2	3	4	5
Location of UCD/Transport problems	1	2	3	4	5
Offered job opportunity	1	2	3	4	5
Personal or family problems	1	2	3	4	5
Needed a year out	1	2	3	4	5

Did not know anyone/ Difficulty in making friends	1	2	3	4	5
Size/scale of campus	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of orientation	1	2	3	4	5
Poor standard of facilities	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of access to social activities (clubs/societies)	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of interaction with faculty/staff	1	2	3	4	5
Unfriendly environment/atmosphere	1	2	3	4	5
Poor sense of community	1	2	3	4	5
Other (please specify):	1	2	3	4	5
_____	1	2	3	4	5

5 Which was the most critical factor? _____

Please explain why. _____

6 Was there anything further UCD could have done to support you prior to, or at, the time you were having doubts about your course?

7 Did you consider deferring for a year, rather than leaving?

- Yes
 No

8 How did you feel having left? (please tick main feeling)

- Relieved
 Nothing in particular
 Disappointed
 Frustrated



9 Did you speak to any member of staff before you made the decision to leave?

- Yes
 No

10 If you sought help from any of the following please rate their helpfulness?
[Rate helpfulness: 1 (low)-5 (high)]

Parents or older siblings	1	2	3	4	5
Friends	1	2	3	4	5
Lecturer	1	2	3	4	5
Tutor	1	2	3	4	5
Counsellor	1	2	3	4	5
Programme Office	1	2	3	4	5
Student Desk	1	2	3	4	5
Students' Union Officer	1	2	3	4	5
Student Advisor	1	2	3	4	5
Chaplain	1	2	3	4	5
Other: _____	1	2	3	4	5

11 What have you been doing since leaving your UCD course ?

12 If you have not re-entered education, would you consider full or part-time study in the future?

- Yes
 No

13 Would you consider studying in UCD in the future?

- Yes
 No

No



Course Choice

14 What factors influenced your course choice?
 [1 (not relevant) – 5 (highly relevant)]

Liked the subject at school	1	2	3	4	5
Previous CAO points levels	1	2	3	4	5
Parents or older siblings	1	2	3	4	5
Friends	1	2	3	4	5
Guidance Counsellor	1	2	3	4	5
Second-level teacher(s)	1	2	3	4	5
Good reputation of course	1	2	3	4	5
Course qualified me for the work I wanted to do	1	2	3	4	5
Other (please specify): _____	1	2	3	4	5

15 What factors influenced your choosing UCD?
 [1 (not relevant) – 5 (highly relevant)]

Only option for particular course	1	2	3	4	5
Close to home	1	2	3	4	5
Did not want to be too close to home	1	2	3	4	5
Parents or older siblings	1	2	3	4	5
Friends	1	2	3	4	5
Guidance Counsellor	1	2	3	4	5
Second-level teacher(s)	1	2	3	4	5
Good social/sports life	1	2	3	4	5
Good facilities	1	2	3	4	5
Good general academic reputation	1	2	3	4	5
Horizons options	1	2	3	4	5
Other (please specify): _____	1	2	3	4	5



16 When making your choice did you read the UCD prospectus?

- Yes
 No



17 When making your choice did you read the UCD website?

- Yes
 No

18 How would you rate the content of the literature on the following criteria?
[1 (low)-5 (high)]

	Prospectus	Website
User-friendliness	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Clarity	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Quality of Information	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

19 Did you attend a UCD Open Day or any other information session on campus?

- Yes
 No

20 If yes, how did it influence your decision to come to UCD?
[1 (low)-5 (high)]

1 2 3 4 5



Orientation & Participation

21 Did you attend Orientation meetings and activities during the week before the 1st semester of first year?

- None
 I attended a few
 I attended most of them

22 Did you find the support and information services involved in Orientation helpful in making the transition to University? [1 (not helpful) - 5 (very helpful)]

1 2 3 4 5

23 If a module for first year students, dealing with university life, had been available, do you think you would you have taken it?

- Yes—please go to question 24
 No—please skip to question 25

24 Which of these topics would most interest you in such a module?
[1 (no interest)-5 (very interesting) scale?]

A study skills	1	2	3	4	5
B campus resources	1	2	3	4	5
C academic planning & time management	1	2	3	4	5
D career exploration & professional development	1	2	3	4	5
E personal development	1	2	3	4	5
F writing and research skills	1	2	3	4	5
G presentation skills	1	2	3	4	5

25 Do you have suggestions for future Orientation events?

26 Did you join any clubs or societies while at UCD?

- Yes
- No



27 If you worked part-time, how many hours did you work per week?

34 Any other comments or suggestions for improvements?

Thank you for your co-operation and for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. The information supplied will be treated confidentially and will enable UCD to plan more effectively for the future. Please return the questionnaire (in the freepost envelope provided) to:



*Non-Completion Survey,
Admissions Office,
UCD, Tierney Building
Belfield,
Dublin 4*

Please return by 31 March 2007