Administrative Support Systems

Central Applications Office and Access Routes to HE

Lewis Purser, Director Academic Affairs
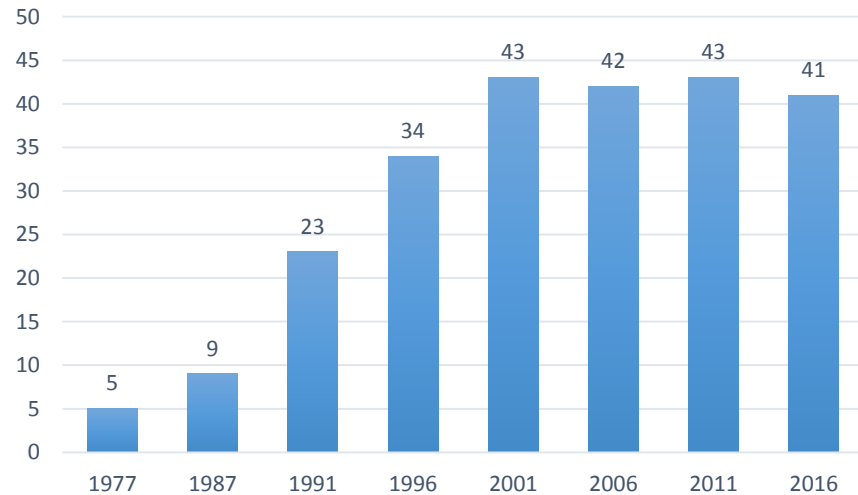
Admissions to Irish HEIs: general intro

- HEIs are completely autonomous in terms of student admission systems: criteria, numbers of places, entry requirements.
- However, all systems must be fair and transparent
- Governmental restrictions apply only re student numbers in some areas of (mainly public) professional employment
- Competitive system, demand outstrips supply
- Based on student high-school exam performance and preference
- End of high-school exam grades are the only criteria for most courses (exceptions in performance arts, etc.)
- System has a number of in-built biases
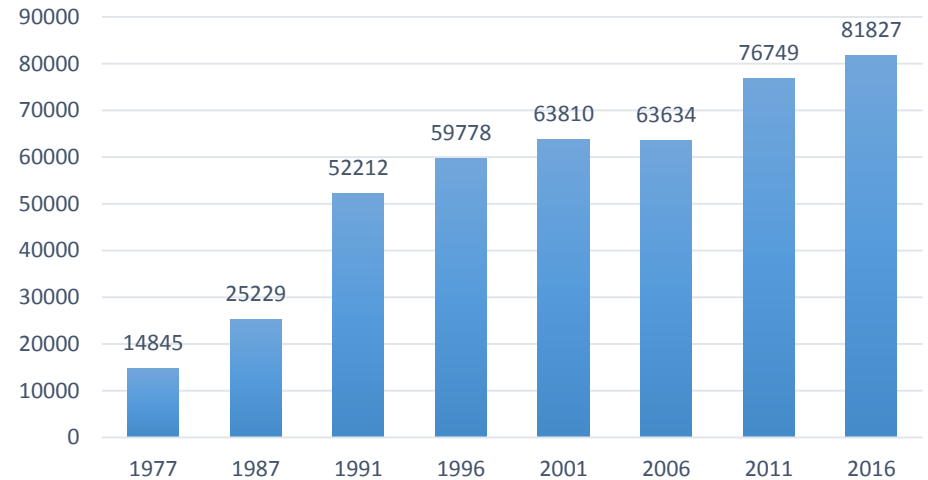
Central Applications Office (CAO) summary

- Central applications and processing office for all Irish and other EU undergraduate applications to Irish HEIs
- Private company created in 1976, limited by guarantee, no share capital
- Membership is representative of the higher education sector
- Governed by a board of directors from members (mostly university VPs Academic)
- Financed entirely by application fees; no state support
- Considerable economies and efficiencies to HEIs in filling their course places
- System based on transparency, and equality of treatment for applicants and participating HEIs
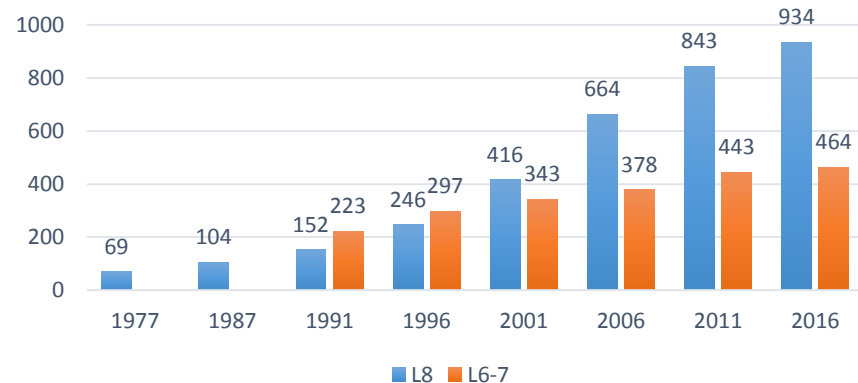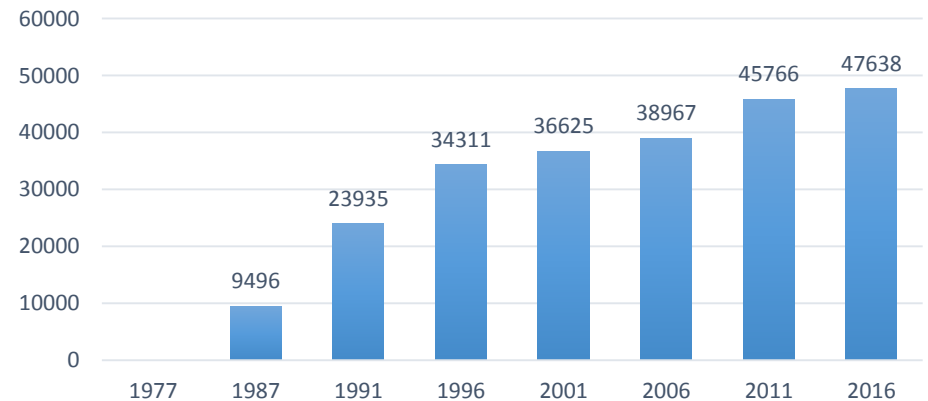
CAO in figures, 1977 - 2016

Participating HEIs

Year	Value
1977	5
1987	9
1991	23
1996	34
2001	43
2006	42
2011	43
2016	41

Applicants

Year	Value
1977	14845
1987	25229
1991	52212
1996	59778
2001	63810
2006	63634
2011	76749
2016	81827

Courses

Year	L8	L6-7
1977	69	
1987	104	
1991	152	223
1996	246	297
2001	416	343
2006	664	378
2011	843	443
2016	934	464

Acceptances

Year	Value
1977	
1987	9496
1991	23935
1996	34311
2001	36625
2006	38967
2011	45766
2016	47638

CAO operating principles

- Courses included must be legally recognised in Ireland
- Applicants may make up to 10 (20) choices, and place these in order of preference
- Applicants may change these choices and their order
- Strict application of deadlines and rules
- High-school grades are converted into points using agreed Common Points Scale, determined by the HEIs
- Agreed conversions/equivalencies for other EU/EFTA exams
- High standard of service
- Controlling costs to applicants

=> increased operational productivity, economies of scale

HEI operating principles:

- Retain full control over their admission policies and decisions
- Delegate certain routine assessment functions to CAO under instruction
- Share a voluntary code of admission practice
- Publish their admission policies in advance and specify the means by which entrants will be chosen

- CAO has enhanced the reputation for fairness and transparency in the Irish HE admissions

Operational milestones

- 1989: computerisation of Leaving Certificate Examination procedures
- 1995: computer network connecting all HEIs
- 2000: comprehensive website facility
- 2003: full electronic document transfer capability
- 2017: new LC grading scale and points system

- www.cao.ie

Staff and finances

STAFF	Permanent	Seasonal
2001	10	30
2016	13	35

Application fee	Website	Paper
2001	20 €	30 €
2016	25 € (early bird)	40 € (no discount)

INCOME and EXPENDITURE	Income €	Nett operating surplus (deficit) €
2001	1,999,900	96,858
2016	2,760,358	144,461

Access routes to HE

- 3rd National Plan, part of HE Strategy
- Target groups:
- Socio-economically disadvantaged
- Mature students
- Students with disabilities
- Part-time/flexible learners
- Irish Travellers (national minority)
- Further Education applicants
- Goals:
- Mainstreaming
- Assessing impact
- Data and evidence
- Progression pathways into HE
- Regional and community partnerships
- Targets set for each target group
- Annual monitoring process

What do universities do?

- Access is an important section of each University's Strategic Plan, with objectives and targets
- Outreach work with target populations in local and regional communities/schools, eg: Student ambassadors, Homework clubs, Summer schools and sports on campus, Information and advice
- **Alternative admissions routes for students with potential to succeed, but whose education has been impacted by disadvantage**
- Additional academic, advisory and financial supports available
- Promote student engagement with their learning and their university life
- Advise students re employment options and assist with placements
- Monitor student engagement, progression and outcomes, particularly "at risk" students
- Evaluate access and social inclusion activities as part of QA

Two shared Access routes

- Pre-2009: some HEIs had their own local access routes
- In 2006, the Universities and DIT decided to develop common policies and practices
- In 2009, 2 Access Routes opened:
    - DARE – Disability Access Route to Education
    - HEAR – Higher Education Access Route
- Now joined by additional 12 HEIs
- Reserved quota of places (normally 5%) on all Ba courses
- Places offered on reduced points to students who meet DARE and/or HEAR eligibility requirements
- Eligible students compete for these quota of reduced points places

Main operating principles

- Agreed eligibility criteria across all categories
- Central application through CAO and central screening process
- Managed centrally through shared service, hosted by IUA
- Project structure, with steering group, expert groups, etc.
- Intense liaison with broad range of stakeholders
- Students pay normal CAO application fee. Other (start-up) costs covered by national project funding and HEIs
- Mainstreaming where possible

Indicators / criteria

DARE:

- Agreed eligibility criteria across 11 categories of disability

- Agreed processes for evidence and verification of these

- Agreed criteria to evidence Educational Impact of disability, across 6 fields of evidence

Indicators / criteria

HEAR:

- Multi-indicator criteria, across 6 fields:

  - Income; medical card; social welfare payments; socio-economic group; disadvantaged school attendance; area profile.

  - Evidence for these is gathered from official sources where possible, or using methods also used by Government in various fields.

- Must meet Income criteria plus 2 others

Growth 2009-2016

DARE HEAR Admissions 2009 - 2016
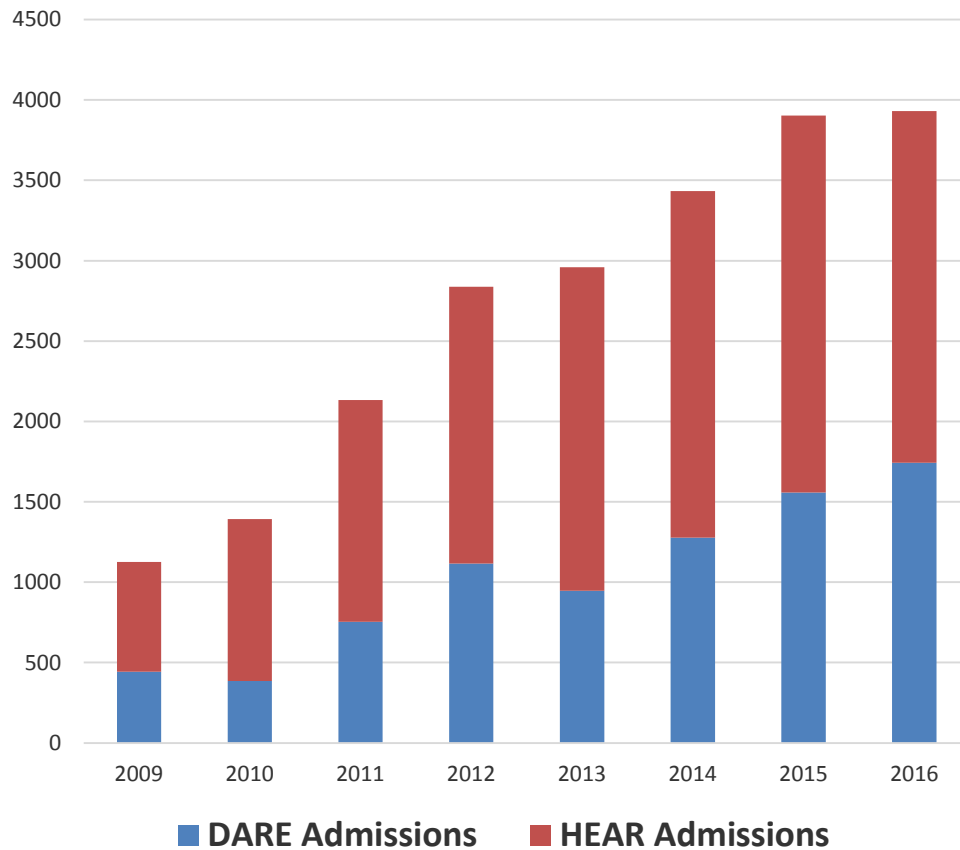
DARE HEAR Applicants as % of LC applicants to CAO in 2015
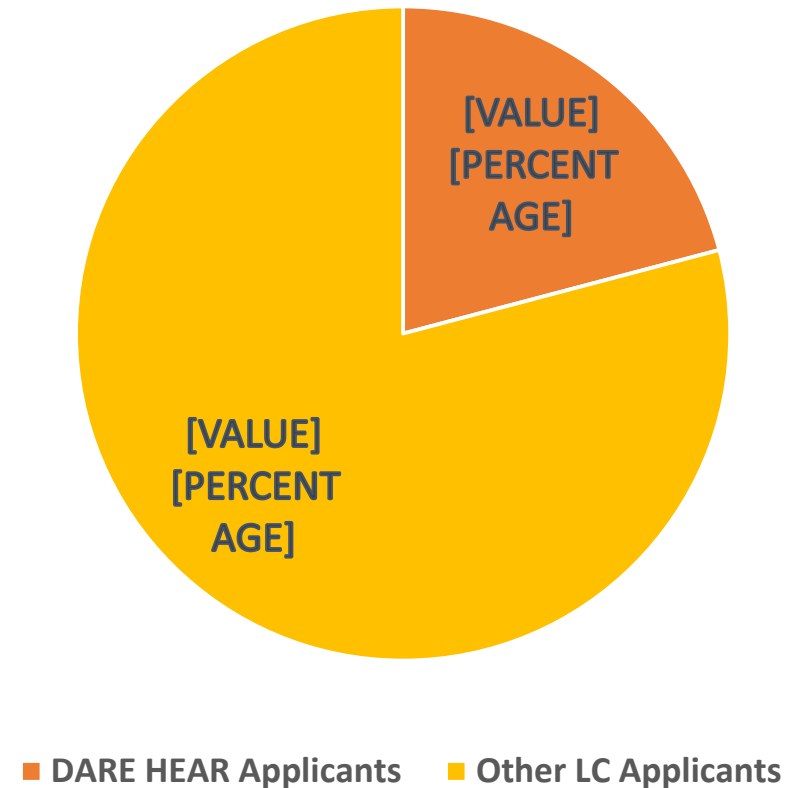
Efficiencies

Pre-2009:

- Each university had its own separate parallel schemes

- Manual process for students and HEIs, very work-intensive

- Multiple staff in each HEI involved

- Stagnating numbers of local applicants due to splintered approaches

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- Increasing risk due to possible local weaknesses

Efficiencies

Shared service approach:

- Development of robust shared criteria and processes

- Much greater visibility for students and schools

- Much larger numbers of applicants and admissions

- Most work now undertaken by CAO and project unit in IUA

- Decreased risk

- Universities now focus on outreach and post-entry support

www.cao.ie

www.accesscollege.ie/dare

www.accesscollege.ie/hear

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