"Crossing the Sahara without water": A critical analysis of the macro and micro-level dynamics of persistent class inequality in the Back To Education Allowance Welfare to Education Programme.

Martin J. Power
Department of Sociology
University of Limerick

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Supervisor:
Dr. Amanda Haynes.
University of Limerick

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I, Martin Power, certify that this thesis, which I now submit for assessment on the programme leading to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) is my own work and has not been submitted for any academic purpose other than in partial fulfilment for that which is stated above.

Signed: _________________________

Date: 10 November 2008.
ABSTRACT

This thesis elaborates a critical empirical and theoretical exposition of the impact of the Irish welfare to education programme, the Back to Education Allowance, on class-based exclusion. In doing so, it contributes to a broader understanding of dynamics of welfare to education programmes in the era of the post-welfare state. It adopts a strong ‘structural’ position, which sees the source of social exclusion as lying in the structured inequality of the labour market and the state (Morris 1994, p.80). It rejects arguments that social exclusion can be addressed by promoting policy that adopts a weak ‘cultural’ position (Morris 1994, p.80), ultimately blaming the excluded for their own misfortune. The thesis proposes the provision of education, and 3rd level education in particular, as a key means of addressing social exclusion. Education is theoretically situated in terms of its relationship with the economy and broader state policy, which has (ultimately) resulted in the commodification of education (Mulderrig, 2003). The education system controls levels of social mobility (Drudy and Lynch 1993, p.26) and by extension I argue that education can affect social exclusion. However the education system as it stands at present serves as a means to reproduce society’s inequalities.

The thesis situates the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) in its macro level (global) context. It examines the system of welfare provision that exists in Ireland and how that system emerged. It locates the emergence of Neoliberalism as the dominant political discourse in the 1980s, before focusing on how the construction of status beliefs and the ‘New Right’ ideology of personal responsibility have justified the rolling back of the welfare state and the promotion of welfare to work over welfare to education programmes in western societies. In doing so, the thesis argues that welfare recipients have been constructed as the ‘undeserving’ poor. It is held that this construction, which is part of a Neoliberal project to retract the welfare state, has offered a justification for the short-term approach which this thesis finds is being adopted in relation to the BTEA. This thesis finds that initiatives to facilitate access to 3rd level education for welfare recipients (on a macro level) are restricted in scope and substantially modified in practice (on a micro level) as a result of the dynamics of interactions between welfare recipients and welfare officers, interactions which are lent great significance by the administrative nature of the BTEA. It has been found that BTEA participants require certain levels of cultural and / or social capital to overcome obstacles created by the DSFA and accordingly those who are most distant from the labour market, and who possess less capital, are considerably less likely to be able to access the BTEA.

The thesis concludes by highlighting the positive impact of participation in the BTEA upon participants’ class situation, economic capital and levels of cultural capital. The latter is in turn used to acquire more sustainable and secure employment, offering welfare recipients the tools to combat their own social exclusion and potentially that of their children. However, I find that the effectiveness of the BTEA in addressing more than individual exclusion is limited by the requirement for cultural and social capital in order to negotiate the system and access the benefits it can offer. This finding informs an evaluation of the state response to the BTEA as minimalist; the documented lack of will to maximize the BTEA’s potential is held to be reinforced by dominant Neoliberal ideologies.
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This thesis is dedicated to John Power who passed away in January 2004.

You will always be missed.
GLOSSARY

AHEAD: Association on Higher Education And Disability.
ALMP: Active Labour Market Programmes.
BA: Bachelor of Arts.
BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation.
B.Comm: Bachelor of Commerce.
BSc: Bachelor of Science.
BTEA: Back to Education Allowance.
CAO: Central Applications Office.
CSO: Central Statistics Office.
DCU: Dublin City University.
DSCFA: Department of Social, Community, and Family Affairs.
DSFA: Department of Social and Family Affairs.
DIT: Dublin Institute of Technology.
ESRI: Economic and Social Research Institute.
ESS: Employment Support Services Section of the DSFA.
EU: The European Union.
EXSPRO: Social Exclusion and Social Protection - the Future Role for the EU.
FÁS: Foras Áiseánna Saothair: Irish National Training and Employment Authority.
FDI: Foreign Direct Investment.
GDP: Gross Domestic Product.
GNP: Gross National Product.
H.Dip: Higher Diploma in Education.
HEA: Higher Education Authority.
IDA: Industrial Development Agency.
IT: Institute of Technology.
JOBS: Job Opportunities and Basic Skills programme.
LMR: Lansdowne Market Research.
MA: Master of Arts.
M.Comm: Master of Commerce.
MEP: Member of the European Parliament.
NAPS: National Anti-Poverty Strategy.
NESF: National Economic and Social Forum.
NRA: ‘No Rent Allowance’.
NUI: National University of Ireland.
NVQ: National Vocational Qualification.
OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
OPEN: Organisation Representing Lone Parent Groups in Ireland.
PAYE: Pay As You Earn.
PESP: Programme for Economic and Social Progress.
PhD: Doctor of Philosophy.
SKILL: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities.
SWAP: Scottish Wider Access Programme.
TD: Teachta Dála (a member of the Irish parliament).
TLA: Third Level Allowance.
TLO: Third Level Option of the BTEA.
UA: Unemployment Assistance.

UB: Unemployment Benefit.

UCD: University College Dublin.

UK: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

UL: University of Limerick.


USI: Union of Students in Ireland.

VEC: Vocational Education Committee.

VTOS: Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme.

WBLA: Work Based Learning for Adults.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

This thesis elaborates a critical empirical and theoretical elucidation of the macro and micro-level dynamics of persistent class inequality in the Irish welfare to education programme, the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA), and the impact of this scheme on class-based exclusion. In doing so, it contributes to a broader understanding of the dynamics of welfare to education programmes in the era of the post-welfare state. Social exclusion is an inevitable feature of the current global economic system, which underpins structural inequality. This thesis proposes the provision of education, and 3rd level education in particular, as a key means of addressing such social exclusion. Education is situated in terms of its relationship with the economy and broader state policy, which has resulted ultimately in a major move towards its commodification (Mulderrig 2003). The education system increasingly selects individuals for different occupations, consequently controlling social mobility (Drudy and Lynch 1993, p.26; Government of Ireland 1998). A large body of international literature identifies low educational attainment as a key constituent of individual social exclusion and at a national level the correlation between low levels of participation, the development of socially and economically marginalized communities and the maintenance of social inequalities has been noted in this regard (see Action Group on Access 2001). This thesis argues that the mainstream education system presently serves to reproduce these inequalities, with an individuals class location found to be the major factor in this regard.

In this context the provision of welfare to education programmes is of paramount importance. Internationally, there is substantial empirical support (Deprez and Butler 2001; Deprez 1999; Pandey et al. 2000; Polakow et al. 2004; Christopher 2005; Zhan et al. 2004) for investing in the education of welfare recipients, which results in major benefits not only for the individual but also for the state. In Ireland the BTEA is the Department of Social and Family Affairs’ (DSFA) flagship welfare to education programme. It is a non-means tested standard payment, which unemployed individuals, single parents and people with disabilities may apply for in order to access approved educational programmes. As such it impacts the level at which Irish
welfare recipients’ move into the labour market and achieve social mobility. In essence it is an extremely important mechanism by which Irish welfare recipients might achieve social inclusion.

1.1 Motivation for undertaking this research:
I came to this research as a result of having participated in the BTEA scheme. I learned of its existence through my social networks, as I had not been made aware of it by DSFA personnel. My subsequent application to the University of Limerick (made without assistance from the DSFA) for a place on a degree programme proved successful and I eventually graduated from UL with a Masters degree. I believe that the BTEA has had a tremendous positive impact on my life in terms of employment options and through increasing my self confidence and assertiveness. In essence participation in 3rd level education has dramatically improved my social, cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu 1986). In 2003 the summer payment to BTEA participants previously on an unemployment payment was discontinued and the postgraduate option was severely restricted. Additionally, 2004 saw the qualifying period for the 3rd level option of the BTEA extended to fifteen months. These changes (in conjunction with my individual experiences and my sociological understanding of, and interest in class dynamics) concretised my decision to focus on the BTEA for my PhD. In effect the thesis offers a greater understanding of the dynamics of welfare to education programmes in relation to class, the ongoing significance of class and its impact on the everyday lived experiences of welfare recipients, and the reproduction of inequality in the current Neoliberal era.

1.2 The research question:
The central research question of this doctoral thesis is concerned with examining the macro and micro-level dynamics of the BTEA and the impact of this scheme on access to and participation in 3rd level education, and thus on the social inclusion of welfare recipients in Ireland at present. Accordingly I analyse the impact and effectiveness of the BTEA in empirical terms, whilst simultaneously examining the internal operation of the BTEA, and its ideological underpinnings. In doing so I endeavored to answer the following theoretical sub-questions:\(^1\):

\(^1\) I address question one and two in chapters five and six, question three in chapters six and seven, and question four and five in chapter seven.
Are welfare recipients still constructed as undeserving and if so how does this construction impact on the provision of welfare to education programmes?

Has the global hegemonic position of Neoliberalism impacted on the design and provision of welfare to education programmes?

How is welfare policy executed on the ground? Do political and ideological factors and the organizational culture of the civil service impact the administration of the BTEA?

What impact does an individuals’ level of cultural, social, and economic capital have on their ability to access the BTEA and 3rd level education?

Are the micro level interactions that occur between DSFA officers and welfare recipients significant in determining whether a welfare recipient gets access to the BTEA?

Additionally, empirical sub-questions that were addressed include:

- How does 3rd level education impact on the social inclusion of welfare recipients?
- What are the major impediments to partaking in 3rd level education for the chosen population?
- How successful has the BTEA been in aiding the entry of economically disadvantaged groups to 3rd level education?
- How have changes introduced in 2003 / 2004 affected those participating in the scheme?
- How can we maximise any positive impact of the BTEA on social inclusion?

The core objective of this original research is to contribute empirically and theoretically to the existing body of knowledge on this subject, and to make policy recommendations that will address / redress the emergent issues.

1.3 Empirical significance:

More than 4000 people have availed of the BTEA scheme every year since 1998 / 1999, with the numbers rising to a high of 5458 in the 2003 / 2004 academic year (DSFA 2005, p.36). These figures are indicative of the importance of the scheme in enabling those who are eligible, to access higher education. Existing research suggests the BTEA has aided social inclusion to a certain extent by moving sections of the

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2 I address question one in chapters four, five and seven, question two in chapter seven, question three in chapters five, six, and seven, question four in chapter seven, and question five in chapter eight.
population off welfare and into sustainable quality work and to a position of higher status (Healy 1997; DSFA 2005). Yet the introduction of changes in 2003 / 2004 resulted in a drop in the numbers availing of the scheme to 4280 in 2004 / 2005, the lowest figures recorded since 1997 / 1998 (DSFA 2005, p.36; O’Dea 2005a). Some of these changes remain in place to date.

At a national level, there is a body of empirical knowledge on the role of unequal access to education in the reproduction of inequalities in Ireland (see Lynch 2007; O’Connell, Clancy, and McCoy 2006; Gannon and Nolan 2004; Clancy 2001; Clancy and Wall 2000; Lynch 1999; Clancy 1999; Clancy 1995; Lynch 1988). In this context Skillbeck and Connell (2000) acknowledge the significance of financial (and non-financial) supports in addressing obstacles to participation in 3rd level education. Yet we are seriously lacking in independent empirical data (with the exception of Healy 1997) by which to judge the effects of the BTEA scheme, its ideological underpinnings and the dynamics of its provision in this regard. There is a dearth of freely available information (regarding the adequacy of the payment itself, the impact of aspects such as the retention of non-monetary benefits, and the influence of eligibility criteria) against which to judge the impact of future alterations to the BTEA. While the DSFA collect their own statistical data on the BTEA, this is not freely available (see chapter two) and has not been independently analysed. As such the lack of availability of these official statistics may be contributing to the denial of inequality by failing to allow independent analysis of the scheme in its entirety.

Censorship doesn’t just apply to the banning or cutting of films; it also applies to restrictions imposed on recalcitrant voices and on research, which documents inequality (Lynch 2007).

“That information might benefit the people on the BTEA scheme and that’s why they said the information isn’t available...you can be sure that the department knows that information might be a disadvantage to the department and go against their argument and that’s why this information is not available” (Michael Ring).

The need for a contemporary independent evaluation of the BTEA - the key mechanism within the Irish social security system for providing access to higher education for the unemployed, people with disabilities and lone parents, is therefore of paramount importance. This research is differentiated from what has gone before by its qualitative methodology and this thesis endeavours to fill an existing empirical
gap, by documenting whether the effectiveness of the scheme is impacted by the relative significance of financial versus other types of support (e.g. accessibility, information, assistance with applications) on the capacity of the target groups to participate in the scheme. Furthermore, my research aims to fill significant gaps in our empirical knowledge of the functionality of this scheme and in doing so to discover the strengths and weaknesses of the BTEA with regard to supporting the educational careers of its recipients.

1.4 The relevance of this research to policy:
The BTEA is a potential mechanism for social inclusion, yet there has been little debate (or work undertaken) on the make up or delivery of the scheme. Given the social significance of the BTEA and its vulnerability to politically motivated alterations, (see chapters 5 and 6) there is a requirement for a contemporary systematic analysis of its effectiveness and functionality, to provide an informed basis for its future development and to optimise its contribution to inclusion.

The central policy question, which this thesis addresses, is how can we optimise the contribution of the BTEA to inclusion and bring about even greater benefits for both participants and the state? The empirical goals stated in the first part of this paragraph (repeated from previous sections) feed into answering this policy-oriented question. The thesis seeks to identify what impact changes made to the scheme in 2003 / 2004 have had on those participating in 3rd level education via the BTEA, what elements of the scheme are working and not working, and where gaps exist in the potential to maximise the impact of the BTEA on social exclusion. It intends to investigate how welfare policy is executed on the ground and whether political and ideological factors and the organizational culture of the civil service impact on the administration of the BTEA. Ultimately this thesis scrutinizes whether welfare to education programmes have the potential to empower those who have greatest interest in altering the day to day effects of social exclusion on their lives.

My research will add to the existing international body of knowledge on welfare to education programmes. More importantly it adds to the limited body of Irish literature in this area, (Healy 1997; DSFA 2005; McCashin, 2000; McCormack 2005; Power 2006; Power 2008) which is vital if we are to make informed policy decisions in the future. As this thesis reflects the contributors’ perceptions of their participation on the
BTEA scheme, it has tremendous relevance for future policy decisions taken in this area. One of the most significant contributions of this thesis is in giving voice to the impact of government and educational policies on the lives of my participants. I hope the recommendations of this thesis will result in their needs being examined thoroughly by all DSFA officers, as some individual officers at the moment seem more interested in providing them with a “quick fix” (see Andruske 1999a for a US context). A summary of this final report will be made available to the DSFA so that the understanding of those planning and delivering this scheme can be heightened. Ultimately the research endeavours to bring about greater benefits for those participating in the BTEA scheme and for the state through the development of more informed policy decisions.

1.5 Theoretical contribution:


The macro level literature is primarily concerned with the ongoing debate about the impact of the US welfare reform model, and the provision of welfare to work or workfare. As we will see in chapter five this reform process has imposed severe
restrictions on the ability of welfare recipients to access higher education, and it is a model that many governments throughout the world have either now implemented or are seriously considering. A significant portion of this literature adopts a conflict theory stance, viewing welfare reform as part of the Neoliberal retraction of the welfare state. This process is said to be aided by the New Right ideology of personal responsibility, which constructs welfare recipients as undeserving. The majority of the existing micro level literature focuses on the effects that participating in welfare to education programmes have on individual welfare recipients. In essence it presents ‘before and after pictures’ which produce findings in favour of these programmes. There are two major exceptions to this trend at the micro level. Andruske (1999a) used Bourdieu's theory of social practice to explore how women welfare recipient’s manoeuvred through obstacles placed in their way by welfare officers, as they tried to make the transition from welfare to work and education, while Adair (2001b and 2003b) focused on welfare recipients being marked by signs which designate them as pathological ‘others’ and offer a justification as to why welfare provision should be punitive.

The macro level conflict approach offers great explanatory power in answering the question of why there is limited availability of welfare to education programmes in the post-welfare state era. However it offers no framework for understanding the micro level dynamics of welfare to education programmes, and the resultant class inequalities in access to these programmes. In contrast the micro level literature, particularly Andruske (1999a) and Adair (2001b and 2003b), offers theoretical explanations of how welfare recipients signify their ‘undeserving-ness’ to welfare officers and of how the use of cultural capital is required by welfare recipients in order to achieve positive outcomes in their quest to move from welfare to education or work. However there is little theoretical exploration of the macro level dynamics of welfare provision in the post-welfare state era. In essence both approaches provide excellent theoretical explanations of half of the phenomenon under investigation, but I argue that there is a need to connect micro-level dynamics to macro-level processes.

The novelty of my contribution lies in the dearth of pre-existing sociological analyses of the dynamics of welfare to education programmes and in the synthesis of macro and micro level analyses. To date few research studies on welfare to education
programmes have sought to theorise their dynamics in relation to class (see Adair and Dahlberg 2003; Adair 2002; Adair 2001a; London 2006; Theodore and Peck 2000). This thesis aims to connect the macro level and micro level class analysis using Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital, which also has not yet been used to any great degree to understand welfare to education programmes (see Andruske 1999a). Theoretically, this study therefore aims to provide a unique insight into the potential of a scheme like the BTEA to impact upon the cultural, symbolic, social, and thus the economic capital of my chosen population.

This thesis elaborates a critical theoretical exposition of the impact of the BTEA, on the class-based dynamics of exclusion. It adopts a strong ‘structural’ position, which sees the source of social exclusion as lying in the structured inequality of the labour market and the state, which disadvantages particular groups in society (Morris 1994, p.80). This thesis therefore aims to explore whether participation on the BTEA impacts positively upon participants’ class situation through the acquisition of valuable cultural capital. It examines the internal processes and logic of the BTEA, and its ideological underpinnings, endeavouring to investigate whether the dominant political discourse of Neoliberalism, the creation of status beliefs and the ‘New Right’ dogma of individual responsibility have been used to justify the rolling back of the welfare state, the promotion of welfare to work over welfare to education programmes, and a short-term approach being taken to the BTEA. It investigates whether the restrictions imposed on the postgraduate option of the scheme in particular, have significant implications in terms of class and social mobility given the onset of qualification inflation and the over concentration of BTEA participants in certain subject areas such as arts / humanities. In doing so, it contributes to a broader understanding of the dynamics of welfare to education programmes in the era of the post-welfare state, by striving to discover whether welfare to education programmes are incompatible with the dominant Neoliberal ideology that holds a hegemonic position at present.

I argue that focusing entirely on the macro level cannot explain the lived experiences of participation in welfare to education programmes in their entirety. A macro level focus only, for example will not address why some people who appear to be of the same class origin have different outcomes when trying to access a scheme such as the
BTEA, which should be provided uniformly throughout the country. Thus I also employ a micro level conflict theory approach, focusing on Collins’ theory (1975, cited in Kemper and Collins 1990, p.513). I utilise Bourdieu's forms of capital, in order to understand class relations in this context. This thesis particularly examines levels of cultural and social capital, and their accumulation and use by welfare recipients in accessing the BTEA and their entitlements. This thesis aims to discover how welfare policy is implemented at the micro level, and whether dominant political ideologies and the organizational culture of the civil service impact on the dynamics of interactions between welfare recipients and DSFA officers. Thus the thesis significantly adds to the work of Adair (2001b and 2003b) and Andruske (1999) in this area.

1.6 Theoretical framework:
My theoretical framework impacted upon every aspect of this research project and in particular provided important concepts that aided my analysis. I decided that a structuralist / Marxist perspective was an appropriate theoretical starting point for examining whether the BTEA has addressed the social exclusion experienced by its target population. However using just a single theoretical framework has weaknesses and no theory that I found explained everything in my data. Therefore I chose to employ multiple frameworks, so as to allow the strengths of one theoretical framework to compensate for the weaknesses of another (Flick 2006). Because of my strong social justice standpoint in relation to these issues, conflict theory offered a convincing explanation for persistent inequalities in access to education in general and for welfare recipients in particular.

My conflict theory approach functions on both a macro and a micro level\(^3\). The macro level approach consists of a more traditional Weberian class critique of society. I utilised Mutch's adaptation of Bourdieu's field theory to develop a macro level conflict theory analysis of the changes made to the BTEA in 2003 / 2004 and the proposed future direction of the scheme. Mutch identified that policy decisions result

\[^3\] Although I make reference to authors such as Ball (2004; 2006), my research eschews a Foucauldian analysis. In combing macro and micro perspectives, I adopt a structuralist rather than a post-structuralist approach. For these reasons, I draw on structural Marxism, Bourdieu, and Randall Collins rather than Foucault.
from a ‘game’ played out on a ‘field’, where the ‘players’ importance and influence is determined by their levels of capital (Mutch 2006, p.156). In addition, external historical, political, economic and social forces exert influence on the field and impact on the policy decisions taken therein. These theoretical insights serve to explain why there is minimal support for the provision of welfare to education programmes despite the evidence that such ventures ensure a greater return to the state than welfare to work or ‘workfare’ schemes.

I also adopted a critical theory approach to my case. I primarily focused on two aspects of this approach, the first of which examined the construction of ideologies, culture, and status beliefs by a power elite (Wallace and Wolf 1999, p.108) which has underpinned the ‘New Right’ ideology of personal responsibility (George and Wilding 1985) associated with, and indeed used to legitimise the Neoliberal retraction of the welfare state. However, I was intensely aware that focusing purely on the macro level political economy (with the central focus being on Neoliberalism and reluctant collectivism) could not explain the entire picture in relation to the lived experiences of the individuals in my study. I employed the theory of interaction rituals as a way of providing a micro level conflict theory approach to the project. I focused on Collins’ theory (1975, cited in Kemper and Collins 1990, p.513), which grounded a micro level understanding of stratification, “in processes of face to face interaction”. It is argued that “social structure is enacted in repetitive microinteractions and the stable or shifting relationships of individuals provide both the glue and the dynamics of that structure” (Kemper and Collins 1990, p.33). Predominantly interactions between welfare recipients and welfare officers take place in the welfare office and are for the most part controlled by the welfare officer. My theoretical perspective sensitised me to the fact that whoever controls the “spatial and material background conditions” essentially controls the path of the interaction (Rossel and Collins 2001, p.518). Additionally this perspective sensitised me to the use of “facial expressions, bodily posture, and certain kinds of behaviour”, which serve as an overriding expression of an individuals social position, and are symbols (which are recognised by the participants in such interactions) of who holds the power and authority in that interaction (Rossel and Collins 2001, p.522). The second key component of my critical theory examination of the BTEA is Bourdieu’s forms of capital, which I use to understand class dynamics in the context of such interactions.
Accordingly I particularly examined levels of cultural and social capital, and their accumulation and use by welfare recipients in accessing the BTEA and their entitlements. Using this theoretical framework demonstrated that limiting access to education contributes to limiting the cultural capital of my chosen population, which in turn has a detrimental effect on both their economic and symbolic capital and ultimately their social inclusion.

1.7 Methodology:
A qualitative methodology was most appropriate to this research as it allowed me to gain insights into my participants’ perceptions and beliefs about their participation in the BTEA scheme. The research was not only concerned with the experiences of the participants but also with the subjective meanings that these experiences have for them (Flick 2006, p.16). I also felt that qualitative research would compliment my philosophical perspective, as I believe that even though the structure of society restricts individuals, they experience those restrictions differently. My purposive sample consisted of individuals who were theoretically meaningful and reflected important aspects of my research question. A total of twenty five individuals participated in this research: eighteen participated in the focus groups, while fifteen individual interviews were completed. I determined that interviews were the most appropriate method of data collection, given the flexibility that they offered and their potential for obtaining rich data.

I conducted interviews with BTEA participants and those involved in designing and administrating the scheme (a senior civil servant from the DSFA, Minister Willie O’Dea, Joan Burton TD, Michael Ring TD, and Proinsias De Rossa MEP). I believed that these people could provide valuable insights into the development and administration of the BTEA, given that they had been involved in its progression (the civil servant, Burton, De Rossa, and O’Dea,) or in the case of Michael Ring had been very vocal (and knowledgeable) about the scheme in the Dáil (the Irish parliament).

I organised focus groups with BTEA participants; composition being organised by the manner in which volunteers had qualified for the BTEA (i.e. disability payment, lone parent’s payment or unemployment payment). In-depth individual interviews were also conducted to examine and expand on issues emerging from those focus groups.
These interviews examined the experiences of BTEA participants and assessed whether their needs and aspirations were met by participating on the scheme. Both the focus groups and individual interviews were conducted using an interview guide, designed to reflect issues highlighted in previous research or prior interviews conducted (Bogdan and Biklen 1992; Holstein and Gubrium 1995). This approach offered tremendous insight into how the BTEA students themselves had come to understand the workings of the scheme. While the focus groups and one to one interviews provided information on how individual participants experienced the dynamics of the BTEA in particular geographical locations, I argue that my findings are theoretically transferable, particularly as the scheme is a national scheme and should be administered uniformly throughout the state.

To develop a broader overview of the pathways of BTEA participants, I also engaged in secondary analysis. Using secondary statistical data from the DSFA, in conjunction with Healy’s (1997) study on the TLA (the forerunner to the BTEA), I constructed an accurate up to date profile of BTEA participants’ course of study, level of qualification being pursued, and how they qualified for the scheme. Additionally I collected secondary statistical data on educational attainment in the Irish labour force, 3rd level graduate destinations, graduate salaries, and enrolment rates of various socio-economic groups in 3rd level institutions. I analysed this statistical data and ultimately profiled where graduates entered the labour market and the return they got from this investment in terms of salaries etc. (see chapter 6).

My analysis of the qualitative data collected was based on data reduction and interpretation of that data (Cresswell 1998). I employed grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) as my method of data analysis, allowing the theory to develop from data interpretation. While the research design was theoretically driven, the use of grounded theory as a method of data analysis, combined with bracketing my assumptions enabled me to gain an enhanced understanding of the experiences and beliefs of my participants. I believe the fact that I was theoretically driven is compatible with the purist qualitative / grounded theory belief that the theory should emerge from the data. The ‘issues’ that emerge from the data can be judged as separate from my initial theoretical framework and prior understandings of the issues involved, as I allowed for the possibility that other theories would hold greater
explanatory power and my theoretical framework evolved with the research process.

In order to ensure the credibility of my research, I employed six verification procedures as recommended by Creswell (1998, pp.201-203). I utilised triangulation, (a combination of diverse methods, sources, areas of expertise, and theories) to enhance the trustworthiness and transferability of my findings (Creswell 1998, p.202). Additionally I utilised peer-debriefing and clarified any researcher bias I may have had. I believe that no one can ever truly be objective, as we all have our own prior life histories and beliefs, which will impact on our research, even if it is only at a subconscious level. Consequently by being frank and honest regarding my reflections on the research process and documenting any prior assumptions, biases etc. that I may have had, I have sought to minimise their impact and allow you the reader to make an informed analysis regarding my conclusions and whether any of my previous history / biases have impacted on those conclusions (McGrath 2000, p.7). Students who participated in the study also partially acted as co-researchers, interacting with the data on several levels over the duration of the project (Miles and Huberman 1994; Creswell 1998; Stake 1995). I shared transcripts, coding, drafts, conference papers and journal articles on various occasions with individual students to ensure I was representing them and their experiences as accurately as possible. All commented that my analysis was extremely accurate and very much reflected the lived reality of being a BTEA student at that time. I utilised the procedure of external audit, where I subjected my sample, methodology, findings and analysis to external comment and critique, through sharing my findings at conferences and having elements of my work published in an international peer reviewed journal. Finally I include elements of the raw data in the report in order to provide a rich thick description of the experiences of my participants and key informants, and I am confident that as a result of these procedures you will have belief in the validity of my research.
1.8 Chapter outline:

This thesis is organised into three sections. The first section (chapters two and three) presents the methodology adopted for this project. Having discussed the rationale for the study, the research question, and the aims and objectives of the research in this chapter, I proceed to demonstrate in chapter two how I married my methodological choices with my chosen theoretical framework. I provide a detailed account of my sampling strategy and how I subsequently gathered, analysed and made sense of my data. I describe why I chose qualitative research methods and document the verification procedures undertaken to improve the trustworthiness of this research. This chapter is as a result, a description of the decisions and circumstances which have formed, and were in turn shaped by the research questions. Chapter three profiles both the key informants and the BTEA participants who were central to the production of the knowledge that this thesis is founded upon. Additionally I offer my reflections on the research process, logging my prior biases, assumptions and life history in as much detail as possible in order to enable the reader to decide whether my previous history has impacted positively, neutrally, or negatively on this research process, thus enhancing the trustworthiness of my research.

Section two (chapters four and five) examines the potential of education to address social inequality / exclusion and the provision and nature of welfare to education programmes in the post-welfare state Neoliberal era. In chapter four, I theoretically and empirically explore educational inequality in Ireland. I argue that the Irish education system largely controls levels of social mobility and that its meritocratic rhetoric hides the continuation of class privilege. Furthermore I examine the myth of ‘second chance’ education, which allegedly offers everyone equal opportunities, while simultaneously allowing existing class inequalities to remain unaltered. This chapter also provides clear empirical evidence that despite increases in overall admission rates to 3rd level, there still remains relative class-based inequality in access to higher education in Ireland. Chapter five discusses competing understandings of social exclusion and the implications that such differing understandings have for measures introduced to address that exclusion. In essence the chapter demonstrates that the current hegemonic discourse offers a ‘cultural’ definition of social exclusion resulting in policy being introduced which seeks to alter the behaviour of the excluded but does nothing to address the ‘structural’ causes of social exclusion (Morris 1994
It examines the emergence of Neoliberalism as the dominant political discourse in the 1980s, documenting how the resultant construction of status beliefs and the ‘New Right’ ideology of personal responsibility have been used to provide a justification for the retraction of the welfare state, and the promotion of ‘workfare’ in western societies. It further examines the system of welfare provision and the emergence of activation policies in Ireland in order that we may locate the BTEA in its global context.

The final section (chapters six and seven) presents the findings of the data analysis process and a discussion of these findings. Chapter six develops a macro level understanding of the development and administration of the BTEA. I will show that Neoliberal views favouring welfare to work programmes hold a dominant position within the DSFA (particularly in the administration of such programmes). The chapter shows that this has resulted in a lesser role for welfare to education programmes relative to welfare to work schemes, in spite of the former’s obvious and accepted successes. The chapter examines the administrative status of the BTEA, which is found to impact negatively on the experiences of BTEA participants and also serves to discourage potential applicants. It examines how welfare recipients in Ireland have been constructed as ‘undeserving’, a construction which offers a ‘justification’ for a short-term approach being taken to the BTEA. The chapter concludes by examining the changes to the criteria for the BTEA introduced in 2003 / 2004 and the route the DSFA wish to take in relation to the progression of the scheme, both of which are found to have a detrimental impact on BTEA participants and potential applicants.

Chapter seven connects the micro to the macro level analysis, as the ability of the BTEA to address social exclusion is impacted at both levels. I confirm the continuing impact of class on the lived experiences of those who either wish to, or are availing of the BTEA scheme. While chapter five demonstrates upward social mobility for BTEA participants and consequently a positive impact on social exclusion, this chapter answers the most important question in relation to addressing the social exclusion of welfare recipients in Ireland, which is ‘who gets access to the BTEA scheme and why?’ I analyse the population availing of the BTEA, the motivations that the participants in this research expressed for returning to 3rd level education, how they access 3rd level courses, the types of course they choose, and the challenges that they
faced in achieving their aspirations. I move to develop a micro level understanding of my participants’ experiences of the administration of the BTEA and how it affects both access to and participation in 3rd level education. I focus on how participants discover, obtain and maintain the various entitlements they have while participating in the BTEA scheme. The chapter finds that even the positive approaches that have been taken at the macro level to facilitate access are restricted in scope and substantially modified in practice on the micro level, as a consequence of “power ritual” interactions (Rossel and Collins 2001) between welfare recipients and DSFA officers. Accordingly I argue that levels of both social and cultural capital influence one’s ability to achieve a successful outcome in these interactions, and ultimately have a major effect on the overall outcomes for potential and actual participants on the BTEA scheme in terms of acquiring both information on the BTEA and entitlements. I find that welfare recipients who possess such capital can successfully negotiate administrative obstacles while those who do not are doubly disadvantaged in this regard.

Finally, chapter eight of the thesis presents the conclusions I have drawn as a result of undertaking this research project. It highlights the positive impact of participation on the BTEA upon participants’ class situation, economic capital and / or levels of cultural capital. The thesis finds that the latter is in turn used to acquire more sustainable and secure employment, offering welfare recipients the tools to combat their own exclusion and potentially that of their children. However I find that the effectiveness of the BTEA in addressing more than individual exclusion is limited by the requirement for cultural and social capital in order to negotiate the system and access the benefits it can offer. This finding informs an evaluation of the state response to the BTEA as minimalist; with the evident lack of will to maximize the BTEA’s potential being reinforced by dominant Neoliberal ideologies. Access to education at all levels, is a right, which a society should provide for its citizens. Accordingly I make recommendations for the introduction of changes, which would help alleviate the class-based social exclusion of welfare recipients in Ireland at present.
CHAPTER TWO
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction:
There is a dual purpose to this chapter, to document the ways in which I have aligned methodological choices with the theoretical framework of my research, and to provide a step by step account of how I have collected, analysed and interpreted the resultant data. The chapter begins by outlining why I chose to employ a primarily qualitative methodology, before introducing the theoretical perspectives that have informed my methodology. I adopted a conflict theory approach, which operated on both a macro and micro level. I argue that this micro/macro dialectic was appropriate because, while I hold that inequalities in access to education are supported by the hegemonic position of Neoliberalism, (macro level) individual participants in (and potential applicants for) the BTEA do not experience the effects of these Neoliberal policies and consequent inequalities in a uniform manner (micro level). My purposive sample consisted of five key state level actors who aided my understanding of the macro level dynamics of the BTEA and the impact of this scheme on access to and participation in 3rd level education, through an examination of the internal operation and logic of the BTEA and its ideological underpinnings. In addition, the experiences of nineteen BTEA participants created a micro-level understanding of these same dynamics, in particular whether an individuals’ level of cultural, social, and economic capital impacts on their ability to access the BTEA and/or 3rd level education. The data collection methods and the method of data analysis are subsequently elaborated. The chapter closes with a section discussing the verification procedures I undertook in order to improve the trustworthiness of my research.

2.1 Qualitative research:
I decided to employ a qualitative methodology for this study. Creswell (1998, p.15) argues that qualitative research is a way of developing an understanding of social problems, based on distinct procedural “traditions of inquiry”, which construct a multifaceted picture, through the analysis of the participants’ comprehensive views on the issues at hand. I felt that a qualitative methodology (to examine the macro and micro level dynamics of the BTEA and the impact that the scheme has on access to
and participation in 3rd level education and ultimately social inclusion) would provide invaluable insights into my participants’ perceptions of social exclusion and how it is addressed by the scheme. This research is not only concerned with the experiences of the participants, but also with the subjective meanings that these experiences have for them (see Flick 2006, p.16). Thus it was understood that the participants taking part in this research might attribute different meanings to things and have different perspectives than people who have not experienced social exclusion (McGrath 2000, p.5). I believed that qualitative research methods would allow for the intensity of interaction between the researcher and participants, which I deemed necessary in order to get to the core of the issues under investigation.

I argue that qualitative research also complements my philosophical perspective, as I believe that even though the organization of society curbs the agency of individuals, they experience such limitations in diverse ways. In the context of my research I wished to understand why some members of certain socio-economic groups were successful in getting into 3rd level while others were not, or why some were successful at accessing the BTEA while others could not. I argue that qualitative research has proved the best route to discovering how individuals with an apparently similar set of circumstances experience educational inequality differently.

2.2 Philosophical perspective:
Theory is a fundamental building block in qualitative research, and accordingly I argue that “research cannot be conducted without the conscious or unconscious use of underlying theory” (Broido and Manning 2002; Papineau 1979 cited in Mertz and Anfara 2006, p.190). Furthermore, there are many good reasons for utilising a stated theoretical framework, particularly when it comes to focusing your research. By acting as a ‘lens’ (Harris 2006) the framework aids the researcher in sifting through the large amounts of data they will have collected. Indeed, it frames all aspects of the study from the start to finish and provides important concepts that are used in the coding and analysis of the data generated (Mertz and Anfara 2006, pp.192-193). My theoretical framework(s) proved vitally important in offering me ways of understanding my data.
Initially I adopted a structuralist / Marxist philosophical perspective to guide my research project. This perspective holds that there are intrinsic restrictions imposed by the structure of society on individual social actors, and the design and implementation of policy by politicians and civil servants is a manifestation of these fundamental structural restrictions (Bilton et al. 1996, p.291; Bowles and Gintis 1986; Peters 1999). I chose Marxism because I see society being structured along class lines, particularly in vitally important areas like education. I believe that the limitations imposed on social actors by the structure of society are not borne (equally) by all and in most cases the structural constraints imposed by society serve the interests of minority elites. I selected this as an appropriate theoretical starting point for examining whether the BTEA has addressed the social exclusion experienced by its target population or has simply ensured the continuance of dominant class interests in the implementation and make up of economic and social policies (Sherman 1995; Bilton et al. 1996). However, I remained open to the explanatory power of other theoretical frameworks throughout the research process.

As the research progressed my structuralist / Marxist approach evidenced limitations in devising the questions that I needed to ask of my participants, or in explaining the issues that they were raising with me. I began to wonder if my theoretical framework (and my research expertise) was sufficient to investigate what were becoming increasingly complex issues. I was heartened to find that I was not alone in encountering such difficulties and doubts. Mertz and Anfara (2006, p.191) highlighted that although we might find a theoretical framework that fits quickly, it is more likely that we will have to actively search for one. This progression is characterized by a lot of reading, discussion with your peers and supervisor; and after a process wherein you find and reject other potential theoretical frameworks you finally arrive at one (or more than one) which you use. Kearney and Hyle (2006) argue that any single theoretical framework has strengths and weaknesses and therefore choosing to utilise multiple frameworks together in a study can provide greater insights. One theoretical framework can compensate for the weaknesses of another. Such a “triangulation of perspectives” broadens the focus on the phenomenon under investigation and provides diverse ways of understanding different aspects of the research question (Flick 2006, p74; see also Creswell 1998, p.78).
This is the approach that I decided to take as I found that no one theory explained everything in my data. I used a combination of theoretical frameworks, each of which explained pieces of my jigsaw, with the combined pieces providing a more complete picture. Gradually as my work with the participants and my reading developed, several theoretical viewpoints drawn from conflict theory, came to inform and progress the increasing complexity of my work. Conflict theory holds that

“there is a continual struggle in society for various “goods” – wealth, power, or prestige….Since power and prestige are inherently scarce commodities, and wealth is often contingent upon them, the ambition of even a small proportion of persons for more than equal shares of these goods sets up an implicit counter struggle on the part of others to avoid subjection and disesteem... The struggle for wealth, power and prestige is carried out primarily through organisations” (Collins 1971, p.1009).

Having come to the research from a social justice standpoint, conflict theory offered me a plausible explanation of why inequalities exist in access to education in general (see Lynch 1999; Lynch and O’ Riordan 1998; Milbourne 2002; Fulcher and Scott 2007) and for welfare recipients in particular. I adopted a macro and micro level conflict theory approach to the research. At a macro level, my approach consisted of a more traditional Weberian class critique of society and also critical theory, focusing on the construction of ideologies, culture, and the accumulation and use of capital. The critical theory approach proved useful in illuminating the process whereby “material conditions and systems of ideology reproduce class structures” (Lincoln and Denzin 1998, p.11; see also Mutch 2006, p.165).

Critical theory informed my understanding of how the construction of status beliefs by a power elite (Wallace and Wolf 1999, p.108) underpins the functionalist and ever more dominant ‘New Right’ ideology of personal responsibility associated with the roll back of the welfare state (Hills 1998; George and Wilding 1985; Hyde and Dixon 2002; see chapter five for a detailed discussion). These theoretical insights served to explain why there is minimal support for the provision of welfare to education programmes despite evidence that these programmes provide a greater return for the state (and hence the tax paying public) than welfare to work schemes (see the work of Adair 2007; Adair 2001a; Zhan et al. 2004; Polokaw et al. 2004; Theodore and Peck 2000). By constructing welfare recipients as the ‘undeserving’ poor it becomes popular belief (particularly in ‘successful’ Celtic Tiger Ireland) that they are
responsible for their own misfortune, and are largely undeserving of our assistance (see Devereux 1998; OPEN 2006; Healy 2004; Culleton et al. 2005; Lens 2002). This dominant ideology of personal responsibility, which I will argue has been internalised by the vast majority of our citizens (see chapters 5 and 6) serves to legitimate the continuing roll back welfare provision.

Bourdieu’s forms of capital, also drawn from critical theory (particularly cultural capital and its uses) further contributed to my theoretical framework. Bourdieu argued that the children of middle and upper class families have learned a form of cultural behaviour that their working class peers haven’t, and which allows the former to succeed in the educational system over and over again (Wallace and Wolf 1999, p.112). This theory aided my investigation of how and why my participants had managed to access the BTEA while other welfare recipients had not. I examined the levels of embodied, institutional and objectified (to a lesser extent) cultural capital that my participants possessed, and it became apparent to me from working with Bourdieu’s concepts of capital that even those participants with low levels of cultural capital, were advantaged by it, particularly in exercising their social capital. In relation to the latter, they drew on the cultural capital of others in their social networks, utilising their cultural capital in their efforts to access 3rd level education.

My macro level analysis of the informant’s data, made use of Mutch's (2006) adaptation of Bourdieu's field theory to theorise changes made to the BTEA in 2003 / 2004, and decisions taken about the future of the scheme by a working group reviewing the BTEA in 2005. Mutch identified that in coming to decisions about policy a ‘field’ is created where a ‘game is played’ to arrive at decisions which are then implemented. There are additional external forces at work on the field, which are historical, political, economic and social. Additionally the ‘players’ involved in the ‘game’ “use capital to gain access to and position themselves on the field” where the “major groups vied for control” (Mutch 2006, p.156). This framework and the concept of capital allows us to understand

“Who was granted entry to the field and why? Which ideological positions were favoured and why? Who was excluded and why? What particular capital did members bring and how was this valued? What forces from outside this micro field influenced what happened within?” (Mutch 2006, p.157).
Accordingly I felt that this element of my framework was particularly useful in developing an understanding of changes to the BTEA, and its likely future development. The various ‘players’ (in this instance the DSFA and the Department of Education, both of whom are constrained by the budgets that they receive from the Department of Finance) essentially battle it out on the ‘field’ in order to arrive at policy decisions concerning the BTEA.

However, I was extremely aware that I could not explain what was happening to the BTEA participants in my sample by focusing entirely on the macro level. For instance, I was faced with the scenario of participants who when (interacting with the DSFA) in similar situations did not receive similar outcomes. It was apparent that even people with similar levels of capital were receiving different results. Collins (1975) has remodelled the Weberian theory of stratification to a micro level, “grounding it in processes of face to face interaction” (cited in Kemper and Collins 1990, p.513). This theoretical development has been progressed by Rossel and Collins (2001, p.513) who combined stratification with interaction rituals to prove an “adequate microsociological theory for conflict sociology”. It is argued that “social structure is enacted in repetitive microinteractions and the stable or shifting relationships of individuals provide both the glue and the dynamics of that structure” (Kemper and Collins 1990, p.33).

Interactions between welfare recipients and welfare officers take place (predominantly) in the welfare office and are for the most part controlled by the welfare officer. Whoever controls the “spatial and material background conditions” controls the path of the interaction (Rossel and Collins 2001, p.518). Additionally “facial expressions, bodily posture, and certain kinds of behaviour” serve as a (dominant) demonstration of an individuals social position and these symbols are recognised by the participants in the interaction as signs of who holds the power and authority (Rossel and Collins 2001, p.522). Consequently this part of my theoretical framework offered a viable explanation of participants’ narratives of their interactions with civil servants when seeking to gain access to entitlements, information etc.

Additionally this perspective offered an explanation as to why some welfare recipients who had a negative outcome from an interaction with a welfare officer expressed their reluctance to look to obtain additional entitlements again, irrespective
of whether they are rightfully permitted to acquire them. I was made acutely aware that when the DSFA officer comes out on top in an interaction their power is enhanced by the demonstration of their capability to impose their will over the other participants in the interaction (Weber 1978, p.926 cited in Kemper and Collins 1990, p.56). This outcome also increases the probability that the other actor (the welfare recipient) will not be able to come out on top in any future interactions (Scherer 1984, cited in Kemper and Collins 1990, p.56). This can result in the confidence of the welfare recipient, that “is so large a part of the ability to play a winning hand in the ongoing microinteractions that determine the actor’s reputation and place”, (Kemper and Collins 1990, p.56) being destroyed. Finally I was sensitised to the fact that when a welfare recipient achieves a positive outcome in these interactions, “the emotional comfort experienced from receiving status will not only increase the likelihood of acting so as to produce more such outcomes, but also allows the actor to be more generous in the conferral of status on others” (Isen 1970; Batson et al. 1979, cited in Kemper and Collins 1990, p.56; see also Ridgeway 2001, p.328). This offered a theoretical explanation as to why some of my participants who had come out on top in their interactions with welfare officers were so keen to stress how they had done so, primarily in order that other participants (whom they did not know prior to engaging with the research) could utilise the same strategies and achieve similar results. This process is indicative of the “conferral of status” on to other participants so as to increase their chances of achieving success from future interactions with DSFA officers.

2.3 Selection of participants:
Most qualitative research is guided by purposive sampling (Lindlof 1995) with the sample chosen to provide conceptual richness. My sample consisted of individuals who were theoretically meaningful and information rich, and reflected important aspects of my research question. Additionally as my sample represented conflicting positions (those in receipt of the BTEA, those charged with advancing the BTEA, government Ministers and opposition politicians) it meant that I could produce true to life explanations.

I began by recruiting key informants (people who could provide valuable insights into the development and administration of the BTEA). I discuss the identity of these
individuals and their significance to the research in chapter three. I then moved to assemble my sample of individuals with direct experience of the BTEA. Accessing a large sample was problematic given the small size of the population in question and the geographic dispersion of this population throughout the country. In addition, the fact that the population were welfare recipients meant that I was reliant on volunteer sampling, as I would not have been granted access to any existent sampling frame. The volunteer sample was obtained through advertising in higher-level institutes, mature student and access offices, community welfare, and social welfare offices. Additionally, participants were selected to represent people with disabilities, single parents and people who had been unemployed prior to re-entry to education. The following subgroups were also purposively included.

- Undergraduates in receipt of the BTEA.
- Final year undergraduates in receipt of BTEA.
- Postgraduates who had been in receipt of BTEA as undergraduates.
- Unsuccessful applicants for the BTEA.

As a result of this sampling strategy a total of 25 individuals participated in this research. Eighteen individuals participated in the focus groups, and a further fifteen individual interviews were completed.

2.4 Ethics:
Ethical decisions were taken throughout the research process, from conceptualisation and research design, to data collection and analysis, through to the final completion of this thesis (Edwards and Mauthner 2002, p.19). In making these decisions I had an ethical responsibility to safeguard the interests of the participants and to report my findings truthfully and accurately (Bryman 2004; Mauthner et al. 2002; Seale et al. 2004; Creswell 1998; Flick 2006). I made use of the “virtue ethics of skills” model which suggests that rather than merely adhering to a general set of principles, researchers’ ethical instincts, feelings and reflective skills, including their sensibilities in undertaking conversations with the research participants should be emphasised (Edwards and Mauthner 2002, p.20). Additionally I consulted the Sociological Association of Irelands’ (SAI) ethical guidelines and found two very clear directives that serve as a guide for sociologists in determining ethical courses of action, those being “Integrity” and “Social Responsibility”.

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“Trust applies to the rapport or the discursive practices defining the standards of presenting both the researcher and the work as trustworthy. In this way the three ethical issues of consent, confidentiality and trust are closely linked” (Fine 1993, cited in Ryen 2004, p.234). This brings me to the first directive that informed my ethical decision making, “integrity”. The SAI (2007) state that researchers do not “knowingly make or support statements that are false, misleading, or deceptive either because of what they suggest or omit in relation to their own work activities”. I adhered rigidly to this principle and the section entitled ‘Verification Procedures and Trustworthiness’ in this chapter explains to the reader how they can have confidence that I have done just so. Regarding the latter directive, the SAI (2007) state that sociologists

“while promoting academic freedom and the production and dissemination of knowledge in forms that are accessible to the public... have a general duty to safeguard the confidentiality of privileged information. They are sensitive to issues arising from inequalities of power and alert to possible conflicts of interest that may prevent them from conducting their work in a fair and impartial manner”.

This was to be the primary guiding principle of my research. In the early stages of this project (long before I had any contact with potential participants) I submitted a research proposal to the University of Limericks’ ethics committee. I informed the committee of the details of my study and submitted copies of the various information letters (to key participants and BTEA participants), the informed consent documents (for the key participants’ and BTEA participants’ one to one interviews, and the BTEA participants’ focus groups), the recruitment posters, and a non disclosure of confidential information document, designed for use in the event that I would hire a transcriber (which I did not). Once the University ethics committee had approved these documents, they were used for the duration of my research project.

2.4.1 Informed Consent:

On the subject of access, the limitations of informed consent have been a topic of continuous debate among qualitative researchers (Edwards and Mauthner 2002, p.19; Flick 2006). It was necessary and appropriate that reasonably informed consent was obtained from the participants before commencing data collection. My consent forms (approved by the University of Limericks’ Ethics Committee) included a brief description of the purpose of the participant’s involvement (See Appendix I). The accompanying information letter ensured in as much as was possible that participation
was voluntary. These documents informed the participants of the nature and extent of the research and asked the individual to reflect on whether they wished to participate. However obtaining informed consent at the beginning of the project does not to mean that it does not have to be sought again (Miller and Bell 2002, p.65) therefore informed consent was obtained from the participants prior to each meeting I had with them.

2.42: Confidentiality:
Before I spoke to any of my participants I needed to consider what constituted harm to them (see Bryman 2004, p.509; Ryen, 2004). I tried to place myself in the shoes of possible participants, identify what ethical issues were likely to arise and how I would deal with them. For the students who were receiving the BTEA I felt that the most important issue would be the protection of their identity. I believed that potential participants might speak for example about bending the rules in order to qualify (and indeed some did). Consequently I predicted that participants might have concerns about how secure the information they gave me would be, given that information might lead to a loss of income for the participants (if for example a participant who had manipulated the scheme for their own benefit was identifiable by a member of the DSFA). In fact this was the main concern that was expressed prior to commencement of the focus groups.

Using focus groups presented difficulties in guaranteeing confidentiality given that there were numerous participants in each focus group. Any one of these participants could have decided to disregard the confidentiality of individual members in that particular group. These issues were discussed openly in assembling focus groups. Group participants were aware that they might divulge sensitive information about themselves, which could be damaging to their situation. Their mutual acceptance of this shared risk seemed to set the participants at ease. From their perspective they held that they were all potentially “hanging themselves” with the information that they were divulging. A verbal agreement was reached between the participants that they would not speak of the content of the focus groups to anyone else. The guarantee of confidentiality that I gave to the participants and that given to the group by individual members allayed any fears about confidentiality.
Among the key informants the civil servant located in the DSFA was unsure as to whether they would participate in the study as they had several concerns. They expressed unease about having the interview recorded, but once I informed them of how the tape was to be secured and what it was to be used for (transcription of the interview, which they could subsequently check for identifiers) they no longer worried about this. Likewise they were very concerned about how they would be referred to or if they could be identified from their transcript. The offer of allowing them to view the transcript of their interview and remove anything that they thought could identify them alleviated these anxieties. Finally this particular informant had concerns about answering questions related to the changes that were made to the BTEA in 2003 / 2004, given that these particular changes were the subject of ongoing court proceedings. I reiterated that they did not have to discuss any issue, which they were not comfortable with. All of this was in keeping with the “virtue ethics of skills” model. As a result of these assurances the civil servant took part in the research.

Each key informant with the exception of the senior civil servant was asked if it would be agreeable to them to be referred to by name in the research; I felt that it was appropriate to suggest this mode of reference as these individuals were leading public figures who are on record in the public domain speaking about these issues. None of those to whom I spoke had any difficulties with being named. I suggested to the senior civil servant that they be referred to by (a) by name, or (b) job title. In this particular instance the civil servant wished to be referred to by their job title, which I was more than happy to do. In the case of the BTEA recipients I guaranteed their confidentiality and refer to all by pseudonym.

Bryman (2004, p.510) speaks of the need to exercise care in maintaining the confidentiality of records, ensuring that identities, and records, notes etc, made about participants be kept secure and confidential, so as to ensure that individual participants are not identifiable. Having obtained the interview data, I duplicated each tape so that in the eventuality of encountering any problems with the original, the data would not be lost. These audio tapes were stored in a locked drawer in my home office, together with printed copies of the interview transcripts. The transcripts from the tapes were inputted into NVivo and password protected, while any printed copies of the transcripts were shredded once they had been used in the analysis process.
Additionally each participant was offered the opportunity to check their respective transcripts to ensure that I had reproduced the data accurately and protected their confidentiality. The participants were offered the opportunity to remove anything, which they deemed that they could be identified from. Finally my supervisor also offered suggestions as to possible identifiers, which could be removed, for example the name of the university that an individual participant was attending.

2.43 Issues of volunteerism:
I had previously taught several of those who decided to participate in the research at the University of Limerick (most of them in a module on social research methods). As such it is important to clarify that I was not teaching any of them at the time they volunteered and there was little chance that I would be teaching them again. Therefore while on the surface this relationship may appear to have compromised their volunteerism, in actuality the decision of these individuals to take part in the study was unlikely to have been affected. These individuals were provided with the same guarantees of confidentiality as everyone else, and indeed I would argue that as our contact had occurred as a result of having taken the module I taught on research methods, these individuals were even more informed about their rights as research participants than the other volunteers.

2.44 Ethical Dilemmas:
I was again faced with an ethical dilemma after the second round of interviews when one participant gave me documents which proved that the BTEA was still being given to some students undertaking Masters programmes, despite such courses no longer having entitlement for BTEA purposes. This participant provided me with their application form and their acceptance letter from the DSFA, both of which clearly state that a Masters course was being pursued. The participant was quite adamant that I should use these documents, as they were tangible evidence that there are inconsistencies in the administration of the BTEA. However I had given an undertaking at the start of this research project that no participant should have an increased risk of being worse off by participating. Consequently I felt that the risk to this participant was too great, as if he was ‘discovered’ there was a very real possibility that he would lose his BTEA and therefore no longer be in a position to continue his studies. I consulted with my supervisor to see if she was aware of any
way that we could use this information while still protecting the participant’s confidentiality. She in turn consulted with our Head of Department. None of us could see a manner in which it was possible to use the actual documents and still protect the participant’s identity. Ultimately, after this consultation process I decided that I could not use these documents, though I still have them in my possession.

The trust the aforementioned participant placed in me raises another ethical issue of which I was aware throughout the research. That is where interviewees are confronted by qualitative interviewers who are skilled in the art of ‘doing rapport’ in order to achieve disclosure. It is argued that this process of ‘doing rapport’ can limit the chances of the interviewee challenging the interviewing process as they may feel that are betraying the researcher’s ‘manufactured’ friendship (Duncombe and Jessop 2002, p.112). In retrospect, I can honestly say that I did not fake friendship with any of my participants. Where I had a rapport with a participant it was genuine (possibly as a result of shared experiences). I found the participants to be truly interesting and articulate, and I had the utmost respect for their pursuit of 3rd level qualifications in spite of the barriers with which they were regularly faced. In fact, I have formed friendships with several of the participants, which continue to this day outside of the research process.

2.45 Empowering the participants:
Feminist research has focused on empowering and even politicising those taking part in the research. Consequently feminist researchers bring a value judgement to their research in that they believe there is a need for social change (Gillies and Alldred 2002, pp.42-43). As mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, I came to this research with a sense of social justice, and where individuals were not in receipt of their full entitlements I felt that I should endeavour to give them the tools that they needed to obtain those entitlements. I was aware that my questions would focus participants’ minds on the obstacles that they faced but I did not want to highlight these restrictions without showing the participants ways of overcoming them (see section 7.141 for an example concerning entitlement to a local authority grant). If these limitations are not fully explained to (and understood by) the participants then there is a very real danger that they may feel even more dis-empowered as a result. This can happen as a result of the participant’s apparent incapability of living up to the new expectations that they
may have about implementing consequential changes in their lives (Gillies and Allred 2002, p.45). Thus approaching research with the aim of encouraging participants to do something about their circumstances themselves needed to be considered carefully.

In this particular case, when I made the decision to aid my participants in obtaining their full entitlements, I did so as a working class academic, who had been a participant on the BTEA in the very recent past, and who was very mindful of the barriers that some of these individuals needed / wanted to overcome. Consequently I sometimes had to balance my role as researcher with that of advisor. I was mindful of not allowing my role as advisor impact on the research and therefore I keep this separate from the interview process. After the interviews finished, or at a pre-arranged meeting, or via e-mail, I answered queries and provided information on a range of topics for the participants. Over the duration I was asked for advice about obtaining 3rd level grants, social welfare entitlements, anomalies in BTEA payments, and even how to go about applying for college. This may possibly have created a conflict of interests as the participants may have felt obliged to ‘return the favour’ by agreeing to be interviewed. However I do not believe that to be the case. I reiterated that any information / help that I offered was irrespective of whether they took part or continued to take part in the study. Indeed I provided the same information for others who did not take part in this research. As a consequence of providing certain information to my participants about their entitlements and how to obtain them, two of my participants received additional social welfare entitlements which they had not received previously; while others received information about 3rd level grants which benefited them financially. Of the individuals who asked me for information about getting into college, two were successful (that I know of).

I believe that participation in the research benefited the participants in a number of ways. It was apparent to me that as a consequence of engaging with each other in the focus groups, participants recognised a shared experience in relation to the BTEA and obtained a reassurance from knowing that they were not alone in dealing with the barriers that they had to overcome. Participants discussed coping strategies, which had improved their outcomes (such as asking for decisions in writing signed by the individual making the decision and their supervisor) when dealing with the civil
service. Finally some participants were happy just to be able to tell their story to someone who was genuinely interested in their experiences. The only negative instance I can recall is where individuals discovered through their participation in the research that they could not continue to receive the BTEA if they went on to postgraduate study. I recall vividly the look of utter disappointment on their faces when I confirmed that this was indeed the case and I can only imagine that I must have looked somewhat similar when I was given that same news. However even in these cases I explained that there were other options available to make up the financial shortfall (such as applying to give tutorials) if they wanted to continue on to postgraduate study. Consequently I believe that as a result of participating in the research project that most of the participants actually benefited to some degree (some financially and others psychologically / emotionally).

2.5 Data Collection Process:
As I was utilising a qualitative methodology, I decided that interviews were the most appropriate method of data collection, given the flexibility that they offered and their potential for obtaining rich data about how the participants interpreted the success or failure of the BTEA in combating social exclusion. This decision is further justified in section 2.53

2.51 Key Informants:
I began my research by conducting individual interviews with the key informants that I had identified. All bar three of these individuals agreed to participate in the study. It was interesting that all three refusals were from those who held the position of Minister for Social and Family Affairs either at the time of the changes made to the scheme in 2003 or subsequently. I begin this section by documenting the steps taken to attain the participation of these three individuals.

Contact was made with Mary Coughlan⁴ (7.3.06); the Minister who had introduced the restrictive changes to the BTEA in 2003 / 2004 and an information letter asking her to participate in my research project was provided. Having given her two weeks to reflect on my request, I again contacted the Minister but was informed that she

⁴ She had by now moved from the Department of Social & Family Affairs to the Department of Agriculture & Food
thought the current “Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs, Mr. Seamus Brennan would be more appropriate to interview.... as it would be more his area of responsibility” (Kearney 2006). On March 23rd I again contacted Minister Coughlan’s secretary and clarified that I wanted to interview Minister Coughlan in particular, as I wished to access her reasoning for her decision to make the changes to the BTEA Scheme in 2003 / 2004. I reiterated that I had heard the opinions of others on this matter and felt it would only be fair to allow the Minister to give her side of the story. I received no reply. Even a final effort where I asked if the Minister wished to participate by answering some central questions via e-mail (Power 2006a) proved fruitless and I received no further correspondence from either the Minister or her secretary on the matter.

I contacted the then Minister of Social and Family Affairs Seamus Brennan on March 27th 2006, with an information letter via e-mail, asking him to participate in the study. The Ministers’ special advisor replied saying that “due to heavy pressure of work, he will be unable to participate on a formal interview basis. However, if you wish to pose particular questions by e-mail, he will arrange to have responses sent to you” (Lahiffe 2006a). I was asked to limit the amount of questions to six or seven (Lahiffe 2006b). At the end of October I sent the questions to the Ministers’ advisor and received a reply two months later (31.1.07), which stated that “the Minister had asked a number of people for assistance in getting the replies to you and we are in the process of assembling information” (Lahiffe 2007a). It was another five weeks before I received any further correspondence (after again making the initial contact), and I was informed that “regretfully, it has not been possible for the Minister to get to your questions and at this stage, I don't think we can give the time required to provide the detailed answers” (Lahiffe 2007b).

Martin Cullen succeeded Seamus Brennan as Minister for Social and Family Affairs after the 2007 general election. I contacted Minister Cullen on his first day in office (15.6.07) and asked if he would be willing to participate in the same manner as the previous Minister had agreed. I contacted the Minister on four further occasions, without receiving any acknowledgement of my correspondence. In my final e-mail correspondence I stated that “in light of the review of the Irish Public Service being

5 June 26th, July 4th, 11th, & 17th 2007
conducted by the OECD at present, I find it staggering that I have yet to receive any acknowledgement from your Department that you are even considering assisting me in this matter” (Power 2007). I subsequently received a response via e-mail on August 31st 2007, from a senior civil servant in the DSFA answering the eight questions posed to the Minister.

At the start of April 2006 I spoke to the senior civil servant from the DSFA in a private location of their choosing. The interview was over an hour in duration. We spoke about a range of topics including how the BTEA has enabled access to 3rd level education, how effective it has been in achieving its objectives, the importance of 3rd level education to current labour markets, data currently held by the DSFA on the BTEA and their opinions on the way forward for the scheme. Additionally the informant directed me to other sources of information which they felt would be of use in my research.

On April 20th 2006, I interviewed Willie O’ Dea, a serving government Minister. The Minister had very few available time slots in which to speak to me and so was quite restricted in the amount of time that he could devote to an interview. The interview lasted about forty minutes in duration, during which time we spoke about a range of topics including but not restricted to the role of education in today’s society, the strengths and weaknesses of the BTEA, the impact of the changes made to the BTEA in 2003 /2004, the influence of the civil service on decision making, and the re-introduction of college tuition fees.

I followed this by interviewing Joan Burton TD in the bar in Dáil Éireann on 27th April 2006. Deputy Burton was quite pressed for time on the day as a result of a breaking policy announcement. However I still managed to speak to her for over forty-five minutes. She spoke about a number of issues such as the role of education in today’s society, the reasons behind the expansion of the BTEA when she was Minister of State for Social Welfare, the impact of the changes made to the scheme in 2003 / 2004, the influence of the civil service in policy decisions, and the re-introduction of college tuition fees.

Michael Ring TD spoke to me on 28th April 2006 in a private office in Dáil Éireann. The interview was over an hour in duration, and we discussed the role of education in
today’s society, the strengths and weaknesses of the BTEA, the impact of the changes made in 2003 / 2004, the influence of the civil service on government decision-making, the availability of information from the civil service and the re-introduction of college tuition fees.

Finally I had hoped to interview Proinsias De Rossa face to face but as he is a serving member of the European Parliament he was quite often in Brussels. However he agreed to answer my questions via e-mail. This was very acceptable to me as I was interested in accessing his knowledge of a number of key issues. I forwarded a list of questions asking about a range of issues such as the strengths and weaknesses of the BTEA when he was involved with it, his assessment of the changes made to the BTEA in 2003 / 2004, how effective the BTEA has been in achieving its objectives, the importance of 3rd level education to current labour markets, and the re-introduction of college tuition fees.

2.52 BTEA Participants:
I organised my initial round of data collection with the BTEA recipients for the months of March to July 2006. I began by distributing a series of information posters and letters to student unions, access offices, disability offices, and mature student offices in 3rd level institutions throughout Ireland. Over a period of time people within these institutions made contact with me offering to participate in the research. I subsequently spoke to these potential participants via telephone or e-mail, and their consent to participate in the research was established. The focus groups were to be used as a forum for discussion and to highlight areas of concern that could be further investigated at a later stage through one to one interviews. When organising focus groups it is recommended that researchers try to select participants who represent a common position / group or status, as a group of individuals of similar status tends to produce more intense discussions and consequently more powerful data (Grbich 1999, pp.109-110).

The grounds by which the volunteers had qualified for the BTEA was established (i.e. disability payment, lone parent’s payment or unemployment payment) in the initial contact. I then began to organize focus groups around the basis on which a participant qualified for the BTEA. I had envisaged holding focus groups in a central geographic
location, having people travel to this site and reimbursing their travelling expenses. However it quickly became apparent that this was not a viable option as potential participants expressed a reluctance to travel far from their residential areas, for a number of very valid reasons such as lack of suitable transport, time constraints, and family commitments. Thus, after consultation with my supervisor I decided to organize smaller focus groups so as to eliminate the need to travel. Suitable dates and times were arranged and the focus groups took place in the period from the beginning of April to the end of June 2006. The purpose of the focus group was clearly explained to the participants by means of an information letter and a signed informed consent document was obtained prior to their participation on the day.

While my focus groups consisted of people of similar backgrounds in terms of how they qualified for the BTEA, they were still diverse in terms of the participants’ course of study, gender, and age. I believed that organising focus groups by qualification criteria was the best way of accessing the particular experiences of each of the three broad categories of qualifying welfare recipient and ensuring, in as much as was possible, that there was equality of status in the groups. Furthermore, though the focus groups and one to one interviews were held in the University of Limerick and the National University of Ireland Galway, there was diversity in terms of the geographic origins of my sample (my participants came from ten different counties). I firmly believe that it is possible to extrapolate the findings and place them in a countrywide context as the BTEA is a national scheme and should be administered and experienced uniformly throughout the state.

2.53 Interviews / Guided Conversations:
Bogdan and Biklen (1992, p.132) highlight that qualitative interviews provide narratives that “describe an individual's actions, experiences and beliefs” and are an effective method for gathering “descriptive data in the subject's own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world” (Bogdan and Biklen 1992, p.96; see also Flick 2006, p.16).

Both the focus groups and individual interviews were conducted by means of an interview guide, which was designed to reflect issues highlighted in previous research or indeed prior interviews conducted for this project. The interview guide was semi structured and consisted of a series of open-ended questions. Holstein and Gubrium
(1995) inform researchers that they must be aware of how the interview is constructed in addition to the data that it produces. The students therefore were given “considerable latitude to pursue a range of topics” and shape the interview content and agenda (Bogdan and Biklen 1992, p.94). The participants played such a strong role in the direction of the interview (particularly at the focus group stage) that they became more like ‘guided conversations’ (Rubin and Rubin 1995). This approach to interviewing allowed me to gain insights into how the BTEA students themselves had come to understand the workings of the BTEA scheme and also assisted me in developing a deeper understanding of the range of perspectives on the issue. This interview style enabled the participant and I to discuss issues that arose from a critical reading of existing literature, while retaining the flexibility to deviate as other issues emerged. These new emerging issues were included in subsequent interview schedules, maximising the benefits of the adaptability provided by a qualitative methodology.

Five focus groups were undertaken. These interviews were arranged, carried out in a quiet, private location, and recorded using a tape recorder. All of the focus groups lasted approximately 90 minutes and endeavoured to obtain the participants’ views on the effectiveness of the BTEA in alleviating social exclusion with regards to its target population. When the participant said something of interest on the key themes, additional questions were asked to guarantee elucidation of their answers. Gaskell (2000) explains that with appropriate probing and targeted questioning, the researcher can obtain clarification and amplification of interesting points. At the end of the conversation all participants were thanked for their time and responses to the questions.

The flow of ideas and information from the participants was enhanced by being able to listen to each others experience and interact with each other, thus the group interview format facilitated the participants in building on each others ideas through their shared experience (Callahan 1983, cited in Reinhartz 1992, p.223). As a method it provides scope for shifting the balance of power by allowing research participants to have more control over their research interaction and by giving priority to the participants’ hierarchy of importance. Morgan (1993, p.15) argues that focus groups are useful when working with categories of people who have traditionally had limited
power and influence, (in my case welfare recipients) as it allows groups of peers to express their perspective with the security of being among others who share many of their feelings and experiences. As such, I directed my focus groups with the intention of giving the participants as much control over the process as possible.

In-depth individual interviews were conducted to examine and expand on issues emerging from the focus groups. They were further used to check the validity of the focus group answers by allowing for the comparison of these answers against the answers given in an individual setting. The individual interviews were particularly oriented to examining the detailed experiences of BTEA participants and to assessing whether their needs and aspirations were met by participating on the scheme. These interviews were semi-structured and were also supported by means of an interview guide. These individual interviews were completed between the beginning of March and the start of June 2007.

The individual interviews were flexible in format and therefore participants talked about what they deemed to be important to them. This resulted in the interviews varying in length but on average they lasted approximately ninety minutes. I began the interviews by reading aloud the informed consent document which participants had been provided with prior to the event and asking if this was their understanding of what they had consented to. I allowed the interview to flow as much as possible and tried not to interrupt when the interviewee was speaking. As a result I had to keep interesting utterances from the participant fresh in my mind in order that I could return to them when a natural break occurred in the interview.

Oakley (1981) argues that a type of ‘dialogic interviewing’ i.e. a form of a two way dialogue between people of equal status can be a way of challenging the exploitative nature of traditional interviewing techniques. My participants were made aware of my past participation in the BTEA scheme when they received the information letter about the research. Given that I had participated on the BTEA scheme and had some similar experiences to those of my participants, I feel that this type of interviewing was achieved in this research.

2.54 Secondary Data collection:
I sought to obtain statistical information on 3rd level graduate destinations, graduate
salaries, and enrolment rates of various socio-economic groups in 3rd level institutions in order to build a profile of who attends 3rd level education. Additionally I intended to use this information to profile graduates position of entry to the labour market and the return from their investment in terms of salaries etc. I also wished to obtain statistical information from the DSFA in order to build an accurate up to date profile of BTEA participants’ course of study, level of qualification being pursued, and how they qualified for the scheme. Furthermore, I wanted to obtain information on the methodology used by Lansdowne Market Research (LMR) in a survey they conducted for the DSFA. I had a question concerning the response rate of this study and wished to clarify this with the organization that had undertaken the research. I believed that this information was important, as this particular survey was influential in the review of the BTEA scheme undertaken in 2005. However, I experienced major problems in trying to source this information from both the DSFA and LMR.

I initially contacted the BTEA section of the DSFA in March 2005, looking for information on the historical development of the BTEA, which I received on March 31st 2005 (O’ Dea 2005a). I then looked for further statistical data and while I was provided with some information, it was limited in its usefulness and I was informed that the particular data I wanted was not available (O’ Dea 2005b). I contacted the DSFA twice more (16th and 27th September 2005) asking for details of all second and 3rd level courses completed by applicants, applicants previous work experience, and whether their courses were 3rd level access, foundation, undergraduate or approved postgraduate (Power 2005a).

I was confident that this information was recorded by the DSFA, as I was familiar

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6 I asked for statistics on the numbers entering as undergrads, the numbers in each year of study as undergrads & in receipt of the BTEA since its inception and the numbers of undergrads in receipt of the BTEA graduating each year since its inception. Additionally I asked for the numbers of graduates who were in receipt of the BTEA continuing onto post grad courses each year since its inception until that option was removed, the numbers of students in each year of post graduate study in receipt of the BTEA since its inception until that option was removed, & the numbers of students in receipt of the BTEA graduating with post graduate qualifications since its inception until that option was removed. Finally I looking for a breakdown of numbers entering which colleges as undergrads since the inception of the BTEA and if possible what programmes those in receipt of the BTEA were pursuing (BA, BSC, MA, PHD etc) for each year of the scheme.

7 See Appendix III
with the questions asked on the application form for the BTEA, having both completed one previously and having downloaded the most up to date form. The BTEA application form (BTE1) also asks what college the applicant is attending, whether the course is full or part time, the course title, type of qualification, course duration and the applicants’ current year of study. Finally it asks what social welfare payment the applicant is receiving and how long they were in receipt of this payment. I believed there would be no problems accessing the information I was requesting (Power 2005a) as it was after all not nearly as detailed as that provided by the DSFA to Margaret Healy (1997) for a study undertaken on the Third Level Allowance (the forerunner to the BTEA). She had received the names and addresses of 777 out of 914 participants on the scheme at that time.

On November 1st 2005, I contacted the DSFA asking when I might get access to the information I had requested or if there was any of the information that I might not be granted access to (Power 2005 b). I received a follow up e-mail on (02.11.05) and was informed that the information I had requested was not recorded on a computer database and facilitating my request would cause an unreasonable interference with the work of the ESS. I was advised if I went down the FOI route the cost would be €20.95 per hour of search and retrieval, given that I was requesting a substantial retrieval of records. However I was given no information on how long such a search was likely to take (and therefore how expensive it would be). Consequently I had to cease my search for this statistical data. While interviewing the senior civil servant (6.04.06) I was pointed towards some of these statistics (published in DSFA 2005).

I contacted LMR by e-mail and was informed by a Director of that company (25.09.06) that they had an obligation to their client (the DSFA) and couldn’t give me the information that I asked for without prior permission. I was given the details of an individual within the DSFA, who might be able to assist me with my enquiries

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8 See Appendix IV

9 LMR conducted a telephone study amongst a random sample of 551 BTEA recipients from leads supplied by the DSFA. They were provided with 7427 leads, the total telephone numbers sourced was 2923, and the total number of successful interviews was 551. I asked if they were only able to obtain telephone numbers for 2,923 of the 7,427 leads supplied to them. Additionally I enquired whether when they stated they completed 551 successful interviews meant that there were therefore unsuccessful attempts to conduct interviews and if this was the case what the overall response rate from those that were contacted was.
(Murphy 2006). I tried contacting that individual (19.10.06) but they no longer worked in the DSFA and the person I spoke to knew nothing of the research in question. I was given a number to contact in the BTEA section of the DSFA, which I tried ringing over a period of two hours but the number was constantly engaged, as indeed it was over the next week whenever I rang.

I contacted the Director of LMR twice more (Power 2006b; Power 2006c) asking if she was willing to comment on material that was already in the public domain\(^{10}\) I asked, if they could not provide me with this information because of cliental obligations, could they provide details of someone at a requisite level within the DSFA who could give the authorisation that they required (Power 2006c). However I never heard anything from the Director subsequently.

I was far more successful in gathering statistical information on 3\(^{rd}\) level graduate destinations, graduate salaries, and enrolment rates of various socio-economic groups in 3\(^{rd}\) level institutions. I contacted the careers office in the various 3\(^{rd}\) level colleges and was able to obtain good statistical reports either directly from them or online. Additionally I made use of various statistics collated by the Central Statistics Office and the Higher Education Authority.

2.6 Analysis and writing up:

While for some, data analysis is viewed as the “final stage of listening to hear what meaning is said”, (Rubin and Rubin 1995) during this study data analysis ran concurrent with my data collection (Bogdan and Biklen 1998, p.158) and was enthusiastically pursued for the duration of the research. I listened to each interview in order to identify key themes and the main points of the discussion, which were incorporated into the interview schedule for subsequent interviews. This process was influenced by Quinn-Patton’s (1990, p.353) assertion that “the period after an interview is a critical time of reflection and elaboration. It is a time of quality control to guarantee that the data combined will be useful, reliable and valid”.

The data collection generated a massive amount of information, consisting of audio taped interviews, which were transcribed. Therefore my analysis was based on data

\(^{10}\) The report of the Working Group on the Review of the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) Scheme from the DSFA had included this information in their report in 2005.
reduction and interpretation of that data. Once the transcription process was complete I used NVivo software to assist in the management of the data analysis. The software provides a formal structure for coding and storing data. This aids the researcher in developing the analysis and assists more abstract and theoretical interrogation of the data. I found that as I became more comfortable with the functions of NVivo it allowed me instant access to my coding, and therefore aided me in asking more complex questions of my data (see Barry 1998). Additionally, but no less importantly, the software greatly reduced the period of time that it would have taken for me to undertake the same process by hand.

2.61 Grounded theory:

Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.24) describe grounded theory as “a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon”. I decided after consultation with my supervisor to use grounded theory as my chosen method of qualitative data analysis. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that we should allow theory to develop from data interpretation but we are inevitably faced with the problem of making sense out of vast amounts of data. Mintzberg (1979) described two essential steps in inductive research, firstly where we search through a phenomenon looking for order, following one lead to another, ultimately followed by a creative leap, where we generate theory from our data.

Grounded theory provided a procedure for developing categories (open coding), interlocking these categories (axial coding), building a story that joins the categories (selective coding) and ending with a set of discursive theoretical proposals (Creswell 1998, p.150; Flick 2006, pp.296-303). Figure 2.1 was a useful guide for reducing the data into themes and creating a theoretical account to explain what was evident in my data.

When I finished transcribing the tapes I then began the slow process of reading through the transcripts over and over again in an effort to fully comprehend what I was being told by my participants. Thus through a process of reading through the transcripts line by line, time after time, I looked for emergent themes, codes and categories. Meta data and data referring to issues outside of those being investigated were eliminated at this stage.
I paid particular attention to issues that had not appeared in the literature review and had most flexibility in generating new categories in the earliest stages of this research as my analysis began with open coding. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.97) described open coding as the process that “fractures the data and allows one to identify some categories, their properties and dimensional locations”. In this phase I examined the transcripts for significant categories supported by the text, and continued reducing the data set using the constant comparative approach until I had reached saturation point and ended up with a set of themes and categories that characterised the phenomenon being explored (Creswell 1998, p.150).

I then concentrated on employing three criteria (Creswell 1998, p.302) to select core categories from the data, those being (a) the centrality of a category relative to the other categories, (b) the frequency with which it occurs in the data, and (c) its power in producing the emergent theory. Once I had these categories I identified my central phenomenon. I then read the transcripts horizontally and through the process of axial coding, described by Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.97) as putting the data “back together in new ways by making connections between a category and its subcategories”, I explored the inter relationship of categories. From here I set about building a story that connects the categories through selective coding in order to end up with theoretical proposals (Creswell 1998, p.150).

I continued looking for instances that represent the category until all the new information didn’t provide further insight into the category (Creswell, 1998:150). This was done for each of the categories identified during the open coding of the data.
When considering the effectiveness of grounded theory as a data analysis strategy, it was vital to recognise the assumptions and biases about the BTEA that I had internalised. I discuss these in detail in chapter three. Thus, while my research design was theoretically driven, the use of grounded theory as a method of data analysis, combined with bracketing my assumptions enabled me to gain an enhanced understanding of the experiences and beliefs of my participants. I must acknowledge that there was some conflict between the fact that I was theoretically driven and the purist qualitative / grounded theory belief that the theory should emerge from the data. Nonetheless I believe both viewpoints are compatible. I did not rigidly adhere to my initial theoretical framework. I allowed findings to emerge from the data and sought the theories that would best enhance my understanding of them. In this regard, Parry (1998) argues that comparing the emergent theory with existing literature helps us to avoid the possibility of existing theories or biases being forced onto the data we collected. Additionally Corbin and Strauss (1990, p.7) believe that theories cannot be constructed only from actual incidents / themes emanating from the raw data. Instead these incidents / themes are analysed as potential indicators of phenomena, and are consequently given conceptual labels.

2.62 Secondary Data Analysis:
Secondary data analysis is the analysis of data or information that was either assembled by someone else or for some other purpose than yours. It is important to note that official statistics (a commonly used source of secondary data) often suffer from accusations of untrustworthiness, omissions in the data, over-generalisation, inaccuracy, variations, and being out of date as soon as they are compiled (Gill 1993). Consequently it was important to critically analyse any and all secondary data and statistics for accuracy and validity.

I specify my secondary data sources in section 2.54. My analysis of those sources sought to achieve three things. Firstly to determine the current level of graduate salary in Ireland (by level and area of qualification) and to track the progression of those salaries over the last number of years. Secondly, I endeavoured to discover the primary destination of 3rd level graduates in Ireland and again track any changes in those destinations over the past number of years. Finally, I examined the progression rates to 3rd level education by socio-economic background. I undertook this analysis
by combining information from multiple databases to arrive at the answer to my research questions.

2.7 Verification Procedures, Transferability and Trustworthiness:
Silvermann (1993) argues that issues of validity and reliability apply to qualitative studies in the same way as they do to quantitative studies (see also Le Compte et al. 1982). Eight verification procedures were depicted by Creswell (1998), which are often employed to enhance the trustworthiness and transferability of qualitative research, and it was recommended that qualitative researchers engage in at least two of these procedures. These techniques were identified as prolonged engagement and persistent observation; triangulation; peer review and debriefing; negative case analysis; clarification of researcher bias; member checks, rich thick description; and external audit (Creswell 1998, pp.201-203). To ensure the credibility of my research, I employed a number of steps as recommended by Creswell and in order that you, the reader, may be confident as to the transferability and trustworthiness of this research I now detail each of the verification procedures that I utilised in this study.

2.7.1 Triangulation:
Triangulation is the process whereby a combination of different methods, sources, areas of expertise, and theories provides corroborating evidence and depth in the methodological proceedings (Creswell 1998, p.202). I utilised multiple sources (twenty five individual participants), multiple types of sources (civil servants, serving and ex-government Ministers, opposition TD’s, BTEA participants who had previously been unemployed, in receipt of lone parents payments, or been on disability, that were attending different 3rd level institutions, and were from diverse geographic locations throughout the country), underpinned by multiple investigators (myself and to a certain extent the participants themselves), and by multiple theoretical perspectives (conflict theory, Bourdie’s forms of capital, Mutch's adaptation of Bourdieu's field theory, Collins’ micro theory of inequality) and consequently therefore endeavoured to enhance the trustworthiness and transferability of my findings.
2.72 Peer Review:

This process can be said to provide an external check of the quality of the research. Lincoln and Guba (1985, Cited in Creswell 1988, p.202) argue that a peer reviewer acts as the person who keeps the research sincere. They do this by asking questions about methods, meanings and understandings. My research supervisor served as my primary peer debriefer. She reflected with me on the process, on specific incidents that arose and data that emerged. Her questioning forced me to reflect on aspects of my work, which I might not have considered, prompting me to ask new questions of myself, the participants and the data. In the early stage of design and prior to beginning data collection, another PhD student also acted as a peer debriefer. She and I spoke about how the research was progressing on a fairly regular basis, and we engaged in a process of reading each others work. Additionally I submitted my work to two annual panel review meetings in the Department of Sociology at the University of Limerick. These reviews entailed my supervisor and another academic from the Department reading two pieces of my work and a report documenting my progress. The meetings proved to be enormously beneficial and the discussions and recommendations emanating from these meetings focused my research.

2.73 Clarification of researcher bias:

I have to acknowledge that as someone who had participated in the BTEA scheme I brought prior attitudes and beliefs to the process and they have probably influenced the research process at some level, even if it was only subconsciously. Harvey and MacDonald (1993) point out that even the most experienced in-depth interviewer will just have pieces of a much larger puzzle. However I firmly believe that having had a practical and thorough personal knowledge and understanding of participating in the BTEA scheme advantaged me in accessing these fragments of the larger puzzle, and consequently allowed statements from the participants to be taken in their overall context.

While traditional mainstream research regards coldness, emotional detachment and role demarcation as being necessary to the research process, it is my belief that no-one can ever truly be objective, as we have our own feelings, views, interpretations and previous experiences which will impact on the research even if it is only at a subconscious level. Consequently a qualitative researcher, by being open about any
prior assumptions, biases etc. and by being reflexive about the experience of carrying out the research, can allow the reader to make an informed analysis of what the researcher has concluded and whether any of the researchers’ biases have impacted on those conclusions (McGrath 2000, p.7; Flick 2006). In essence, reflection helps us to minimize the impact of our biases on our interpretations. Accordingly I have detailed this process of reflexivity in chapter three.

2.74 Member Checking:
Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that it is important that the researcher attempt to solicit the participants’ views on the findings and interpretations of the research, while Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.314 cited in Creswell 1998, p.203) consider this technique to be the most critical for establishing credibility. Students who participated in this study also acted to a certain extent as co-researchers, interacting with the data on several levels over the duration of the study. This was in keeping with Stakes’ (1995, p.115) assumption that the participants should be asked to examine drafts of the researchers work in order to provide their own observations and interpretations of the reality that was being constructed. Consequently I ensured that I shared my interview transcripts, coding, drafts, conference papers and journal articles on numerous occasions individually with the students to ensure I was representing them and their experiences as accurately as I could. A full discussion of how I feel this process worked can be found in the next chapter (section 3.3).

2.75 Rich Thick Description:
One means of achieving transferability is through the process where the reader identifies the particulars of the research process and its results and compares them to a case they are familiar with. If there are enough similarities between the two situations, they may surmise that the results of the research would be similar in the other case also. However, in order to engage in such transferability, the reader needs to know as much as possible about the original research in order to determine how similar it is to their case (Bryman 2004, p. 275). Creswell (1998, p.203) describes the rich, thick description as allowing the reader to draw conclusions concerning transferability because we present the reader with enough detail of the experiences of those we have researched, to allow the reader to relocate that information to other settings, and thus conclude whether the findings can be reassigned as a result of mutual features (see
also Bryman 2004; Guba and Lincoln 1994; Geertz 1973). I am firmly of the opinion that in order to maximise the potential of schemes like the BTEA, the voices, opinions and experiences of those who participate in it must be central to decision-making, which affects the scheme. Thus I included elements of the raw data in the report in order to provide a rich thick description of their experiences. Consequently I am hopeful that my writing, particularly in subsequent chapters, facilitates the reader in engaging with the research on as many levels as possible using the voices of the participants through verbatim quotations to facilitate readers in entering into the ‘rich’ framework within which this study is positioned.

2.76 External Audit:
Finally I utilised the procedure of external audit as a verification check. Creswell (1998, p.203) states that an external consultant who has no connection with the study should “examine both the process and the product of the account, assessing their accuracy… In assessing the product, the auditor examines whether or not the findings, interpretations and conclusions are supported by the data”. I began by comparing my findings with the existing literature as the final step in seeking verification of my research. This process involves seeing similarities and contradictions that exist between the existing literature and the developing theory. We should not ignore contradictory findings. Instead conflicting literature represents the prospect of greater understanding and literature that has resemblance to our findings can strengthen the confidence of the reader in our research (Eisenhardt 1989). I then shared my findings orally on a number of occasions at formal presentations / conferences and had some of my work published in an international peer reviewed journal. Indeed some of my participants were present (unknown to anyone but myself and some of my other participants who were present) when I presented a paper at the SAI conference in 2007 and took part in the discussion afterwards. I therefore subjected my sample, methodology, findings and analysis to external comment and critique. I am confident that as a result of these procedures the reader will have belief in the validity of my research.
2.8 Theoretical Generalisation:

Generalisation is a contentious issue in qualitative research. Difficulties arise from problems associated with applying quantitative criteria for empirical generalisability to qualitative research. Some researchers working within the qualitative paradigm have responded by eschewing concerns regarding generalisability in their entirety, with Cresswell for example arguing that the intent of research conducted within this paradigm is not to make inferences from one one’s sample to a wider population but to illuminate the particular case one is examining (Creswell 2007, p.127). Other qualitative researchers intimate that, if we do not aim for some form of generalisability, we aim too low (see Mason 1996, p.6 cited in Silverman 2005, p.128).

This latter group have focused on sourcing criteria for achieving generalizability which are more appropriate to the qualitative paradigm. Many qualitative researchers have focused on the potential for “theoretical generalization” (Hillebrand et al. 2001, p.653). Bryman (1988, p.90 cited in Silverman 2005, p.130) argues that qualitative research, particularly given that it tends to generate rather than test theory, should seek to achieve generalizability through inference to theory rather than to specific populations. Furthermore, Morse (1994 cited in Holloway 1997, p.78) argues that theory adds significantly to the existing body of knowledge when it is recontextualised, i.e. where theoretical concepts found in one situation are reapplied to different settings.

Theoretical generalization is achieved by generating and developing a framework to analyse comparable cases or through devising logical arguments in support of causal relationships, which may also hold explanatory power for similar cases (Hillebrand et al. 2001, pp.651-654). Thus, theoretical generalization is essentially concerned with presenting explanations that are conceptually framed (Hillebrand et al. 2001, p.653). These relationships are based on “empirical facts, logical argumentation, and formerly accepted theories”, with the empirical facts being the building blocks upon which the theoretical arguments are advanced (Hillebrand et al. 2001, p.654). The generalisability of the research therefore does not derive from the representativeness of the sample, but from framing the research findings in terms of theoretical concepts and relationships (which may or may not be derived from existing theory) which,
through their abstract form provide for application to other settings (Greene Rodriguez 1999; see also Hillebrand et al. 2001, p.654). The findings of this study are based on my application of existing concepts (such as cultural capital) and the development of new concepts (see for example section 7.63) as a result of the research undertaken (Silverman 2005, p.128).

I now document the specific strategies that I used to enhance my theoretical generalisability, which included theoretical sampling and “the comparative approach” (Hammersley 1992, cited in Silverman 2005, p.128). However I wish to make it clear that these strategies were not as central to accomplishing that goal as the creation of theory itself (which I have just discussed). In theoretical sampling participants are selected on the basis of their theoretical relevance (Schwandt 2007, pp.126-127). In this research, my sampling allowed me to choose individuals (see sections 2.51-2.52 and 3.1-3.2) who could illustrate dimensions of key concepts (for example on the basis of their class, capital, and authoritative location in relation to the advancement of the BTEA) and thus allowed me to assess the development of my theoretical explanations (Silverman 2005, pp.129-131). Additionally my theoretical sample consisted of deviant cases and this offered a crucial test to my theory development (Silverman 2005, p.133). Selecting the participants in this manner makes my contribution to theory more robust and trustworthy and extends the generalizability of this research (Hillebrand et al. 2001, p.654).

The “comparative approach” (Hammersley 1992, cited in Silverman 2005, p.128) saw me compare my data and emergent concepts to other studies, which share my theoretical direction. Additionally I endeavoured to attain information concerning pertinent aspects of similar cases and compare my case to them (Silverman 2005, pp.128-132). For instance, I compare my findings on the internalisation of the ideology of the ‘undeserving poor’ (see section 6.3) to that offered by Lens (2000) and Edelman (1998). The comparative approach consequently allows me to make stronger claims about my analysis and “directly tackles the question of generalizability by demonstrating the similarities and differences across a number of settings” (Perekyla 2004, p.296 cited in Silverman 2005, p.129). In this sense my literature review (see chapters 4 and 5) is also central to the generalizability of this research (Silverman 2005, p.129). Accordingly, I believe that I have taken sufficient
steps and provided sufficient detail for the reader to apply and / or compare my theoretical concepts to their own particular case. In essence I argue that this thesis offers theoretical generalization.

2.9 Limitations of the research:
I wish to acknowledge that my research study was subject to some limitations. I did not interview DSFA officers about their interactions with welfare recipients. However I was most concerned with the experiences of the individual BTEA students to inform this aspect of the research. Furthermore, I had hoped to speak to unsuccessful applicants for the BTEA but did this not come to fruition. I had advertised in 3rd level institutions and DSFA offices, however my entire sample volunteered as a result of having seen my posters (or through word of mouth) in their college. I lacked a sampling frame to provide alternative means to reach this group. I must note however that some of my sample had previously been turned down for the BTEA prior to eventually successfully accessing it. I have documented the shortfall I experienced in the availability of secondary statistical data (in section 2.54). Finally I was also denied certain information, as an informant (the civil servant) was reluctant to discuss facts pertaining to a case that was before the courts at that stage. However I do not think that any of these limitations seriously detracted from my findings, though I believe that the availability of the secondary statistical data in particular, would have added further weight to my argument.

To conclude, it was the intention of this chapter to chart the ways in which I have come to ally procedural decisions with the theoretical stream in my research, and to provide a step-by-step account of how I have collected, analysed and interpreted the data. I trust that I have done just that. The findings generated from the process just discussed are presented in subsequent chapters.
CHAPTER THREE
RESPONDENT PROFILES and REFLEXIVITY ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Introduction:
This chapter begins by presenting profiles of both the key informants and the BTEA participants who were central to generating the knowledge, which was subsequently analysed to produce this thesis. The chapter concludes by presenting my reflections on the research process. That section logs my prior biases and assumptions, my life history, and the reflexive process in which I have engaged. I include as much detail as possible in order to enhance the trustworthiness of my research for the reader.

3.1 Profiles of Key Informants:
This section presents a profile of the key informants who took part in this research. I also present a short profile of three key individuals to whom I wished to speak but who unfortunately decided not to participate in the research. I sought to obtain information from my key informants about lifelong learning and the knowledge economy, the value of the BTEA, the workings of government and the civil service, and in particular how the political process impacts on schemes such as the BTEA. All of these informants were extremely knowledgeable about the workings of the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA) and the influence of the civil service and Department of Finance in the design and implementation of the BTEA. I offer a reflective appraisal of the success of these interviews in section 3.32.

Proinsias De Rossa was re-elected to the European Parliament in June 2004. He is currently a Labour Party member having previously been leader of the Demoratic Left party. He served as the Minister for Social Welfare between 1994 and 1997 and during this period the criteria for BTEA were widened to allow more welfare recipients to apply to avail of the scheme. I was interested to know why under the stewardship of De Rossa, the Department of Social Welfare took the decision to widen eligibility for the BTEA during this period. In particular if this decision was related to his left wing political alignmnet. I also wished to guage his opinions of
subsequent changes to the scheme and whether he thinks it achieved its primary objectives.

Joan Burton is serving her second term as Labour TD for the Dublin West constituency. In the present Dáil she is Labour's Finance spokesperson, having previously served as a Minister of State in Social Welfare. Before her first election to Dáil Éireann, Deputy Burton lectured in accountancy at the Dublin Institute of Technology (The labour Party 2007). While her party identifies itself as a left wing party, it is my opinion that the Labour Party has over the last two decades, become a centre left party (more centre than left) which has developed a reluctant collectivist ideology. It was a colleague of Deputy Burton’s, Niamh Breathnach who abolished 3rd level fees in Ireland, a decision which, has resulted in an increase in relative class inequality in access to 3rd level education (as I will document in chapter 4). I wished to access the views of this well educated left wing politician, whose party I believe has moved consistently towards the centre, in order to see whether this has had any influence on her views around social exclusion and social justice. Additionally I wanted to find out her assessment of the effectiveness of the BTEA, particularly during the period when she herself served as a Minister of State for Social Welfare. Finally I was interested to know what future she sees for schemes like the BTEA, and whether as a left wing politicians she favoured the functionalist equality of opportunity approach to addressing disadvantage.

Willie O’ Dea is the Minister of Defence in the current government. He was formerly a barrister and accountant and has lectured at UCD and the University of Limerick. He was first elected to the Dáil for the Fianna Fáil party in February 1982. He served as Minister of State at the Department of Education between 1997 and 2002 (O’ Dea 2007). I chose Deputy O’ Dea as I wanted to access his assessment of the effectiveness of the BTEA, particularly in the period when he served as a Minister of State for Education, when he would have had some responsibility for the direction of the BTEA. Finally Minister O’ Dea has a reputation for not simply towing the party line for the sake of it, so I particularly wanted to ask his opinions as a government insider of the changes that were made to the BTEA in 2003 / 2004.

Michael Ring was re-elected to the Dáil for the Fine Gael party in May 2007. During the coalition government, which lasted from December 1994 to June 1997, Deputy
Ring was a member of the Joint Committee on Women's Rights and the Select Committee on Enterprise and Economic Strategy. From June 2002, he was a member of the Joint and Select Committee on Social and Family Affairs, and Deputy Ring served as an opposition spokesperson on Social and Family Affairs between June 2002 and October 2004. Additionally he was named Magill Magazine heckler of the year in 2006 for effectively challenging the government (Ring 2006). Speaking on the Social Welfare Bill, on 13 December 2005\(^\text{12}\), Deputy Ring said

> “I would like the Minister and his officials to examine the issue of people who are refused unemployment assistance because it is assumed they are not searching for work, even though they provide evidence to the contrary. One person is going to take an action against the Department to Social and Family Affairs in this regard and I will support him. If he wants a financial subscription I will give it to him... I am delighted that somebody is now taking a case against the Department and I hope the judges will take a sympathetic approach to them. That person felt they had been degraded, even though they had produced the necessary proof of seeking work. They felt so strongly about how they were treated that they are now planning to take a case to court. I wish them well and hope the Judiciary will not take the Government's side. They should take the side of the person who produces evidence of seeking work, even though someone behind a counter may say they were not doing so. .....it is wrong for someone behind a counter to act in that way just because they may not like the look of a person”.

Speeches like that provoked my interest in speaking to Deputy Ring. If he was prepared to put his hand in his own pocket to financially aid a citizen in an action taken against the DSFA then I determined that he might provide insights from the perspective of a public representative with a concern for social justice. Additionally as opposition spokesperson on social welfare, I believed he could give me an alternative viewpoint on the BTEA to those in government. Finally from reading the Dáil debates, I developed the opinion that Deputy Ring had an in depth understanding of the workings of the DSFA, even down to the level of individual interactions in the local DSFA office. Finally he was particularly vocal in the parliament regarding the changes that were made to the BTEA in 2003 / 2004.

Additionally I wanted some input from a civil servant in the DSFA in order to develop an understanding of the day-to-day workings of the administration and development of the BTEA. I successfully recruited a high-ranking DSFA officer, though I do provide personal detail, as I am particularly conscious of protecting his identity. Suffice to say that this individual was perfectly positioned to aid my understanding of the scheme from the perspective of the DSFA.

Finally there were also three key informants to whom I wished to speak but who不幸imately did not participate in the research. Below I present a profile of these three people to determine their relevance to the study. In section 2.51 I documented the efforts that I made to enable these three individuals to participate, though these ultimately proved unsuccessful.

Mary Coughlan was the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when the changes placing restrictions on the BTEA scheme were made in 2003. Consequently I believed that she was a key informant whom I should endeavour to speak to, as she had a very important insight into decisions that affected a great many individuals, both those on the scheme and those hoping to access it subsequently. Additionally I noted that she holds a degree in social science from UCD and is a former social worker (Fianna Fáil 2006a). Therefore I felt that she would have a good knowledge of social issues, might value 3rd level education, and might have an understanding of the structural causes of exclusion. As a result I wanted to gain an understanding of how her personal and professional values impacted on or were constrained by, the day to day running of a department such as the DSFA and on the development of the BTEA scheme in particular.

Seamus Brennan succeeded Mary Coughlan as Minister for Social and Family Affairs (2004-2007). He had previously served as Minister for Education (1992-93). I wished to develop an understanding of whether the Minister had brought ideas from his time in the Department of Education with him to the DSFA, particularly in relation to the development of the BTEA scheme, which is after all a welfare to education scheme. Additionally I noted that he had
obtained a B.Comm, and BA [Econ] from University College Galway, and an M.Comm from University College Dublin (Fianna Fáil, 2006, b). Consequently I felt that the Minister might value 3rd level education and the benefits that it brings. Additionally I felt that he was uniquely situated in that he had previously been Minister for Education so must be acutely aware of the value of education at all levels. Finally I found it interesting that Social and Family Affairs was the only Ministry that he did not list on his C.V. located on the Fianna Fail Website.

Martin Cullen was re-elected to Dáil Éireann in May 2007 and appointed Minister for Social and Family Affairs in June 2007. I wished to speak to Minister Cullen to access his views on the BTEA. In particular I wanted to gauge what the future might hold for this scheme under his stewardship. Given that the Minister’s party were seen by many commentators (myself included) as being at best influenced by reluctant collectivism and in many instances anti collectivism (the reaction of the government to Aer Lingus’ decision to pull its Heathrow slots from Shannon airport for example), I wanted to try to establish the level of priority a welfare to education programme is granted in the social policy agenda of the current Irish government.

3.2 Profiles of Back to Education Allowance participants:
I now present a short profile of my BTEA recipient participants. I do not provide too much personal detail, as I am conscious of protecting the identities of these individuals. All of the participants have been assigned pseudonyms and have been given the opportunity to check documents relating to their input to this research. All of these individuals took part in the initial focus group interviews, while eleven were interviewed on more than one occasion. These eleven individuals who participated in the research over an extended period received copies of a journal article I had written (Power 2006) and conference papers that I had presented on the research. They provided useful feedback on their evaluations of my interpretations of the research data. All participants were presented with transcripts of their interviews to check for identifiers.
When I first interviewed Denis he was a third year humanities student, having previously worked as a painter before receiving a back injury. He had been in receipt of a disability payment before returning to education to complete his leaving certificate. He then completed an access course prior to being accepted for the BTEA scheme in 2003 (when the qualifying period was set at six months). His motivation for returning to education was to enable him to change career to compensate for the injury he had received.

Seán was a final year humanities student, having previously worked for a semi state body. He suffered an injury and was in receipt of a disability payment prior to accessing the BTEA scheme in 2003 (when the qualifying period was six months). His motivation for returning to education was also to enable him to change career to accommodate the injury he had received.

Frank had worked as a store man before injuring his back. He subsequently received a disability payment before completing an access course and joining the BTEA scheme in 2003. His motivation for returning to education was to enable him to change career direction to an area where his injury would not be an issue. He identified the need to obtain a 3rd level qualification if he wanted to achieve this. When I first spoke to Frank he was a final year humanities student.

Claire was a final year humanities student who had owned her own business before suffering injury in a serious car accident. She had been in receipt of a qualifying disability payment before she successfully accessed the BTEA scheme in 2003. Her motivation for returning to education was to improve her sense of self worth and possibly to provide a route to a career where her injuries would not be an issue.

Gus was a third year humanities student. He originally came from a middle class background but following the death of his fiancé he was left to raise their son as a lone parent. He subsequently worked in an unskilled manual job, but was also in receipt of the one parent family allowance, which was a qualifying payment for the BTEA. He completed an access course and was accepted for the BTEA scheme in 2004 (when the qualifying period stood at fifteen months). Gus’s motivation for returning to education was to provide a decent standard of living for himself and his son.
Maxine was from a lower professional socio-economic background and had a parent who was a teacher. She had been a student in a hotel and catering college before becoming a single mother. She was in receipt of lone parents allowance and successfully accessed the BTEA in 2005 when the qualifying period was twelve months. Her motivation for participating in 3\textsuperscript{rd} level education was to change career in order to provide a decent standard of living for her daughters.

Diane came from a skilled manual socio-economic background. She had worked for a semi-state body previously. Diane had been married but was now a lone parent in receipt of the one parent family allowance, which was a qualifying payment for the BTEA. She completed an access course, successfully entered the BTEA scheme in 2005, becoming a humanities student. Her motivation for accessing 3\textsuperscript{rd} level education was to change career but also to avail of educational opportunities that she had not previously taken advantage of.

Peter was a third year humanities student when I first interviewed him. He was an unskilled manual worker who had left formal education at the age of twelve. He had been long term unemployed prior to completing an access course and joining the BTEA scheme in 2004 as a humanities student. Peter’s motivation for attending 3\textsuperscript{rd} level was to obtain an education. He was not particularly concerned about whether that education would lead to new career options.

Dave accessed the BTEA in 2005 when the qualifying period was twelve months. He had returned from travelling and had signed on at his local DSFA office. He was thinking about returning to college so he prolonged his period of unemployment by undertaking a FÁS course in order to ensure that he would meet the qualifying criteria. At the same time he completed an evening access course and subsequently obtained a place on a science course.

Adam had previously worked as a civil servant but became long term unemployed as a result of illness. The qualifying period for the BTEA was fifteen months at the time when he decided that he wished to return to education. He completed an access course and successfully gained a place in university, accessing the BTEA scheme in 2004. Adam was a second year humanities student when we first spoke. He had two children attending college at the same time. Adam’s decision to attend 3\textsuperscript{rd} level
education was motivated by the desire to obtain a qualification which would enable him to change career direction, but more importantly the desire to simply obtain a 3rd level education to provide an example to his children.

Mary had been a salaried employee working as a professional before becoming unemployed. She had previously obtained a degree. The qualifying period for the BTEA was twelve months when she decided that she wished to return to education. Consequently she prolonged her unemployment in order to qualify. She successfully accessed the BTEA in 2005 and was a first year business student at the time of our first interview. Mary’s motivation for returning to education was to enable her to change career direction.

Mathew had been an unskilled manual worker employed on building sites. He became unemployed and decided that he wanted a career change, which he believed that only a 3rd level qualification would provide. At this time the qualifying period for the BTEA stood at six months so Mathew prolonged his unemployment in order to qualify for the scheme. When I first interviewed him Mathew was a fourth year engineering student.

Mark was a skilled non-manual worker, working as a toolmaker before becoming unemployed. He had previously attended college as part of his training to become a toolmaker. Finding that he was only being offered short-term contracts he made a conscious decision to change career. He decided to obtain a place at 3rd level by means of an access course. The qualifying period for the BTEA at this time was fifteen months so Mark prolonged his period of unemployment in order to qualify for this scheme. At the time of our first interview Mark was a third year humanities student.

Luke had accessed the BTEA scheme in 2001 when the qualifying period stood at six months. He had purposely made himself unemployed and prolonged his period of unemployment in order to fulfil the qualifying criteria. He was a fourth year business student at the time we first spoke. Luke was motivated by the desire to change career direction to a position that would require a 3rd level qualification.
John came from a very middle class background. His father was a well respected professional and several generations of his family on both sides had attended college. John had been a very successful entrepreneur before illness caused him to require welfare assistance. He decided that he would return to education and so he prolonged his unemployment in order to qualify for the BTEA. He successfully accessed the scheme in 2005 and was a first year business student at the time of our first interview. John’s decision to attend 3rd level education was motivated by a desire to obtain a qualification which would enable him to change career direction, but also the desire to simply avail of educational opportunities which he had not taken advantage of previously.

Fiona had been a salaried employee. She purposely made herself unemployed as with childcare costs it was actually costing her money to work. When she took into account the cost of childcare, petrol, etc. she found that her expenses outweighed the salary she was receiving. She prolonged her period of unemployment in order to qualify for the BTEA scheme. She successfully accessed the scheme in 2003 and was a third year inter-disciplinary humanities student when I first interviewed her. Fiona was motivated to return to education by a desire to change career, which she believed required a 3rd level qualification.

Carmel had previously owned a business but had become a full time carer to her husband prior to his death. She received the widows’ pension, which was a qualifying payment. Carmel completed an access course and she successfully accessed the BTEA scheme in 2005. She was a first year humanities student at the time of our first interview. Carmel’s motivation for going to college was to obtain an education, which would allow her to change career but also to avail of educational opportunities, which she had not previously had.

Brendan had been a salaried employee (an assistant manager in a shop). He felt that he lacked career progression options so he made a conscious decision to return to 3rd level education in order to change career direction. He purposely made himself unemployed and prolonged his period of unemployment in order to access the scheme. He completed an access course and was accepted for the BTEA in 2003 (when the qualifying duration was set at six months). When I first interviewed Brendan he was a final year humanities student.
Table 3.1: Profiles of BTEA Participants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denis</td>
<td>Humanities student. Previously worked as a painter before receiving a back injury. He had been in receipt of a disability payment. Accepted for the BTEA scheme in 2003. Motivated by a desire to change career to compensate for an injury he had received.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seán</td>
<td>Humanities student. Previously worked for a semi state body. He was in receipt of a disability payment prior to accessing the BTEA scheme in 2003. Motivated by a desire to change career to accommodate an injury he had received.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>Humanities student. Previously worked as a store man. He was in receipt of a disability payment. Accessed the BTEA scheme in 2003. Motivated by a desire to change career to accommodate an injury he had received.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>Humanities student. Previously owned a business before suffering injury. She had been in receipt of a disability payment before she successfully accessed the BTEA scheme in 2003. Motivated by a desire to improve her sense of self worth and access a career where her injuries would not be an issue.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gus</td>
<td>Humanities student. Originally from a middle class background. Became a lone parent. Accepted for the BTEA scheme in 2004. Motivated by a desire to provide a decent standard of living for himself and his son.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxine</td>
<td>Business Student. Lone parent. Accessed the BTEA in 2005. Motivated by a desire to change career in order to provide a decent standard of living for her daughters.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>Humanities student. Lone Parent. Accessed the BTEA scheme in 2005. Motivated by a desire to change career but also to avail of educational opportunities that she had not previously had.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Humanities student. Long-term unemployed. Accessed the BTEA scheme in 2004. Motivated by a desire to obtain an education.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Humanities student. Long-term unemployed. Accessed the BTEA scheme in 2004. Adam was a second year humanities student when we first spoke. Motivated by the desire to obtain a qualification, change career direction &amp; provide an example to his children.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Business student. Previously worked as a professional before becoming unemployed. She had previously obtained a degree. Prolonged unemployment in order to qualify. Accessed the BTEA in 2005. Motivated by desire to change career direction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Business student. Previously owned a business before ending up on welfare. Middle class background. Prolonged unemployment in order to qualify for the BTEA. Accessed the BTEA in 2005. Motivated by desire to obtain a qualification, change career direction &amp; avail of educational opportunities which he had not taken previously.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathew</td>
<td>Engineering student. Had previously been an unskilled manual worker. Became unemployed and prolonged his unemployment in order to qualify. Motivated by the desire to change career.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Humanities student. Had previously been a skilled non-manual worker. Became unemployed. He had previously attended college. Prolonged his period of unemployment in order to qualify. Motivated by the desire to change career.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>Inter-disciplinary humanities student. Had been a salaried employee. Purposely became unemployed &amp; prolonged period of unemployment in order to qualify. Accessed the scheme in 2003. Motivated by the desire to change career.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmel</td>
<td>Humanities student. Previously owned a business. Widow. Accessed the BTEA in 2005. Motivated by desire to change career but also to avail of educational opportunities, which she had not previously had.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brendan</td>
<td>Humanities student. Had been a salaried employee. Purposely became unemployed and prolonged period of unemployment in order to qualify. Accessed the BTEA in 2003. Motivated by desire to change career.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3 Reflections on the research process:

As an undergraduate student, I had been in receipt of the BTEA. Thus a central requirement of this project is self-reflexivity (Strauss 1987). Creswell (1998) comments on the necessity of being reflective as our values and ideologies replicate in our work, while Peshkin (1988) warned that subjectivity is inevitable. Furthermore Berger (1972) argues that the way we see / interpret things is affected by our prior beliefs and experiences. I believe that we inherit most of our ways of knowing and understanding ourselves from our social and cultural location. My ability to understand the social world is also reflective of my position within the social world at present. Consequently, I believe that a commitment to maintaining standards of quality requires that the researcher become critically aware of their own prior assumptions / biases and any possible impact that these assumptions / biases may have on the research process. For these reasons I have sought to be self-reflexive throughout the research process. This reflexivity also involved understanding that my presence and research techniques disrupt the natural context and may have a contaminating effect on the nature and extent of the data collected. The participants may say something or act in a way they think I want them to. Therefore I needed to consider and document the extent to which responses might have been influenced by such factors (McGrath 2000, p.5). To these ends I decided to log my prior bias / assumptions and life history in order to analyse how it may impact on my research, even if it was only on a subconscious level. I also documented my reflections upon the research process, which are summarized later in the chapter.

3.31 Prior Bias / Assumptions resulting from my life history:

I come from a very strong working class background. The town where I have spent the majority of my life to date has a long history of coal mining and a very strong labour party movement. My father was an active member of the Labour Party and he had an enormous influence on my political and social beliefs. From a relatively early age I was aware of the ‘us and them’ idea of class relations. I was encouraged by my father never to internalise the message that ‘we’ were the cause of our disadvantage, as he made me aware that there were structural reasons why ‘we’ were pigeonholed by the dominant groups in society, who had their positions of power to protect. Thus I internalised a desire for social justice from a very early age.
When I left secondary school in 1988 I went to Carlow IT to study Applied Chemistry. However when I left Carlow I became unemployed and signed on in the local DSFA office in my home town in county Kilkenny. As I was newly unemployed I received assistance from the social welfare officer who was anxious that I get into the workforce as quickly as possible. I was sent on a FÁS13 training course for jobseekers, located on a construction site in county Carlow, but a medical condition prevented me from taking up the scheme. Instead I began a FÁS / community employment course in Kilkenny city in November 1989 which lasted for twelve months. Once this course finished I applied for various jobs but to no avail and I was forced to sign on again at my local DSFA office. As time progressed I drifted from short term to long term unemployment. At a certain point the DSFA office ceased to ask me where I was applying for jobs and with that my enthusiasm for doing so waned. However having been unemployed for approximately twelve months (if memory serves me correctly) I secured part time employment and began to sign DSFA dockets for the days that I worked each week. With this I believe I was largely abandoned by the DSFA. I sent in these dockets by post and my actual face to face dealings with the DSFA consisted of two minutes once a month when I attended the office to sign on. I felt that the DSFA office was satisfied as long as I was signing off the live register for at least a couple of days each week.

In September of 1998 a friend of mine returned as a mature student to the University of Limerick (UL). He told me that he had become aware that there was a scheme in existence (BTEA), which allowed welfare recipients like me to return to 3rd level education and keep their social welfare entitlements for the duration of their course of study. This information had never been mentioned to me by anybody in the DSFA and given my limited contact with the local DSFA office I was unlikely to see any literature that may have been displayed there about the scheme. In February of 1998 my friend provided me with the application forms and I applied to the University of Limerick to return to education as a mature student. I received no assistance from the DSFA in relation to my application, and rightly or wrongly I didn’t believe that there was anyone there that I could ask for assistance. Instead I asked one of the teachers from my former secondary school, with whom I had a good relationship, if he would be willing to give me assistance with the application and any subsequent interview, to

13 Ireland's National Training and Employment Authority
which he agreed. Ultimately my application proved to be successful and I was due to begin my undergraduate course in September of 1999.

I almost didn’t go. I had a fear (unfounded as it turned out) that I would not be able to fit in either socially (as I believed I was from the wrong class to do so) or academically. I encountered financial barriers, in that I was told by the fees office at UL that I would not be eligible for free fees in first year as I had attended 3rd level previously (Carlow IT). Again I received no assistance from the DSFA in relation to this matter and I decided that I was not going to go. However I was informed by the local community network organisation that they would subvent my fees if needed, before it subsequently transpired that I did indeed qualify for free fees given the time period that had elapsed since my previous venture in 3rd level. As a result of the lack of initiative shown by the DSFA in assisting me with overcoming these obstacles I must acknowledge that I had concerns about whether the DSFA would aid me if I experienced any difficulties while at UL.

On reflection the BTEA scheme worked well for me over the next four years while I studied as an undergraduate. I received the BTEA payment almost immediately and there were no delays in getting my book allowance (now cost of education) payment. Over the duration of my undergraduate career I was largely left alone by the DSFA to get on with my studies. In addition I must acknowledge that the process of adding my partner and daughter to the payment was seamless. In retrospect I only experienced one major problem in my dealings with the DSFA while I was on the scheme.

Prior to the beginning of my 3rd year at UL my payment did not arrive one particular week. I rang my local DSFA to be told that I needed to call a particular individual in the BTEA section in Dublin. When I rang I was left on hold for what was a considerable length of time before eventually my money ran out (I was using a payphone in Kilkenny to ring Dublin during peak hours). This happened on two occasions. When I rang a third time I asked if the individual could ring me back as I wasn’t prepared to hold for that long again. I was shocked by the attitude of the person on the other end of the line who seemed annoyed that I should have the audacity to ask for such a service. When I insisted on it, she seemed somewhat taken aback. The individual I needed to speak to rang me back the following day to explain that the reason my payment had been suspended was because I had not returned a
form stating I was returning to college the following September. I explained that I thought I had indeed returned the form and if I had not returned it then it was because I had not received that particular form. I felt as if I was under investigation for something for which I was not responsible. Consequently, I (in someway) felt beholden to this individual who held the power to decide whether to restore my payment. It felt as if he was doing me a favour (instead of simply doing his job) when he said he would investigate my claim. It subsequently emerged that my form had in fact been returned but had simply not been processed. This ‘oversight’ on the part of an individual within the DSFA had ultimately resulted in me and my family being without any income for a two week period.

In September 2002 I began the final year of my degree. I began to think about the possibility of continuing on to a Masters programme. However, early in 2003 I received notification from the BTEA section of the DSFA, informing me that the BTEA would no longer be available to those progressing on to postgraduate study. This forced a rethink; as it would not have been financially viable for me to continue on to undertake the Masters. Consequently I decided that I would simply enter the labour market when I completed my studies. I graduated with a first class honours degree in September 2003. However during the summer months of 2003 I was unsuccessful in gaining any employment. Prospective employers informed me that I didn’t have the requisite experience and my degree was too broad. Some told me that I really needed to specialise. As a result I again found myself signing on the live register, which was very disheartening given that I had just achieved such a qualification.

In September of 2003 I enrolled at UL to undertake a Masters. I was no longer eligible to receive the BTEA given the changes that had been made to the scheme. However my family circumstances had also changed and in conjunction with payment for teaching hours from the Department of Sociology at the University it became financially possible for me to continue on to postgraduate study. I was amazed to find that others from my undergraduate class were still in receipt of the BTEA as they had begun their postgraduate course the year previous to me. These individuals had taken up the option (available to mature students) of finishing a year earlier by not
undertaking the study abroad or work placement, whereas I had taken the four year option in order to get the greatest benefit from my degree course.

I graduated with a first class honours Masters degree in September 2004 and found that my employment options were completely different to those available to me twelve months previously. This reinforced my belief that in certain fields a postgraduate qualification is more of a necessity if you are to obtain sustainable employment. It further led me to form the opinion that had I not been able (through a change in my family circumstances) to undertake the Masters then I would still have been on and off welfare, as my 1st class honours degree was not enough to enable me to obtain sustainable employment. At that time I believed that in effect the DSFA was wasting the tax payers’ money in funding me for only four years as this had little or no effect on my employability. The effect on my employability manifested only once I had specialised by obtaining a postgraduate qualification. As a result, I formed the opinion that the decision to restrict (effectively remove) the postgraduate option of the BTEA was wrong. I felt that the BTEA was an excellent scheme, without which I would not have been able to attend college but that the potential that the scheme offered was not being maximised.

3.32 Reflections on the data collection process:
Having now stated my prior assumptions about the BTEA and acknowledging that these were relevant to my decision to undertake this research, I must state that I don’t feel that I would have been as effective in undertaking this research without my prior experiences and past history. I explain why I believe this to be the case throughout this section. Additionally, self reflexivity allowed me to compose questions that limited the possibility of influencing the information participants gave to me. In fact, my experiences of the BTEA scheme were largely positive, and I decided to research the scheme because I believed it to be a valuable resource to individual welfare recipients as well as to the state and society at large. So it was not as if I began the research looking for negative aspects of the scheme. My major criticism of the BTEA at that time was that it should include a more expansive postgraduate option.

Grbich (1999, pp.91-92) argues that both inside knowledge and acceptance may be advantageous where research is undertaken on the working class (also see Kane 1985,
As discussed in section 2.5, I was known to several of the BTEA participants on account of having taught them in UL prior to commencing this research. I firmly believe that this helped these individuals to come forward and speak to me. Being familiar with me, the participants knew that I was coming from a similar educational/class background and I feel that they accepted my sincerity and understood why I was conducting this valuable research. I believe that consequently a level of trust was established early, which allowed the participants to answer honestly. In the case of those participants who had no prior knowledge of me, I believe that once they received the information letter and informed consent document then they too could establish that they could trust me to protect their identities and conduct this research properly. In addition I believe the fact that I too had participated in the BTEA scheme generated a two way respect between the participants and myself, and a greater degree of equality between us.

Harvey and MacDonald (1993, p.202) assert that the researcher

"should not select an informant who is well known to you – over familiarity can make it very difficult to gain basic information that may be important to your research, but of which your informant feels you should already be aware".

While the participants occasionally assumed knowledge on my part, I tried as much as possible to ‘play dumb’ so as to illicit the required information from the participant. My ultimate goal was to obtain rich, detailed data from the interviews (Lofland and Lofland 1995). Gaining such detailed data is dependant on both the interviewee and interviewer fully comprehending one another (Grbich 1999, p.86), and mainly depends on the quality of the rapport established between them (Grbich 1999, pp.90-91). Additionally, good interviewers listens intelligently to what the expert interviewee says; are enthusiastic regarding the topic, totally focussed at all times; and know how to deal with contradictory information and multifaceted situations that may emerge (Grbich 1999, p.89; Kane 1985, pp.68-69; Bryman 2004, p.325).

To assist in establishing rapport the interviews were preceded by a settling in period where I clearly explained the rights of the participants; answered questions regarding the research, and addressed any concerns the participants expressed (Grbich 1999, p.98). On reflection I believe that I established a personal rapport with the BTEA
interviewees (and my key informants) and we spoke at length about the issues that were important to them. I wanted to conduct the interviews in such a way as to allow the participants to express their opinions on the issues that were raised by me, but also to inform me of any issues that they felt were important but which I had not asked them about. I feel this was achieved in both the focus groups and individual interviews conducted with the BTEA participants, and were largely achieved in all of my interviews with the key informants. New issues emerged through the interviews and my data became increasingly rich as the interviews progressed.

Grbich (1999, p.88) highlights that when interviewing elites “the interview session rarely occurs outside the elite person’s workplace, is usually limited to ‘twenty or thirty minutes’ and tends to be punctuated by phone calls and the intrusion of urgent matters”. This is exactly what happened during my interview with Deputy Burton. I had concerns about interviewing her in the Dáil bar (a decision taken by Deputy Burton) as I was concerned it would not constitute a private, quiet location potentially impacting on the answers I would be given, but also on the quality of the interview recording (due to background noise). However with hindsight I feel it actually worked quite well. We sat in a section at the rear of the bar and given that it was the middle of the day and is not a public bar, it was in fact a quiet location in which to conduct and record the interview.

Grbich (1999, p.86) further spoke of how elite interviewees sometimes undertake a reassessment of their experiences, leading to the interviewee favouring themselves. On reflection I believe that this process is evidenced to a certain extent in the interview with Deputy Burton. I felt that she was quite insightful on a number of the issues that we spoke of; but there were times during the interview where the Deputy spoke of issues that were not entirely relevant to our discussion. On occasion, it felt like I was listening to a party political broadcast from the Labour Party, which may have been a consequence of the looming general election. However, I was generally happy with the manner and outcome of this interview, which generated very useful insights from a person who had a direct input into the BTEA at government level previously.

I was initially concerned about how the interview with the senior civil servant would proceed as I was unsure how much the informant would say in spite of the guarantees
of confidentiality that were given to them. Yet after a few minutes the interview flowed as a normal everyday conversation would. This informant was very helpful and gave me as much information as they could in the circumstances (they were unable to talk about the changes of 2003 / 2004 due to an ongoing court case).

I feel that the interview with Deputy Ring again proceeded as I would have wished. We established rapport quite quickly and as a result of our discussion I was convinced that Deputy Ring holds a deep-seated sense of social justice and that his answers were not just the rhetoric of an opposition politician in the run up to a general election. I would obviously have preferred to speak to Proinsias De Rossa at length and in greater detail than proved possible but given his schedule that was not feasible. In the grand scheme of things the information that I obtained from Mr. De Rossa may be limited, but I firmly believe that it has contributed in no small way to my theorisation of the design and implementation of the BTEA.

On completing interviews with two of my key informants, a more relaxed discussion which occurred when the audio recording stopped, produced some information of greater significance and indeed interest than that recorded, going to the heart of these informants’ opinions concerning the BTEA scheme (see Grbich 1999, p.99; Bryman 2004, p.332). I was aware of the necessity to inquire if the informant preferred not to have these comments included in the research (Grbich 1999, p.99). One of the informant’s made it clear that they were speaking “off the record” so despite the comments being invaluable to my research I did not use them in my analysis and they do not appear in this thesis.

Finally I felt that the interview with Minister O’ Dea also evidenced a good rapport between us and elicited useful information. Answers from influential politicians in interview situations are often “very carefully worded, presenting a public and usually already publicly available view” on the relevant issue (Grbich 1999, p.88). I asked what I believe to be some very searching questions for a serving government Minister to answer, yet I believe that he spoke his mind and had no reservations about speaking against policies in relation to the BTEA that his own government had implemented (though it is important to remember that he was not a member of cabinet at that time). Indeed, the Minister reminded me that he was also on record in the Dáil debates as making such criticisms.
Minister O’ Dea said two things in that interview that have stuck with me throughout the period of conducting this research. These two statements made me even more determined to tell the story of how BTEA participants experience the scheme and how it impacts on the social inclusion of welfare recipients. Firstly Minister O’ Dea argued that in relation to the BTEA and education in general “you get very good value for the money you are spending and you couldn’t say that with all public projects unfortunately” and secondly he believed that it was up to the DSFA to “explain their own policies and if they can convince you they convince you, if they can’t convince you that is their problem”. The second quotation in particular is something that has stuck in my mind given the difficulties I encountered in getting a Minister of Social and Family Affairs to speak to me and the problems that I experienced getting statistical information from that same department.

3.321 Learning through experience:
I strongly believe that I learned a considerable amount about the lived reality of dealing with the DSFA through the experience of undertaking this research and I now document this process of learning through experience. As mentioned in chapter two, I encountered difficulties when trying to gain access to aggregate figures from data requested on the BTEA application form (see section 2.64). I was told this information was unavailable. It was really exasperating to be told that a considerable amount of information on the BTEA application / renewal forms is not retained after a decision is made, and it seemed impossible that the DSFA could make suitably informed decisions on the administration and development of the BTEA without access to the simple aggregate statistics that I was asking for. If on the other hand they retain this information then why was I not granted access? I felt very frustrated over the course of this research, by the repeated failure of my attempts to get access to this information and rightly or wrongly I felt like the DSFA was trying to restrict my access to information for whatever reason.

Additionally I encountered difficulties in trying to get any Minister for Social and Family affairs (subsequent to the changes being made to the BTEA in 2003) to answer my questions even via e-mail. As detailed in chapter two I received a response via e-mail on August 31st 2007, from a senior civil servant in the DSFA answering the 8 questions that I had posed to Minister Cullen. While this response was most welcome,
I was disappointed that the answers were not from the Minister himself, who after all has ultimate political responsibility for the DSFA.

As mentioned earlier my experience of participating on the BTEA was positive; however my participants expressed enormous frustration and resentment regarding their dealings with the DSFA. I argue that the feelings of frustration I experienced, when looking for statistical data from the DSFA and / or seeking a Minister to participate in my research, helped me to appreciate the level of frustration that potential applicants and participating students say they have to deal with. The frustration that I experienced in dealing with the DSFA was lessened considerably by the knowledge that there were other avenues that I could explore to make up the shortfall. However potential applicants or participating students could not take such a philosophical attitude, as they had invested heavily in being able to successfully navigate this particular scheme on route to a 3rd level qualification. For almost all of them there was no alternative.

3.33 Reflections on the process of data analysis:
When engaging in data analysis I again logged my prior assumptions etc, so that any implicit biases I may have had were bracketed during the process. I feel that by adhering to a rigorous and systematic process I ensured as much as possible that the theory generated was contextually sensitive, persuasive, and valid. Consistent with a grounded theory approach, I didn’t bring specific theoretical orientations to the data analysis. As detailed in chapter two, I began by fracturing my large body of data into categories (open codes). I subsequently began to develop an understanding of the emerging axial connections, leading me back to the literature, which I employed to advance meaningful theoretical propositions that offered empirically grounded explanations of the experiences of the BTEA participants (Creswell 1998, p.224). Throughout this process of developing new theoretical understandings, I continually returned to the data to check my analysis. Consequently, on reflection I firmly believe that I have produced valid findings and theorisations.

3.34 Reflections on verification procedures:
Verification can be achieved through a number of different strategies, including by maintaining an audit trail that documents the research process, and the development
of codes, categories and ultimately theory (Miles and Humberman 1984, cited in Creswell 1998, p.303). I am confident that my methodology chapter leaves just such an audit trail. In addition I ensured that I shared my interview transcripts, coding, drafts, conference papers and publications with my participants so as to ensure I was representing them and their experiences accurately and that my version of their reality was being truthfully constructed. Skeggs (1997, p.165) spoke of the difficulties with regards presenting her interpretations of informant’s subjective realities to them.

“When I identify them as White working class women I impose categories onto them which they use very differently to produce their own subjectivity. I identify their positioning in economic, social, and discursive relations not their subjectivity... Subjectivities are not produced as coherent categories. The women’s refusal of fixity is an admission of its impossibility. To fix the women is to project my desire for fixity onto them: they always refuse it.”

In spite of the potential pitfalls in proceeding down such a path, I felt that it was worth the extra effort; if I could at the end of such a process, confidently claim (with justification) that I had indeed produced an accurate account of the subjective lived realities of the BTEA students participating in this research. For example, after I had completed follow up interviews with the BTEA participants, I provided them with a journal article that I had published in the Journal for Critical Educational Policy Studies (Power 2006) and asked for their feedback on it. I made a conscious decision to wait until after I had completed the follow up interviews to make them aware of the article as I did not want it to influence any subsequent interview with them. All participants were enthusiastic about the article and the popular comment from them was that the arguments and themes that I was advancing in this article were accurate and realistic.

Subsequently, a paper that I had written was accepted by the Sociological Association of Ireland for presentation at their annual conference in May 2007. This paper specifically dealt with the day to day experiences of BTEA participants in 3rd level education, and their evaluation of the scheme. As such I was anxious that my interpretation of that reality would be as valid as possible. Accordingly I informed all of my participants that I was presenting this paper at the conference and gave them details regarding the date and time if they wished to attend. Furthermore I gave copies
of the paper to the informants who had maintained contact with me and again asked them for their feedback.

I was satisfied that I presented valid interpretations, and the informants confirmed this to me. All commented that the paper was extremely accurate and very much reflected the lived reality of being a BTEA student at that time. Only one issue that I had advanced in the paper was questioned by any of the informants. John questioned the recentness of ‘New Right’ ideologies, arguing that some of the strongest proponents of middle class virtues (personal responsibility, educational qualifications, merit, effort, etc) and the cultural representation of those virtues (car, house, address, rose garden) that he knew were those who had “moved from the working class to the middle classes and pulled the ladder up after them”. Yet he was simply questioning the ‘newness’ of the ideology not the concept. This was taken on board and became part of the analysis to which I continued to subject my data.

I acknowledge that my personal history is related to the research topic and my decision to undertake this research. I have worked to bracket my prior assumptions regarding the BTEA by documenting them and reflecting upon their potential impact on my interpretations. Furthermore, I have engaged in verification processes, in order to reassure both myself and you the reader, that I have been successful in these efforts, and subsequently present an accurate picture of my participants’ realities. I argue that my prior experiences were an asset in developing my understanding of that which my participants taught me about the day to day realities of how the BTEA aids or hinders the process of social inclusion for them.
CHAPTER FOUR
EDUCATIONAL POLICY IN IRELAND

Introduction:
This chapter has a dual purpose, which is to explore educational inequality by means of both a theoretical and an empirical analysis. The chapter begins with a theoretical discussion surrounding the place and role of education in what has become an increasingly globalised Neoliberal world. I then theoretically and empirically situate education in Ireland and discuss the importance of 3rd level educational qualifications for contemporary labour markets, before examining inequalities in access to 3rd level education. Ultimately I assess whether increases in overall admission rates to 3rd level education have led to a reduction in class inequality in access to higher education, and consider the implications that persistent inequalities in this area have for social mobility.

4.1 A theoretical discussion of the role of education in an increasingly Neoliberal world and its implications for inequality / exclusion:

In this section I engage in a theoretical discussion of the role of education in contemporary society and its implications for inclusion. I argue that education has been condensed by an ongoing global Neoliberal project, to the point where it has now has become increasingly tied to labour market needs. I will show that Neoliberal governments have attempted to link educational (and indeed overall) success and failure with individual effort, and that such Neoliberal interpretations have become generally accepted, even by those who are marginalized by them. It is evident that there social class continues to influence educational attainment and in this section I argue that the education system in countries governed by Neoliberal values will continue to deposit its dividends towards the top of the social ladder.

“Education is a fundamental human right. As such it is clearly the responsibility of the state and a core element of any development policy committed to social justice. Securing the right to education is key to enabling people to secure other human rights, yet the right to education is violated by governments around the world.” (Archer 2006, p.7 cited in Greene 2007)
Those who are strongly in favour of the Neoliberal project argue that the power and influence of the nation state are being reduced and that ‘the market’ has essentially taken over. Yet I argue that this understanding is over simplified. While the power and influence of the nation-state has been reduced in many areas, with countries having ceded aspects of their sovereignty to organisations such as the European Union for example, I argue that the nation-state continues to have a strong impact in other areas. While the Neoliberal agenda has restricted the will of the state to exercise that power in relation to the provision of social services (which I will examine in chapter five), over the same period the state’s role in aiding capital expansion has grown exponentially (Went 2000 p.48 cited in Holst 2007). Classic liberalism sought to retract the state, in order to let private business ventures make profits comparatively unimpeded by legislation and the costs associated with providing the welfare state; Neoliberalism also seeks this result (Tabb 2002; Hursh and Martina 2003; Hill 2002) but additionally it demands a strong state to ensure such outcomes. As will become evident in subsequent chapters the Neoliberal reform of education is just one element of a larger project, which seeks to underpin and promote global capitalism.

Globally, but particularly in developed, western, first world countries, we have seen Neoliberalism continuously working to mould the education sector to the needs of global capitalism (see Mulderrig 2003; Hirtt 2004). These reforms were led by the education policies of the Thatcher governments in the UK, which introduced structural / ideological alterations, opening up “education to business values, interests, principles, methods of management, and funding” (Mulderrig 2003) and over the intervening period we have seen international convergence in this regard, with more and more countries adopting such measures (Hatcher and Hirtt 1999, cited in Mulderrig 2003). As Collins (1979) has noted, the trend towards a more technical education system is regarded as giving students the necessary skills for employment. As a result, education determines occupational success, particularly in the West where the global economy has resulted in an increasing concentration of highly skilled positions (Collins 1979, p.7). In effect, education has been placed at the forefront of assembling the post-welfare society (Tomlinson 2001, cited in Mulderrig 2003). Marxist education theorists hold that whether in terms of attainment, selection, or life chances, it is inevitable that market-oriented education systems reflect the
features of capitalist inequality (Greaves et al. 2007; McNeill 2000, p.3; Dale 1989). In modern liberal democracies, high and continually growing economic inequality thus generates a legitimacy question, which Neoliberal governments must address.

Globally, governments have sought to deal with this issue by persuading people (by transferring responsibility from society, and indeed the state, to the individual) that Neoliberal ideals, reduced levels and standards of public services, and increasing social and economic inequalities are justified (see Hursh and Martina 2003; Hill 2002). Thatcher’s statement that there is no such thing as society, only individuals who have a responsibility to provide for themselves, “perfectly encapsulated an ideological drive that reduced everything to individualized relationships between providers and consumers, and understood inequality variously as a sign of personal / community deficit or part of the necessary spur to achievement in a meritocracy” (Gilborn and Youdell 2000, p.39). The state uses the education system (and other institutions) and associated meritocratic rhetoric therefore to make the existing status quo seem ‘natural’ (Hill 2003).

Social actors are required to make educational choices (for example regarding where they send their children to school) in competitive education markets “on the basis of evaluations of their costs and benefits and of the perceived probabilities of more or less successful outcomes” (Breen and Goldthorpe 1997, p.275 cited in Kivirauma et al. 2003). The ideology of ‘educational choice’ serves those that can afford these desirable ‘choices’, but not all social actors can actually exercise ‘choice’ in this ‘free market’ of education. Disadvantaged parents have fewer financial resources to invest in the education of their children, and less cultural and social capital to transmit to them (Reimers 2000, p.55) relative to advantaged groups. Under such a system we will continue to see the middle classes and the sons and daughters of those from the educated professions (who have higher levels of valued cultural and social capital) gain the most access to and benefit from the education system, while those sections of the population who enter the education system from socially, economically, and culturally marginalized positions will continue to be the ones that benefit least from an unequal and unfair education system, which continues to reward certain sections of the population disproportionately (Chubb and Moe 1990; Lauder and Hughes 1999,

To counter the Neoliberal model of education, the Radical Left argue for large increases in funding for education systems, a complete ban on private education, an end to the marketisation of education, and a focus on equal educational outcomes (among other initiatives), all the while recognising that educational reform must be part of multi-dimensional social change, which ultimately strives to rid society of poverty, inequality, discrimination and social exclusion (Hill and Boxley 2007; see also Hill 2000). In spite of what we are led to believe, Neoliberalism is not inevitable, it is quite simply a policy choice implemented by nation-states (Holst 2007). “Once we pierce the ideological veils of neoliberalism, then … it becomes clear that the production of the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ – the ‘winners’ and ‘losers’, the stigmatized and excluded minorities … is the fruit of political decisions” (Smith 2008, p.133). Yet in contemporary society education plays a pivotal role in conditioning and institutionalising people to accept their future situation and indeed in orienting their expectations to that future (Greaves et al. 2007). Neoliberal policies (which are essentially located in class positions), become widely accepted, even by those who are marginalized by these very practices. Thus fundamental social change is seen as unattainable and for many (including many of those who are excluded) it is even held to be undesirable (Holst 2007).

Having linked success and failure with individual effort and desire to succeed, the Neoliberal education system thus acts as a powerful mechanism of social control wherein stereotypical understandings of class, gender, and race, are used to legitimate the exclusion of certain sections of the population from certain types and levels of educational credentials (Greene 2007; see also chapter five for a further discussion of these ideas). A perceived potential for upward mobility (rather than its actualisation) disguises the need for those who are marginalized by the current system to engage in its reform. The Conservative Party in the UK for example enjoyed broad appeal even when the Thatcher governments’ privatisation of industry saw many thousands of people essentially discarded from society, because of an increasing association by workers with (and the dominance of) the values of the middle class (Greaves et al. 2007). A similar situation has occurred in Ireland where despite rising inequality, the
same party (or that party in coalition with smaller parties) has been returned to power for seventeen of the last twenty-one years. Accordingly, I argue that restrictions imposed on peoples ability to actualise the right to an equal education are unlikely to change while Neoliberal ideologies continue to inform the dominant values of our society.

The values that support the status quo at a macro level also operate at a micro level (for example in the promotion and implementation (or lack) of policy). By way of highlighting the difficulty we face in bringing about change I use the example of a homeless activist, who argues that many homeless services have a vested interest in the preservation of the status quo, and are not really interested in ending homelessness. These services stop short of promoting or introducing real solutions, as a solution to homelessness brings an end to their employment (Cassanova and Blackburn 1996, cited in Greene 2007). The same situation arises in the provision of welfare, where it has been argued that individuals working for the state, benefit from the existence of ‘welfare dependency’ and consequently (even if it is on a subconscious basis) may work against its elimination (Greene 2007). I argue that as long as Neoliberal ideologies hold a hegemonic position, those of us working to eradicate educational inequalities will encounter similar obstacles, as those in positions of power and those whose children benefit from the current system, are unlikely to introduce / advocate real solutions to educational inequality as it may bring an end to the advantage that they currently enjoy.

This thesis seeks to challenge the legitimacy of ideologies, which ‘justify’ educational inequality (Hill 2003). Furthermore, I will argue that education (particularly 3rd level education) is key to disseminating a critical approach to wider society (see for example Herzog 2008; O’ Sullivan 2005, p.343; Tiwaah Frimpong Kwapong 2005). In order to bring about the equality that we strive for, we must include in the education system those “masses of people who have been pushed out of and have no place in capitalism. In other words, people who have nothing to lose and a world to win” (Holst 2007). The apparent paradox, whereby educational equality is required in order to give people the skills, insight and desire to fight for educational equality, needs to be addressed. Therefore I argue that only policies that explicitly address inequality, through a major redistribution of resources can truly make
education an equalizing force in society (Greaves et al. 2007) and that process needs to begin immediately.

4.2 Theoretically situating education in Ireland:

In this section I adopt a conflict theory approach to educational provision in Ireland. Conflict theory interprets education systems as a mechanism for the reproduction of social inequality. This is perpetrated via a number of means, for example through the ‘hidden curriculum’, which is a subtle presentation of dominant political or cultural ideas in the classroom. In addition, inequality is reproduced through schools routinely tailoring education to a student’s social class background. Research has identified an association between low educational attainment and both unemployment and wage rates (McCoy and Williams 2000; Gorby et al. 2005, cited in Tormey 2007, p.70). Additionally it is generally accepted that improving educational outcomes can have a major impact on levels of poverty and exclusion (Tormey 2007, p.169). In assessing the success of Irish policy in this regard I draw on evidence, which highlights the functionalist overtones of the Irish education system and I argue that the meritocratic ideology of functionalism masks the perpetuation of privilege. Additionally I argue that Irish government interventions to counter educational inequality have been largely unsuccessful because they have failed to acknowledge the need for radical, rather than incremental change.

It is often suggested that Ireland has successfully resisted the Neoliberal educational reform movement, characterised by the marketisation of education and the introduction of consumer ‘choice’. Yet I argue that even before Neoliberal reforms came to prominence internationally, Ireland had a system characterised by local management of schools and a fully functioning education ‘market’ (Tormey 2006, p.185). Dunne (2002, p.86) describes the Irish education system as being underpinned by business values whereby students and their parents are defined as consumers. For example parents in Ireland have always been free to seek places for their children in whatever school they wish (O’ Sullivan 2005, p.168). In fact, almost half the of the student cohort in Ireland do not attend their nearest school (Smyth and Hannan 2007, p.182). Furthermore O’ Sullivan holds that a ‘mercantile paradigm’, evident in the Irish education system, asserts that “what education is for is a matter for consumers of the system, such as pupils, parents, civic leaders and business interests, to decide” (O’
In essence Ireland did not need to participate in the Neoliberal educational reforms that took place elsewhere because we already had a system that permitted Neoliberal ‘consumer choice’ (Tormey 2007, pp.183-186).

It is clear that the Irish education system has a particularly strong meritocratic ideology and Irish government policy documents on education primarily reflect a variant of functionalism, termed ‘human capital’ theory. Human capital theory proposes that any increased investment in education will bring automatic economic benefits for society as a whole and also for the individuals concerned (see Drudy and Lynch 1993, p.31; Allen 2000, p.91). Yet I argue that the meritocratic discourse evident in the Irish education system camouflages the continuing existence of privilege (see O’Brien and Ó Fathaigh 2007, p.596).

The education system in Ireland has a core curriculum common to all school types; however the availability of specific subjects for example, is often determined by the size, gender, class composition and / or location of the school (Lynch 1998, p.154). Additionally attendance at middle class schools (Smyth and Hannan 2007, p.176), and / or the ability to access such resources as extra notes, grinds schools, and revision courses, all impact on educational attainment (Smyth 2008, p.13). Walsh and Donnelly (2006, cited in Murphy 2008, p.34) claim that “education by chequebook” reaps significant dividends, as parents who heavily invest in 2nd level education significantly increase the chances of their children getting into 3rd level. Therefore I argue that the simple provision of an equal opportunity to access education cannot guarantee equality of outcomes. I argue that in contemporary Irish society, to consume education one must have both the skills and more importantly the resources to do so (Lynch 1998, p.162; Lynch 1999; Murphy 2008). Ireland spends considerably less on education (4.4% of GDP) than Denmark (8.4%) and poorer EU states like Latvia (5.8%). As such, Irish parents are expected to subsidise education and where they cannot pay their children invariably suffer (Lynch 2007; Smyth and Hannan 2007, p.183).

It is argued that the state has only intervened in the area of educational provision through equality of opportunity policies and not in the area of participation (Lynch 1998, p.151). Tawney (1964, cited in Lynch 2007) captures the ambiguity of these
equality of opportunity policies by stating that its “credit is good as long as it never tries to cash its cheques”. In this context, while the Irish state often uses a meritocratic discourse, which “draws on liberal conceptions of equality”, the targets set in relation to addressing educational disadvantage have almost always been politically conservative. This process continues to the present time with targets set in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 essentially being rehashed versions of previous targets which were not met either (Tormey 2007, pp.178-179). Furthermore, Irish responses to educational disadvantage tend to be targeted rather than systemic, i.e. most are based on identifying the disadvantaged population and addressing their specific needs. Yet there are two major limitations to such an approach. Firstly, such responses mainly benefit the most advantaged individuals from the disadvantaged groups that they are targeting (Lynch 2007) and secondly (and most importantly), focusing on those who are said to have ‘failed’ within the system denies us the opportunity to focus on the system itself (Tormey 2007, p.191).

This assessment is crucial to understanding the ability of individuals to access second chance education schemes, which I will examine later. I argue that the Irish education system ensures that those who enter the education system from advantaged positions are perfectly positioned to increase (or at worst maintain) their advantage at every level within the system. Additionally, the meritocratic discourse used by the state ensures that as long as the education system is functional for the majority, the exclusion of the minority is tolerated (see O’Brien and Ó Fathaigh 2007). This has profound implications for education (in its current ideological location) as a mechanism for achieving social inclusion and / or an egalitarian society in Ireland.

Such issues have long been identified in research (see Smyth 2008; ESRI 2006; Clancy 2001; Lynch 1999; Clancy 1988; Hannan et al. 1983), which has documented that in Ireland, children from the upper socio-economic groups get a disproportionate number of the more valuable educational qualifications. Universalistic practices which provide (disadvantaged groups) limited potential to acquire valuable educational qualifications help to present a public facade of equality, to which the state can refer when asked to explain the persistence of educational inequalities (Lynch 1998, p.165). Educational disadvantage is an outcome of an unequal society (Lynch 2007) but this obvious fact has been largely ignored in policy on educational
disadvantage, meanwhile the state facilitates and funds the promotion of inequalities (Tormey 2007, pp.193-195) through for example the continuation of the free 3rd level fees initiative14.

I argue that those who control the education system are unwilling to over extend intervention as such a strategy might lessen their own power. Lynch (1998, p.163) argues that if interventions resulted in much higher participation rates among the groups the system currently disadvantages, then the elites who dictate and implement education policy (the government of the day) would almost certainly lose the support of the politically powerful and mobilised middle class groups, who are the main beneficiaries of education in Ireland presently. Thus it is argued that elites have a vested interest in maintaining the educational status quo (Lynch 1998, pp.152-153; see also the reference to Cassanova and Blackburn 1996, in the previous section of this chapter). This vested interest is clearly seen in the hostility of politicians (and wider Irish society) to even consider the reintroduction of 3rd level fees, (Hayes 2008; Cannon 2008; Quinn 2008; Doherty 2008) despite the now documented evidence that the removal of these fees has disproportionately benefited those who were already advantaged (see section 4.42). I argue that these politicians and their parties effectively see such a move as political suicide.

Irish policy in this area has not significantly concerned itself with eliminating the inequalities of wealth, power, and status that produce educational inequalities in the first case and reproduce them from one generation to the next (Lynch 2007). Therefore despite forty years of attempts by our governments (which have included both parties of the left and right) to address educational disadvantage, there is little evidence that these interventions have had a major impact on the groups that they were intended to assist (Archer and Weir 2004). The situation in Ireland at present (as elsewhere), is that 3rd level education is replacing secondary education as the focal point of access, selection, and entry to rewarding careers (OECD 1999a, p.20, cited in Clancy 2001, p.16). Education also produces inclusion in ways other than through the economic return that people obtain when converting acquired cultural capital into

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14 Third level tuition fees were abolished by Labour Education Minister Niamh Breathnach in the mid-1990s in order to remove the financial barrier and thus increase the participation of disadvantaged students in 3rd level education. While it has resulted in increases in absolute terms in participation from these groups, it has disproportionately benefited the middle classes and I argue that it has resulted in greater relative inequality in 3rd level than was the case before it was introduced.
economic capital. Education also can and should, strive to enable empowerment (working within the system) and emancipation (trying to change the system), (Inglis 1997) particularly for disadvantaged groups participating in it. Consequently I am in agreement with Forsyth and Furlong (2003, p.224) who argue forcefully for the necessity of encouraging disadvantaged groups to aspire towards post-compulsory education. However, in section 4.4 we will see empirical evidence, which illustrates that the patterns of educational inequalities referred to in this section remain intact. I argue that such research findings are evidence that the meritocratic ideology associated with functionalist equality of opportunity policies disguises the continuation of class-based advantage through the Irish education system. Accordingly I argue that the outcome for those whose educational ‘choices’ are restricted in Ireland, is the same as for those in similar situations in countries which have recognised Neoliberal education systems.

4.3 Developing an Empirical Understanding:
I now begin to empirically situate 3rd level education in order to support the theoretical arguments that I have made in the previous sections of this chapter. In section 4.31 I will show that 3rd level qualifications continue to act as valuable currency in ensuring social inclusion. We will see that access to higher education can be an extremely important pathway out of welfare dependency for welfare recipients given the present situation in European labour markets. In addition we shall see that rising levels of educational attainment in the general population brings a growing risk of qualification inflation, which has ominous connotations for those who have yet to obtain such credentials. I will document that high demand for 3rd level graduates is forecast to continue, and accordingly, a primary motivation for mature students (of which the vast majority of BTEA students are) returning to higher education is to access the graduate employment market.

4.31 The importance of 3rd level education in contemporary labour markets:
A plethora of research (see Lynch 1989; Winefield et al. 1993; Hammer 1997; OECD 1998) has been carried out on the labour market careers of previously unemployed young people. It has found that unemployed youths have low levels of education and often lack the qualifications demanded in today’s labour market. It has been further identified that for the unemployed, higher education can be an extremely important
pathway out of welfare dependency, given the current situation in European labour markets (OECD 1998). Riseborough (1993) argues that educational qualifications are “cultural capital passports” into the labour force, and as social inclusion is related to employment status, 3rd level graduate careers ensure social inclusion. This argument is further supported by Warmington (2003, p.103) who describes educational qualifications as currency within a labour market increasingly polarised between a working hub and a periphery dependent on a combination of short-term employment and state welfare. This echoes Ainley (1994, p.23), who argues that a lack of educational certification is virtual condemnation to social exclusion.

While Ainley and Warmington speak of educational qualifications in general, I believe that we are now faced with the situation where a lack of 3rd level qualifications, vastly increases the chance of being concentrated in less sustainable (and low paid) employment and / or unemployment. In all OECD countries, 3rd level graduates earn substantially more than non-tertiary graduates, with the earnings differential between 3rd level education and upper secondary education being significantly larger than the differential between other levels. This suggests that education beyond upper secondary level attracts a particularly high premium (OECD 2006, p.21). I accept that addressing educational disadvantage requires intervention at pre-school level right through to 3rd level (Power 2006), however for the reasons stated, I argue that it is 3rd level qualifications that (continue to have valuable currency within contemporary labour markets and) ensure social inclusion.

Clancy (2001, p.17) argues that education’s fundamental role in ensuring social inclusion is related to the role that it plays in the process of status attainment and reward configuration in our society, with higher levels of educational attainment being associated with declining prospects of unemployment. Furthermore the higher an individuals’ level of education the more likely that individual is to find sought after employment. This view is highlighted perfectly by two interviewees in Warmington’s study, who were resolute regarding the cultural capital passport status of formal qualifications. Mark states

“You only have to look in the papers to see how important (qualifications) are because they’re looking for these people. They say experience—but all these qualifications that you need. You know straight away which job you can and can’t go for”. (Warmington 2003, p.103)
Likewise Judith’s assertion (Warmington 2003, p.103) that “you need a qualification for everything these days” indicates a belief that the value of qualifications within the labour market has intensified. This highlights the apparent widespread conviction / belief that educational qualifications generate their own employment opportunities, while conversely a lack of qualifications forms a barrier to accessing more sustainable higher end positions (Warmington 2003, p.100). In an Irish context this is evidenced in the fact that over 50% of the jobs created in Ireland in the very recent past require 3rd level qualifications (IDA 2006). A 3rd level education delivered an annual earnings premium of 57% in Ireland in 2002 (Department of Education and Science 2003, p.7) and all of the evidence suggests that higher qualifications greatly benefit individuals both in terms of starting salary and long term career progression (HEA 2001, p.9; see also section 6.43). Thus, it was not surprising to note that 83% of mature student graduates from the University of Limerick considered that they were more employable by virtue of having a degree, as it opened up more options or complemented their existing experience (Ryan and Sweeney 2004, p.20). In spite of the fact that such a large proportion of mature student graduates felt this way, 48% of these same graduates undertook some form of further study or training since completion of their primary degree (Ryan and Sweeney 2004, p.16). This would seem to show that this group is aware of the need to continuously update their educational qualifications so as to maintain employability for the duration of their working lives and is possibly evidence of an on going process of qualification inflation.

In Ireland, increasing levels of educational attainment in the general population (see Figure 4.1), and rising numbers of people completing higher education may result in 3rd level educational credentials losing their current value both in the competition for attractive jobs in the labour market, and as cultural capital (as has occurred with 2nd level qualifications previously). High-skilled occupations are forecast to continue expanding, and the demand for 3rd level graduates is predicted to remain high (Sexton et al. 2004; O’Connell, McCoy and Clancy 2006, p.313). As the supply of skilled labour increases, we see an increase in the level of qualification required for occupational entry and this has seen admission to the more prestigious occupations, such as medical doctor becoming very restricted (Drudy and Lynch 1993, p.23). This has worrying implications for people who have not obtained 3rd level qualifications as they stand to be even further disadvantaged by such devaluation (Bourdieu 1984).
Table 4.1: Educational Attainment of the Labour Force 2006:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest level of education completed</th>
<th>Percentage of total whose full-time education has ceased</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of people whose full-time education has ceased</td>
<td>2,850,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary (incl. no formal education)</td>
<td>514,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower secondary</td>
<td>573,411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary</td>
<td>803,498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree or higher</td>
<td>527,775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Level Non-degree</td>
<td>301,327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>130,237</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of people whose full-time education has not ceased</th>
<th>Percentage of total whose full-time education has not ceased</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>525,065</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At school, university, etc.</td>
<td>349,596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>175,470</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CSO Education Principal Statistics.

In conclusion, with a shifting global division of labour, employment patterns are changing and multiskilling requirements now influence employers towards hiring a knowledge-based workforce (Watt and Paterson 2000, p.110). I argue that in Ireland we have seen a reduction in demand for unskilled young people with only 2nd level
education. The Minister for Social and Family Affairs recently announced an increase in the number of under-25 year olds signing on to the welfare rolls, with over 48,000 now looking for full time work, a 42% increase in twelve months. In addition, more than 14,500 of this group have been on the Live Register for more than six months, with half of them signing on for between 1 and 3 years (DSFA 2008a). I interpret these figures as evidence that large numbers of this particular population group do not have 3rd level qualifications. I make this interpretation on the basis that according to the DSFA (2008a) this group are going to be targeted for the BTEA\textsuperscript{15}. Therefore we are seeing a reduction in demand for unskilled young people with only 2nd level education, which is probably contributed to by the decline in the Irish construction industry.

\textbf{4.4 Inequalities in access to 3rd level education:}

This section examines inequalities in access to 3rd level education. I begin by briefly highlighting the international experience in order to contextualise the Irish situation. I then present empirical evidence in section 4.42 which illustrates that successful access to higher education is still largely dependant on ones’ social class background, and that the recent rise in 3rd level participation rates has disproportionately benefited the middle classes, in spite of stated national policy priorities to achieve equity of educational opportunity. Additionally, there are still major differences between socio-economic groups in terms of the type of college students attend and once again this appears to be a consistent pattern. Sections 4.43, 4.45, and 4.46 examine access to 3rd level education for mature students, students with a disability, and lone parents respectively. These sections will show that Ireland’s success to date in achieving equity of access to higher education for these groups still leaves a lot to be desired. Section 4.44 will examine mature student access courses, as alternative routes into 3rd level. The provision of such courses has assumed greater importance given the obvious advantage that the middle classes have in accessing 3rd level courses via traditional routes. However we will also see evidence that places on these access courses are being taken by middle class students at the expense of those for whom access was originally intended.

\textsuperscript{15} The highest option of the BTEA is the 3rd level option.
4.4.1 Setting the scene: the international context:

Internationally it is found that disadvantaged students are underrepresented in 3\textsuperscript{rd} level education. It was identified by the Scottish Council for Research in Education (cited in Watt and Paterson 2000, p.114) that finance and time constraints are the primary concerns of such students, and spending four years in relative poverty whilst amassing substantial debt unquestionably deters some individuals from entering higher education. Any loss of income as a result of the time spent in education is a material barrier to students with no other financial supports, and transport and/or childcare costs further contribute to the incurred cost of education in many cases (Hammer 2003). In keeping with this theme, previous research (Coffield and Vignoles 1997; Melcalf 1997) has found that those from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds were less likely to apply for higher education, especially at more prestigious institutions (Reay et al. 2001a). One possible explanation is that the longer duration of more advanced courses may deter some people with limited resources, and these ‘reluctant students’ choose the shortest course with which it is possible to gain access to their chosen career, or chose a course in a vocational subject that leads to a ‘guaranteed’ job (Forsyth and Furlong, 2003, pp.217-218). In summary, participation in 3rd level education has to be financially ‘worth it’ (Archer and Yamashita 2003, p.65). Yet it is very heartening to note that in spite of the perceived and actual financial hardships, students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are involved in 3\textsuperscript{rd} level programmes, regardless of their previous educational experiences, see higher education as a way to a ‘better’ life (McFadden 1995, p.40).

Reay, David and Ball (2001) demonstrate however that continuing in, or leaving education may not be an active, cognizant, coherent ‘choice’ as social class background often makes the choice for you. They suggest this reflects unequal access to cultural, social and economic capital, which may restrict and outline the options and ‘choices’ that people think are possible. In this context, in addition to reducing the financial deterrents it is necessary to reduce any perceived cultural barriers, in order to increase the participation of disadvantaged groups (Forsyth and Furlong 2003, pp.224-225).

Finally, it was found that such students still do not receive the requisite information to convince them that education will broaden their life chances and that education is a
lifelong process, which they can join at any stage in their life (Watt and Paterson 2000, p.116). Watt and Patterson (2000) found that people often receive information from schools and further education colleges that lead them to inappropriate courses, with the information offered not taking account of the fact that non-traditional students may need more support and information.

4.42 Persistent relative inequalities: The case of Ireland:

I begin this section by noting the words of Mary Hanafin, who when Minister for Education and Science in 2004, stated that

“Equity of access must be an integral feature of our higher education system if that system is to deliver for individuals, society and the economy... There is now general agreement that individuals should be able to enter and successfully participate in higher education, regardless of social, economic or cultural background”. (Higher Education Authority 2004, p.5)

Such statements were indicative of an evolving government discourse. Education has a pivotal role socially, culturally, and economically in Irish society. Widening access to higher education thus not only offers many benefits for disadvantaged groups but also for wider society. It is in this context that the state depicts its role in education as being underpinned by the ideology of pluralism, equality and the elimination of educational disadvantage (Action Group on Access 2001, p.17). The Irish government has increasingly incorporated into its discourse the understanding that the cumulative exclusion experienced by people living in certain districts, has resulted in high unemployment rates, welfare dependency, and comparatively low levels of participation in education, particularly 3rd level education. The National Development Plan identified a lack of educational achievement as a pivotal factor in individual social exclusion, while also noting the association between low levels of participation in the education process and the expansion of socially and economically marginalized communities (cited in Action Group on Access 2001, p.103). Consequently, tackling social exclusion through education, achieving equity of educational opportunity, and encouraging access to and successful participation in higher education have all been national policy priorities in Ireland since the mid-1990s (Higher Education Authority 2004, p.9). But how successfully have these policy priorities been implemented?
Access to 3rd level education in Ireland is expanding and 68.3% of those who sit the Leaving Certificate\textsuperscript{16} enter some form of higher education (ESRI 2006), but for many working-class children going to college remains an improbable dream. Both the national, and area based data presented in this section will show that successful access to 3rd level education in Ireland is strongly linked to a person’s social class background, with increasing participation rates disproportionately benefiting the middle classes. Thus I argue that the Irish education system, as it presently stands is an apparatus through which societies inequalities are reproduced.

Inequalities in participation ratios show both continuity and change over time (O’Connell, Clancy and McCoy 2006, p.65). Continuity is evidenced in the persistence of class inequalities in access to 3rd level education, while change is indicated in some lower socio-economic groups reducing their disadvantage, partly as a consequence of more advantaged groups reaching saturation point (O’Connell, McCoy and Clancy 2006, p.312). However it is clear that there remain major differences between socio-economic groups in terms of the levels of participation in higher education in Ireland. Empirical evidence shows that while rising participation rates have assisted all socio-economic groups, working-class groups have not gained any great advantage in relative terms (see ESRI 2006; Action Group on Access 2001; Drudy and Lynch 1993).

At a national level, overall rates of admission to higher education in Ireland rose from 20% in 1980, to 44% in 1998, and to 55% by 2004. It is interesting to note that in 1993 Rafterty and Hout suggested growth in the numbers progressing to 3rd level would improve the educational chances of formerly disadvantaged groups. We have seen large increases in participation occurring for those lower socio-economic groups with very low rates in 1980. This is clearly evident in the participation rate of the unskilled manual group, which increased from 3% in 1980 to 21% by 1998 (Clancy 2001, p.161). The participation rate in 3rd level education for the semi and unskilled socio-economic groups have further improved to between 33% and 40% by 2004, while over the same period the skilled manual socio-economic group has almost

\textsuperscript{16} The Leaving Certificate is the major public examination at second-level in Ireland. The results of this examination are the determining factor for the vast majority of 3rd level entrants in obtaining a course, what that course is and which college they can attend.
doubled its participation to a range\textsuperscript{17} of 50\% to 60\% up from 32\% in 1998 (ESRI 2006; see also O’Connell, McCoy and Clancy 2006, p.327). However it must also be noted that at the other end of the socio-economic spectrum, the progressive increase in the estimated participation rate of those groups, which were already ‘over-represented’ in 1980, is striking. The higher professional group’s participation rate reached saturation level, with an estimate of full participation by 1998, up from 85\% in 1992 (see O’Connell, McCoy and Clancy 2006, p.324; Clancy 2001). The employers and managers group had a participation rate of 84\% by 1998 (up from 42\% in 1980), while the farmers group reached a participation rate of 72\% by 1998 (Clancy 2001, p.161; Action Group on Access 2001, pp.33-34). Rafterty and Hout (1993) had suggested that relative inequalities between the different socio-economic groups in accessing 3\textsuperscript{rd} level education would only change when demand for higher education from the higher socio-economic groups became saturated (Clancy 2001, p.175). We have seen that such saturation has occurred, but the rest of this section will document that there has been little change in the levels of relative inequality.

In spite of a stated policy priority to increase access to 3\textsuperscript{rd} level education for disadvantaged groups, we can see from table 4.2 that in 2004 participation ratios in respect of higher professionals, farmers, employers and managers and lower professionals remained above 1, illustrating that these groups have advantaged positions in terms of accessing higher education. The share of children of skilled manual workers among new entrants increased and became roughly proportional to their share of the population of college entry age in 2004. Table 4.2 indicates a similar improvement in access among the semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, though these groups remain significantly under-represented in terms of their proportional share of new entrants to 3\textsuperscript{rd} level relative to their share of the population (O’ Connell, Clancy and McCoy 2006, pp 47-51; see also ESRI 2006; O’Connell, McCoy and Clancy 2006, pp.319-322). Therefore very little has changed since Clancy (2001, pp.158-159) reported that more than 58\% of 3\textsuperscript{rd} level entrants in 1998 came from just four socio-economic groups (higher professional, lower professional, employers and

\textsuperscript{17} The data gathered on who went to college in 2004 had methodological difficulties which required adjustment of the class distribution data, with the result that class-specific participation ratios and rates are estimated as ranges, rather than point estimates. See chapter 3 in O’Connell, Clancy and McCoy 2006, or O’Connell, McCoy and Clancy 2006, pp.316-318 for a full explanation.
managers and farmers), in spite of these groups making up just over 37% of the relevant national population.

*Table 4.2: Fathers’ socio-economic status of entrants to higher education and the adjusted participation ratio for 2004 in comparison to fathers’ socio-economic status of entrants to higher education and the participation ratio for 1998:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employers &amp; Managers</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Professional</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Professional</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Manual</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual Skilled</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi Skilled</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un Skilled</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own Account Workers</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>1.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Workers</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total %</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total N</strong></td>
<td><strong>19087</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: Socio-economic status of new entrants to higher education by college type, in 2004 in comparison to 1998:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-economic groups</th>
<th>Universities %</th>
<th>Institutes of Technology %</th>
<th>Colleges of Education %</th>
<th>Other Colleges %</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employers &amp; Managers</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Professional</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Professional</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Manual</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual Skilled</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi Skilled</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un Skilled</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own Account Workers</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Workers</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total %</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total N</strong></td>
<td>6156</td>
<td>8450</td>
<td>5713</td>
<td>8303</td>
<td>505</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: O’ Connell, Clancy and McCoy 2006, p.50; Clancy 2001, p.158.

Table 4.3 shows that there are still major differences between socio-economic groups in terms of the type of college students attend and once again this appears to be a consistent phenomenon (O’ Connell, Clancy and McCoy 2006, p.50; Clancy, 2001). In 2004 we see that 65.1% of entrants to university came from just four socio-economic groups (higher professional, lower professional, employers and managers, and farmers groups). In addition these four groups make up 51.2% of entrants to Institutes of Technology, almost 59% of entrants to Colleges of Education, and over 61% of entrants to other colleges. It is quite profound to note that the employers and

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18 See the Higher Education Authority website [www.hea.ie](http://www.hea.ie) for a list of these colleges. The Universities offer courses up to doctoral level. Institutes of Technology primarily offer courses to certificate and diploma level, though some degree courses are provided. The courses offered in IT’s are primarily technical courses. The Colleges of Education prepare individuals for careers as primary school teachers.
managers group made up the highest percentage of new entrants in all four categories of college. It is also noteworthy that the children of manual groups are more likely to enter Institutes of Technology than University, perhaps reflecting the argument that students from these particular socio-economic groups value educational qualifications, which will help them gain entry to the labour market in a shorter length of time.

Having examined the national data on access to 3rd level I now interrogate area based\(^{19}\) data, as there are often very large variations in the admission rates of individuals from certain geographic locations; variations which are less apparent when we only present national data sets. We find that in Dublin 10, which includes Ballyfermot, only 11.7% progressed to 3rd level; while in Dublin 17, which includes Darndale and Priorswood, the figure is just 16.7%. Similar low progression rates were observed in Dublin 1 (North Inner City) where the rate was 22.8%; in Dublin 2 (South Inner City) where it was 29.5%; and in Dublin 24 (Tallaght, Firhouse) where it was 40% (ESRI 2006). The evidence presented suggests that students from these districts face a range of obstacles at personal, family and community levels to their progression to higher education. These obstacles include the need to earn money, pressure to avail of employment opportunities or supplement the household income, and / or little tradition of progression to employment that requires college education (Action Group on Access 2001, p.104). In middle-class areas, the picture is a mirror image of that just highlighted. Dublin 14, which contains Rathfarnham, Dundrum, and Clonskeagh, shows progression rates of 86.5% (ESRI 2006), while leading fee-paying schools, such as Gonzaga, Blackrock College, and the Teresian School in Donnybrook regularly find a minimum of 90% of their students progressing to 3rd level colleges, most frequently Trinity College or University College Dublin (McConnell 2006).

\(^{19}\) I present information on admission rates from various areas in Dublin. Ballyfermot, Darndale and Priorswood, North Inner City, South Inner City, Tallaght, and Firhouse are all deemed to be disadvantaged areas. They are largely working class areas, with many large local authority estates, high unemployment, and many social problems. In contrast Rathfarnham, Dundrum, and Clonskeagh are all predominantly middle class areas.
Table 4.4 Rates of admission to higher education by postal district and level of study:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Postal District</th>
<th>Honours Degree Admission Rate</th>
<th>Sub Degree Admission Rate</th>
<th>Ratio of Degree / Non Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dublin 1</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predominantly Working Class Areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin 10</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin 17</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin 24</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predominantly Middle Class Areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin 4</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin 6</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin 14</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin 18</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Furthermore, there are differences between these areas in terms of rates of admission to degree versus sub-degree courses. As we can see from Table 4.4 there are lower ratios of degree to non-degree admission in what are predominantly working class areas in comparison to predominantly middle class areas. In essence the pattern is that new entrants to 3rd level from areas with higher overall admission rates are also considerably more likely to enter degree courses, while those from areas with low overall progression rates are more likely to enter sub-degree courses (O’Connell, Clancy and McCoy 2006, p.105). Accordingly I argue that children from working class areas are doubly disadvantaged, in that they are faced with lower overall progression rates to 3rd level, but they are also experiencing lower admission rates to degree courses relative to their middle class peers.

The 2004 figures (both at national and area based level) are an improvement (and in some locations and groups very significant improvements) on the 1998 rates. The debate therefore rests upon whether we should be satisfied that the absolute
participation rates of lower socio-economic groups have increased considerably over the last few years, or whether relative participation rates should be of paramount interest. In my opinion relative participation rates must always be of overriding concern. We should remain acutely aware of continuing competition to achieve the most highly valued credentials (Clancy 2001, pp.174-175). Accordingly the data just presented suggests that our educational system is not really the meritocratic structure that those in government would like us to believe it is. It is apparent that a society where successful participation in higher education is unrelated to social, cultural or economic background has not materialised and the rise in participation rates has disproportionately benefited the middle classes. All of this has occurred in spite of the abolition of 3rd level tuition fees in Ireland in 1996 (McCoy and Smyth 2003; O’Connell, McCoy and Clancy 2006, p.315), which was designed to remedy this situation. Thus it is argued that the education system as it stands, is indeed a mechanism through which society’s inequalities are being reproduced.

I am particularly concerned with examining access to 3rd level education for mature students, lone parents, and students with a disability, as BTEA recipients are will primarily drawn from these groups. It is in this context that the provision of access to higher education for these students is considered.

4.43 Mature student access to 3rd level education:
In 1970, UNESCO helped popularise an apparently broader understanding of adult education; ‘lifelong learning,’ presenting education as an integral part of people’s life experiences pervading all stages and areas of their lives (Grummell 2007, p.185; Department of Education and Science 1998, p.7). A primary motivation for mature students returning to full-time education in Ireland is to access the graduate employment market, as 3rd level qualifications are seen as improving ones long-term employment and promotional prospects (Ryan and Sweeney 2004, p.10). However Figure 4.1 shows that just 7.2% of the population aged 25-64 was engaged in education and training in 2004 in comparison to 9.9% in the EU (Department of Education and Science 2006). The numbers of mature students returning to education has risen, reflecting the ever growing emphasis on re-training, accreditation, and credentialism (Sargant 1996; Grummell 2007, p.195), yet still only 9% of new entrants to Irish 3rd level institutions in 2004 were aged 23 and over (O’ Connell,
Clancy and McCoy 2006, p.27). This rate is still well below the average for western countries (Action Group on Access 2001, p.81; OECD 2003). Irish state discourse on adult education is based on Neoliberal ideals, which presume the need for certain levels of social inequality\(^\text{20}\) (Fleming 2004). As such the promotion of a discourse of individual responsibility and meritocracy has underpinned the introduction of equality of opportunity policies in relation to access to 3\(^\text{rd}\) level for mature students, which I argue have in turn resulted in low participation rates for this population.

*Figure 4.1 Percentage of the population aged 25 to 64 participating in education and training in 2004:*

![Graph showing percentage of population participating in education and training in 2004.]


In 1991, Ireland’s Fianna Fáil government produced its Programme for Economic and Social Progress (PESP), which recommended increasing the participation rates of adult students within the higher educational system (Morrissey 1996). In 1992, a government Green Paper, ‘Education for a Changing World’, was published, proposing that 3\(^\text{rd}\) level institutions be encouraged to increase the number of places for mature students who did not necessarily meet academic requirements so as to assist mature students in gaining access. This policy was further developed in the 1995 publication ‘Charting Our Education Future’ (an Irish Government White Paper). The central aim of this White Paper was to maximise access for adults wishing to continue or update their education, irrespective of their prior educational attainments.

\(^{20}\) See Minister for Finance Michael McDowell’s comments that ‘a dynamic liberal economy like ours demands flexibility and inequality in some respects to function’ in an interview with Herman Kelly in *The Irish Catholic*, 27th May 2004.
This document accepted that the development of adult education in Ireland had occurred in an “adhoc and unstructured manner” (Department of Education and Science 1995, p.73). All of these policy documents were built upon the concept of ‘second chance’. Second chance education was to be provided in “a non-threatening learner centred environment” (Aontas 2008) with programmes ranging from developing a hobby to courses offering 3rd level qualifications (Aontas 2008). In essence the state sees ‘second chance’ as allowing people the opportunity to gain qualifications which they did not obtain previously from the education system (Fleming 1998, pp.59-60; Grummell 2007, p.183).

I argue that the discourse of ‘second chance’, which underpins lifelong learning, is invested with a Neoliberal ideology of individualism. The state argues that it provides for the possibility of lifelong learning and all that it entails, for those who are welfare recipients via wider access to ‘second chance’ educational opportunities, supported by financial assistance and incentives for those at greatest risk of ‘alienation’ from society (Mulderrig 2003). But for many of these people (as we have just seen) such ‘opportunities’ are not their second chance, but rather their first chance (Fleming 1998, pp.59-60), and for some may be their last chance, to gain such qualifications. Such discourse also fails to recognise the reality that many citizens cannot make such active consumer choices (Grummell 2007, pp.188-189), either in progressing to 3rd level education as a traditional age student, or in returning to 3rd level education as an adult. In this context it is noteworthy that a government Green Paper (Adult education in an era of learning 1998) and White Paper (Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education 2000) document Ireland’s low international ranking in relation to age-based differentials in educational attainment, and acknowledge that significant increases in mature student entry to education was needed to address this differential (O’ Sullivan 2005, p.510).

A key factor identified as restricting access to 3rd level education for disadvantaged mature students has been a serious lack of information and guidance services (Action Group on Access 2001, p.90; Lynch 1997). This has been addressed to some extent by the launch of a dedicated website (HEA 2007) which is to be welcomed. I argue however that this method of information delivery is not optimal for my population of interest. For welfare recipients their first point of contact with services is the social

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welfare offices. This is where they should have access to all the information that they will need but as we will see in chapter seven this is not the reality. Furthermore, while this HEA website provides the requisite information, users will need a certain level of social and or cultural capital to know of its existence and to be able to utilise it.

Inadequate financial supports also effect the participation of mature students in education (Action Group on Access 2001, p.88) as students often (through economic necessity) have to balance part-time work with their academic duties. Furthermore, the majority of mature students pursue higher education through part-time or distance education options, where the tuition fees waiver does not apply, and so fees continue to be a major burden (Action Group on Access 2001, pp.88-89). Research highlights that even for full time mature students (to whom the free fees initiative applies) the inadequacy of maintenance grants, the need for additional support towards the cost of books, course materials and transport, and the lack of supported services such as childcare are prominent obstacles which have to be overcome (Action Group on Access 2001, pp.88-89; Healy 1997; Lynch 1997).

Most significantly, mature students continue to be faced with low availability of reserved college places. There are two main direct entry routes available to full-time mature students in Ireland, the first being through an application made to the Central Applications Office (CAO), where the applicant is assessed on their leaving certificate results. The second method is where the applicant applies directly as a mature student to the individual 3rd level institution. In this instance the application is assessed on an individual institutional basis but applicants have to undertake separate assessment processes in each of the 3rd level institutions to which they apply. Different appraisal procedures may be used in separate faculties in the same institution, which prove time-consuming and expensive from an applicant’s viewpoint. Furthermore, a high level of confusion is evident among unsuccessful mature student, primarily because of lack of feedback (Action Group on Access 2001, pp.84-85) from the individual institutions. The Commission on the Points System (cited in the Action Group on Access 2001, p.85) considered that there should be a single evaluation of a mature person’s application for a 3rd level place in any broad course area and that where diverse courses are applied for there should be a general assessment of each application. In this regard the Commission recommended that 3rd level institutions
should provide a co-ordinated system of assessment of mature students applications, under the control of the CAO, to be established by autumn 2002. Significantly this has not happened to date.

The reality is that access to and participation in 3rd level education remains difficult for mature students. For example, the University of Limerick increased its intake of full time mature students from 75 in 2001/2002 to 155 in 2004/2005 (Devereux 2006, p.5), which represented approximately 2.6% of the University’s’ entire full time student body. This is in spite of the University having a dedicated (and very active) mature student access course and courses, which specifically reserve places for mature students. Furthermore across the Irish higher education sector there is considerable variation in the types of course which mature students can access with “disciplines such as business and humanities tending to have higher numbers of mature students compared to courses like medicine, dentistry or veterinary studies, which have very low numbers of mature students” (Devereux 2006, p.3).

Moreover, limited proactive policies (we will examine these in the next section) continue to make it tremendously hard for disadvantaged mature students to enter and succeed within the system. O’ Sullivan (1992, p.344) argues forcefully that while expansion in interventionalist adult and continuing education would attract more from a low socio-economic background into the system, those from a higher socio-economic background are still more likely to benefit from such developments. This is because equality of opportunity policies in reality offer little more than the right to succeed in an ‘open competition’. Such policies do not take account of the fact that in all ‘competition’ there are losers and that the social, economic and cultural advantage of some participants ensures that the contest will never be fair (Mulderrig 2003). In such competitions to obtain one of these valuable places, previous educational attainment can put an individual at an advantage relative to the other applicants. Accordingly, those from socio-economic groups, which are least likely to attain better school-leaving qualifications, are doubly disadvantaged in this competition. In fact, Hammer (2003, p.210) argues that in most European countries, the probability of re-entering post-compulsory education is primarily dependent on educational capital, with those who possess higher levels of educational capital being significantly more likely to further increase their stock of such capital. Accordingly I argue that those
with lower reserves of educational capital are continually disadvantaged in their struggle to access 3rd level education in Ireland.

In 1997, Lynch carried out a comprehensive survey on mature students in higher education and found that most mature students came from a lower middle class background, with only 22% of mature student entrants coming from the four lower socio-economic groups. Greater mature student participation in 3rd level had not resulted in a significant increase in the representation of disadvantaged groups. Significantly, Lynch (1997) also found that a large proportion of mature students had at least a Leaving Certificate, with a sizeable minority having some form of 3rd level qualifications as well. As such, some of these students would not even be regarded as educationally disadvantaged. It is argued that our current model for mature student access to 3rd level education allows the “strong and self-motivated individual to climb the economic ladder and fit into society” (Fleming 1998, pp.59-61) while those who are most in need of ‘second chance’ education continue to struggle to access it.

In a UK context, some of the young men in Archer and Yamashita’s (2003) study spoke of how their classed masculine appearances and speech mark them out as different and may prevent them from being accepted onto college courses. Two of the male participants expressed the view that their “‘rough’ identities were in conflict with the need to be ‘polite’ and speak ‘all smart’ in college interviews– where acceptance may depend upon hiding ‘your true self’. This situation led one of the interviewees to suggest that it may be “safer (in identity terms) for boys like himself to not even attempt to be socially mobile, but rather to accept his ‘limits’ and, thus, not try to become or act ‘all smart’ and/or middle class” (Archer and Yamashita 2003, pp.61-62).

These issues hold tremendous significance for those of us who argue in favour of working towards social inclusion through education. To a certain extent I agree with the individuals in Archer and Yamashita’s (2003) study and feel that extensive social mobility through education may be unattainable, without more radical change. I argue that in the context of the prioritising of equality of opportunity over equality of participation, ‘second chance’ is essentially a myth, which allegedly offers everyone an equal chance to access education and improve their circumstances, while simultaneously allowing existing class inequalities to remain unchecked in the
resulting competition for places. To this extent I argue that we need to strive to change the education system, which reproduces and underpins class inequalities from one generation to the next, particularly as a result of the increased credentialisation of contemporary western society.

4.44 Mature student access courses:

This section examines the provision of dedicated mature student 3rd level access courses in Ireland. As a result of the obvious advantage that the middle classes have in accessing 3rd level education via traditional routes (both in terms of progressing to 3rd level as a traditional age student, or in returning as a mature student), alternative proactive routes for disadvantaged mature students (such as mature student access courses) are ever more important. I begin by briefly illustrating the international situation so as to contextualise the Irish experience.

The 1995 European Commission White Paper on Education and Training stated that “positive discrimination in favour of those at a social disadvantage is essential” (cited in McGuire et al. 2003, p.42) to achieving equity in 3rd level education. The original discourse (and intention) of access was to transform 3rd level education by increasing the numbers of marginalized groups in the academy, creating a “fundamental shift in the distribution of cultural capital” (Williams 1997a, p43 cited in Burke 2002, p.14). However this radical agenda of access education has been eclipsed by Neoliberal governments’ focus on widening educational participation (Burke 2002, p.4). There is a major paradox in the discourse that accompanies this widening of participation as although this Neoliberal rhetoric focuses on the educationally (and socially) excluded it also constructs the education system as being founded on the principles of equal opportunity and meritocracy, where students are consumers of education and (Burke 2002, p.140) and where ultimately individual desire and hard work is all that is needed to succeed. Such policies and their implementation are held to have undermined the ability of education to address social inequalities (Burke 2002, p.1).

Accordingly, international trends suggest that it is proving to be difficult for disadvantaged mature students to obtain a place even on such specialised access courses. The Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP) was set up in 1988 to facilitate access for mature students and other groups from disadvantaged
backgrounds, yet after 15 years in existence it had only limited success in attracting the unemployed and disabled (McGuire et al. 2003, p.44). Tight (1996) found that mature students undertaking access programmes already had some degree of qualifications and relevant experience. Consequently, throughout Britain, despite the promotion of access courses specifically targeted at those from disadvantaged backgrounds, there has been a decrease in the number of such students being accepted on to access courses and a similar situation is said to be occurring in Ireland (Devereux 2006, p.18).

In Ireland, access programmes were introduced to encourage greater representation of the socially excluded at 3rd level (McGuire et al. 2003, p.42). The allocation of places on such courses is often based on the results of interviews, where previous educational and or work experience (levels of cultural capital) are taken into consideration. In the University of Limerick for example, there are no standard educational entry requirements to obtain one of a limited number of places on the Mature Student Access Certificate Course, but “evidence of a particular interest in education and a strong motivation is essential” (UL Mature Student Office 2008). Those from working class backgrounds tend to have less experience of and familiarity with higher education and so they are at a significant disadvantage (Devereux 2006, p.123). Middle class students on the other hand often have significantly higher levels of the required (at the interview stage) cultural capital and accordingly are proving to be more successful in obtaining these valuable places (see Devereux 2006; McGuire et al. 2003).

There is a significant dearth of empirical data on those obtaining places on mature student access courses in Ireland. Since 2007, all publicly funded higher education institutions have gathered information on the socio-economic, ethnic/cultural and disability background of new entrants as part of student registration. However the questions, which elicit this information, are not mandatory (HEA 2008, pp.1-7) and many students leave these questions blank. However McGuire et al. (2003, pp.51-56) have profiled mature students participating in access courses. Their study found that these individuals are likely to be aged 29+, possess at least a leaving certificate, studying an arts / humanities course, and are most likely to attend 3rd level for personal development purposes (stating that they are availing of educational
opportunities which they had not taken advantage of previously). There is also strong anecdotal evidence suggesting that places on access courses are being taken by middle class students (often those who have retired from the labour market) who have decided to return to the education system for ‘recreational education’.

Furthermore, it is quite remarkable to note that while an access course may be the best entry route available to welfare recipients it is not recognised for 3rd level grants. While the BTEA recognises full-time courses, part time access courses are not recognised for the purpose of the scheme (see section 7.53). As a result of the evidence presented throughout this section I conclude that Ireland’s success to date in achieving equity of access to 3rd level education for mature students (and particularly disadvantaged mature students) leaves a lot to be desired.

4.45 Access to 3rd level for students with a disability:

When we look at students with a disability, we find that their active inclusion in 3rd level education in Ireland is a fairly recent development. The percentage of disabled students at 3rd level was only a minute 0.65% in 1993 / ‘94 (Assist Ireland 2005). Participation is not only about obtaining a place in college, it is also about having access to the resources which can ensure the same learning experiences as other students (Assist Ireland 2005). Students with disabilities are met with physical barriers to accessing the campus and its facilities, and traditional assessment procedures may not be effective in assessing the knowledge of some students with disabilities (Shevlin et al. 2004, p.17; Action Group on Access 2001, p.65). Ominously, these students may also experience difficulties in accessing work experience or disability related social welfare payments (Action Group on Access 2001, p.66; Shevlin et al. 2004). For many students with disabilities, intensive courses with long contact hours do not offer the optimum conditions for pursuing 3rd level studies. The absence of funding structures to support access to part time education, and the limited range of courses available on a part-time basis, remain significant obstacles to access to 3rd level courses by students with disabilities (Action Group on Access 2001, pp.65-66).

On a more positive note, while many people with disabilities will not have had any opportunity to, or an expectation of, accessing 3rd level education, many higher
education institutions have developed alternative admission procedures for students with disabilities (Action Group on Access 2001, p.70). The allocation of HEA strategic funding has been pivotal in the development of an infrastructure of core disability support services and the introduction of broader teaching and learning strategies to address these issues (Assist Ireland 2005). Accordingly, the participation rate of students with disabilities in the universities has risen from 0.88% in 1998 / 1999 to 2.38 in 2004. The same progress was not seen in the Institutes of Technology, where the participation rate remains persistently low, essentially because ITs are not as successful in accessing HEA strategic funding (Assist Ireland 2005). However, even these improved participation rates are low in comparison to international standards. Furthermore, a participation rate of 2.38% demonstrates significant under-representation of this population in 3rd level education, given that 5-10% of the Irish population have one or more disabilities (Shevlin et al. 2004, p. 16).

Recommendation 39 of the Action Group on Access to 3rd level education (2001, p.72) suggested that the Department of Social, Community, and Family Affairs (DSCFA) should remove the six month criterion for eligibility for the BTEA. This was recommended in order that students with disabilities in receipt of relevant social welfare payments would qualify. It further recommended that the DSCFA facilitate the eligibility of students with disabilities to complete postgraduate studies with the support of the BTEA (as we will the see in chapter 5 the exact opposite has happened). Worryingly it noted that students with disabilities who are eligible to apply for the BTEA, often do not, as they are concerned about difficulties or delays that can occur when transferring back to the original payment on completion of a course of study (Action Group on Access 2001, pp.72-73). This again has great significance as an obstacle to achieving social inclusion through the BTEA.

To conclude, the response of both the Irish state and individual 3rd level institutions to the inclusion of disabled students demonstrates the intrinsic limitations to the approach that has been adopted. Conventional ‘second chance’ access initiatives have been implemented, which effectively fail to optimise the academic (and resultant labour market) participation of disabled persons. The provision of such initiatives for marginalized groups does not fundamentally modify the dominant processes within the education system, which have marginalized such groups in the first instance (or
indeed society at large). In essence, while such initiatives have a major positive
impact on individuals who can and are selected to avail of them, they have little
impact on the isolation of the larger disabled population within society (Shevlin et al.
2004, p.28).

4.46 Lone Parents:
There were 162563 lone mothers (CSO 2007a) and 25630 lone fathers (CSO 2007b)
recorded in the 2006 census in Ireland, with 47% of this population having only been
educated to Junior Certificate level (Combat Poverty Agency 2008). For this
population education has long been identified as a route to economic sufficiency and a
way to break the poverty cycle that many lone parents find themselves trapped in.
Accordingly it was not surprising to find a very high number of lone parent
participants (65%) in Healy’s study (2004, pp.8-9) stating that they wanted to return
to education or training. Yet it is also clear that access to educational opportunities
(particularly 3rd level education) is very limited for lone parents in Ireland and thus
the relatively low educational attainment of the group is continuously compounded
(McCormack 2005; Smyth and Hannan 2000).

In Ireland, lone parents exhibit low levels of participation in higher education, which
is often explained by the fact that there are no education programmes aimed
specifically at them (in the same way for example as there are access courses for
socio-economically disadvantaged students and mature students (McCormack 2005)).
The barriers, which lone parents need to overcome in order to access the very limited
educational opportunities available to them, are both structural and individual
(Duncan and Edwards 1997, cited in McCormack 2005). Supported child care (or lack
of) is the major obstacle to this group returning to education (Healy 2004, p.19). Lone
parents returning to education (or taking up employment for that matter) rely
significantly more on childcare facilities than two-parent families (Russell et al. 2004,
friendly arrangements, and the possibility of the loss of secondary benefits
(McCashin, 2000) are also significant barriers which lone parent must negate if they
are to return to education. Individual barriers including low self-esteem, and negative
past experiences of education (Lone Parents Forum Report, 2001) are also significant
in this regard. In the current Neoliberal era the retraction of the welfare state has seen
more pressure being brought to bear on lone parents to enter the labour market. However the level of education that lone parents possess largely limits the level at which they enter the labour market (McCormack 2005). Recognition of the structural barriers, which lone parents face in trying to access higher education, thus generates an understanding of the poverty traps which these individuals experience on a day to day basis (Combat Poverty Agency 2006). The participation of lone parents in education (and employment) requires the state to properly address the issue of childcare in particular (McCormack 2005) as the allocation of €1000 euro per child per annum (to all families) has had little impact, when childcare costs can be between five and ten times that amount.

In the early 1990s the Irish state began to introduce measures to encourage lone parents back into education, measures that were ultimately combined with policies directed at ‘enabling’ the long term unemployed to do likewise (McLaughlin and Rodgers 1997, cited in McCormack 2005). Although, we will see that individual recipients benefit enormously from the BTEA, schemes such as the BTEA appear to be doing little to overcome the barriers to education for this group. In 1999 for example there were only 567 lone parents availing of the third level option of the BTEA (McCashin, 2000, cited in McCormack 2005), constituting only 12% of the total number in receipt of the BTEA that particular year. While the retention of financial benefits is crucial for participation in higher education, the BTEA offers no support for childcare even though eligibility for the scheme insists on enrolment in full-time courses (One Family 2004). The lack of funding for part-time educational options may further explain why the uptake of education by lone parents remains low (McCormack 2005). Finally, there is a lack of empirical data available to most service providers and indeed the DSFA (see section 6.54) on the requirements of lone parents (Healy 2004, p.7) making it very difficult to develop informed policy decisions for the provision of educational access to this particular group.

**Conclusion:**

In this chapter I developed a theoretical and empirical understanding of educational inequality, including with specific reference to Ireland. I established that education has become increasingly characterised by its relationship to the labour market and documented how Neoliberal governments have attempted to link educational success
and failure with individual effort and choice. I argued that such an education system will continue to disproportionately benefit those at the top end of the social ladder. I have argued that the Irish education system effectively controls levels of social mobility, but its meritocratic ideology masks the perpetuation of privilege. Furthermore I offered an insight into the myth of ‘second chance education’, which purports to offer all groups equal opportunities to access education and improve their circumstances, while simultaneously allowing existing class inequalities to remain largely unaltered, as a result of competition for access.

I empirically situated 3rd level education in terms of its effect on social mobility and demonstrated that 3rd level qualifications continue to constitute valuable currency in ensuring social inclusion. Yet we saw clear empirical evidence that in spite of increases in overall admission rates to 3rd level and national policy priorities to achieve equity of educational opportunity, there has not been any great reduction in relative class inequality in access to higher education in Ireland. Additionally, there appears to be a consistent pattern of major class differences in terms of the type of college students attends. I have shown that increasing levels of educational attainment in the general population brings an increasing risk of qualification inflation, which has ominous connotations for those who have not yet obtained such qualifications. Finally, I have argued that while it is apparent that adequate information, financial support and additional resources are essential in order to widen access to higher education for mature students, lone parents, and students with disabilities, we also need to strive to change the education system in its current ideological position if we are to bring about true educational equality. In effect, the ability of these groups to access 3rd level education in Ireland is being inhibited by the very policy approach which maintains that is trying to create inclusion and equality (see Burke 2002, p.25 for an evaluation of a similar situation in the UK). It is asserted that equality of opportunity policies provide access to the competition for second chance education, rather than to education itself. I argue that in such an open competition the relative disadvantage of the very groups that second chance education seeks to assist will be maintained.
CHAPTER FIVE
THE ROLLBACK OF THE WELFARE STATE

Introduction:
This chapter seeks to situate the Back to Education Allowance in its macro level context. It begins by examining the system of welfare provision that exists in Ireland and how that system emerged. It progresses to examine competing understandings of social exclusion and the implications that choosing a strong or weak definition of exclusion have on the measures taken to address it. The chapter further examines the emergence of Neoliberalism as the dominant political discourse in the 1980s, before focusing on how the construction of status beliefs and the ‘New Right’ doctrine of individual accountability have been used to justify the rolling back of the welfare state and the promotion of welfare to work programmes in western societies. The chapter concludes by focusing on the emergence of activation policies in Ireland and examining the place of the BTEA welfare to education programme in a post-welfare state era.

5.1 Ireland: A minimalist system of welfare provision:
In this section I will demonstrate that Ireland is a residual welfare state, characterised by a minimalist system of welfare provision, despite social partnership agreements seemingly signifying the emergence of a neo-corporatist welfare state. There are primarily two ways of understanding how welfare states materialized. The first view sees the welfare state emerging as a response to economic uncertainty caused by the process of industrialisation. Those who hold this view explain the materialization of the welfare state from a functionalist perspective. They argue that it was not in society’s interest to allow severe poverty or social exclusion to occur, as this has the potential to cause social unrest, conflict and upheaval. Thus the state provides a collective donation through the institutions of the welfare state to insure against the risks of social exclusion (Manning 2003, p.62). Those who adopt this interpretation argue that the existence of the welfare state ensures that society remains in a state of equilibrium.
I adopt the second perspective which sees the welfare state as having emerged through the political process as a result of social conflict (Manning 2003, p.62; McCashin 2004; Baldock, Manning, and Vickerstaff 2003, pp19-20). The welfare state is thus seen to have resulted from a conflict of interests, between the parties of the Right and those of the Left. When these parties enter government, their left-wing or right-wing ideologies influence policy to address society’s inequalities (Manning 2003, pp.62-63). Research has shown that the provision of public welfare through the welfare state is strongest when “left-wing mobilization and the absence of right-wing governments” is evident (Castles and McKinlay 1978; Hicks and Swank 1984; Hicks et al. 1989; cited in Manning 2003, p.63). I argue that the Left have put the developed welfare state in place and the Right have not been able to justify entirely dismantling it.

It is important to note that while the state can regulate and provide resources for social policies, it is simultaneously controlled through the electoral system. Therefore social policies are underpinned by political ideologies, which are of central importance here (Manning 2003, pp.63-64). In various periods different political ideologies have dominated. Traditionally when there have been strong governments of the Left, (or where parties of the Left have held the balance of power in governments, there has been broad welfare state development. However in the main, where parties of the Right have held power, the opposite has proved to be true. I would argue this may be as a result of the ideals of the Right being located in Social Darwinism, which ensure that the Right has historically been slow to intervene, as they see intervention as having highly adverse consequences for society (Manning 2003, p.66; George and Wilding 1985). Instead, the Right has preferred compulsory insurance or a paltry state safety net at low levels, the rationale being that these low level payments would ensure that people would avoid dependency on these payments (or in their best case scenario avoid claiming benefit) if at all possible (Manning 2003, p.70). In contrast, Manning (2003, p.72) argues that the Left fights for rights to more generous levels of welfare, and to make sure that excluded groups get equal treatment, rights which are much more expensive for the welfare state to provide. Yet I argue that such a clear distinction is no longer evident in mainstream politics, where the mainstream parties
of the centre-left (who still claim to be left wing\textsuperscript{21}) increasingly prefer state provision at levels not too far removed from basic adequacy (Manning 2003, p.70), which in essence is what the parties of the right have advocated.

I now examine the type of welfare provision in existence in Ireland. I utilize Esping-Andersen\textquoteright s (1999) typology of welfare states, particularly the Universalist and Residual models in order to situate the development of Irish welfare provision. The Scandinavian welfare states are the best representation of the Universalist model, which is characterized by universal coverage. In contrast the USA is a good example of the Residual model, characterized by the provision of minimal levels of assistance (most often means-tested) which aims to alleviate extremes of poverty. In fact it is argued that the Residual model of welfare provision does little to tackle these inequalities and instead results in their maintenance (Turner and Haynes 2006, p.87).

It is said that Ireland is a hybrid welfare state\textsuperscript{22} (NESC 2005) but I argue that Ireland falls considerably nearer to the residual than it does to the universal model, as the Irish welfare system is characterized by minimal state involvement, the promotion of market solutions and the cultivation of an ideology of personal responsibility, in order to individualise risk (Turner and Haynes 2006, pp.88-89; see also Esping-Andersen 1990, pp.26-27; Kuhling and Keohane 2007, p.153). “One distinguishing feature is that Ireland uses a moderate to low proportion of national resources in providing services and a low proportion in providing cash transfers despite its relatively wealth status in EU terms” (Cousins 2007, p.6). In addition Irish spending on active labour

\textsuperscript{21} In 1992 the Irish Labour party received its largest vote in 70 years, yet they then “not only joined Fianna Fail in coalition, but agreed to a tax amnesty for the wealthy elite they had rhetorically attacked. As one journalist put it, ‘that Labour, after all the passion and eloquence with which it had denounced the old system, agreed to and defended and amnesty which benefited, in the words of Dick Spring’s (Leader of the Party) adviser, Fergus Finlay, in his book Snakes and Ladders, “every sleazebag in the country” at the time inexplicable’” (Allen 2000, p.190). The labour Party has never come near this level of support in Ireland since.

\textsuperscript{22} Specifically that Ireland is a variant of the liberal or Anglo-Saxon model. In support of this, such factors can be cited as the “concentration on providing basic levels of services and weak commitment to reducing inequalities; the high degree of reliance on means-testing; the low proportion of resources devoted to social spending; the emphasis within social insurance on solidarity and the very limited practice of income replacement. Ireland’s welfare arrangements also show features of a ‘solidaristic’ approach, for example the purchasing power of social welfare payments has consistently been increased; National partnership arrangements have adopted consensual approaches to wage-setting, paid particular attention to increasing the lowest wages, and a significant set of active labour market programmes have been developed” (NESC 2005, pp. 139-140).
market programmes (ALMP) increased to 1.53% of GDP in 2000, which is significant spending given the scale of economic growth during this time. Irish welfare policy is infused with both encouraging and penalizing measures which combine to push welfare claimants towards employment (Murphy 2007, pp.127-129) irrespective of the wages or social security benefits associated with that employment. This assessment is borne out in the fact that Ireland has seen the percentage of working poor increase from 3.2% in 1994 to 7.4% in 2000 and to 9.8% in 2004 (CSO 2005, cited in Murphy 2007, p.119). I argue that such policies are evidence of a residual welfare state model.

It has been argued that Ireland is actually a liberal neo-corporatist welfare state, (see Roche and Cradden 2003, for a discussion) particularly as a result of the social partnership agreements between the government, business organizations and the unions, which are claimed to be negotiated for the social good (Boucher and Collins 2003, p.296). Those participating in the agreements argue that partnership is vitally important, as the growing inequality in Irish society is deemed to be a threat to social cohesion and economic prosperity, especially in the context of an increasingly high wage knowledge economy (Turner and Haynes 2006, p.88; Hardiman 2000, pp.289-291). However while there are definitely elements which suggest a corporatist welfare state (I cannot deny the existence of the social partnership agreements), I argue that Irish corporatism operates primarily in the service of Neoliberalism.

Irish social partnership arrangements have reacted to Neoliberal globalization and increased European integration by simultaneously moving our social and economic policy towards European neo-corporatism and Anglo-American Neoliberalism (two apparently opposing tracks). This has seen Ireland's liberal corporatist welfare state transformed into a form of Neoliberal corporatism emblematically positioned somewhere between Boston and Berlin (Boucher and Collins 2003, p.295). The Boston – Berlin dichotomy involves a struggle between the continental European belief in high-quality levels of social protection, public services and higher taxation, and the global (though US led) Neoliberal path of free markets, restrictive social provision and lower taxation (O’Mahony 2004, p.24). The latter is the direction recent Irish governments have chosen to take us (see Allen 2003) prompted by the Neoliberal ethos of the Progressive Democrat party, who though extremely small in
size (and electoral support) have been in government for 14 of the last 19 years (Kuhling and Keohane 2007, p.155). In fact the Tánaiste, Mary Harney (2000) clarified Ireland’s position when she stated that while “geographically we are closer to Berlin than Boston. Spiritually we are probably a lot closer to Boston than Berlin”. But what has such positioning meant for those living in Ireland?

Ireland's most recent social partnership agreement (Towards 2016) “recognises the importance of measures to build an inclusive society (Ireland 2006) … and the social partners are committed to the achievement of a participatory society and economy with a strong commitment to social justice” (Cousins 2007, pp.2-3). Yet I would argue that social partnership has in reality acted as a more subtle means of breaking (or at least controlling) the unions, with the dominant strategy used to ensure this result being the incorporation of the union leaders into these agreements “so that they come to share the same general objectives as the employers and state officials” (Allen 2000, p.112). Social partnership was supposed to be negotiated for the social good but by 2006 Ireland was the second most unequal country on the planet, with the welfare state in its current guise failing to address that inequality. Social partnership has coincided with changes which have seen social security to GDP spending fall considerably and a transfer of wealth upwards (Allen 2003, p.68; Lynch 2007) with the percentage of national income going to wages, pensions and social security falling by 10% in the decade after social partnership was introduced (Allen 2000, p.71).

Ireland is now characterised by greater class inequality than ever before. Rents have risen, home ownership is no longer an option for many people and many of those that have managed to purchase houses (in a massively inflated property market) are now crippled with massive debt repayments, banks have made exorbitant profits, and the cost of energy has risen enormously, but the only item controlled in partnership agreements was workers’ wages (Allen 2000, pp.180-185). We have also seen little of the social and affordable houses that we were promised under these agreements. Finally, workers’ demands for a greater share of the wealth that has been created (higher wages) are constructed as a form of selfish lunacy that will damage the economy (Allen 2000, p.35) with such rhetoric being used even more frequently in

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23 The Deputy Prime Minister of the Irish Republic. At this time Mary Harney was also leader of the Progressive Democrats.
the current economic climate. I argue that when we scratch the surface and look at the results of these partnership agreements we can hardly say they were negotiated for the social good.

A contrasting argument is often made (particularly by the government) that spending on social welfare has consistently increased. So how can I argue that Ireland is characterized by minimal welfare provision when faced with these ‘facts’? It is quite true that government expenditure increased significantly between 1987 and 2004 in the areas of social welfare (83%) and education (118%). However it is, in my view, more important to mention that during this same period of time the proportion of GNP spent on social welfare declined by 4.7%, while the amount spent on education declined by 1.4% (Turner and Haynes 2006, p.91). Table 5.1 shows that Ireland’s spending on welfare and on education as a percentage of GDP is far below that of Sweden and is even below that of poorer countries such as Slovenia. This is without even taking into account how much of the social welfare and education budgets are taken up by capital expenditure. In an era when Ireland has experienced unprecedented growth, resulting in huge tax takes for the state, we have not seen equivalent increases in the rates of spending on welfare provision or education.

**Table 5.1 Social expenditure as a percentage of GDP:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total Social Expenditure as a % of GDP</th>
<th>% on Education as a % of GDP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


While there have therefore been improvements in absolute conditions, there has been a simultaneous growth in relative inequality. While welfare benefits have risen in real terms since 1987, they have not risen at a similar rate to the gross average industrial wage, resulting in a greater gap between welfare benefits and average earnings (Turner and Haynes 2006, p. 93; McCashin 2004, p.68; Allen 2003; Callan and Nolan 2000, p201; Kirby 2002). This has had a major impact on the day to day lives of welfare recipients in Celtic Tiger Ireland, where the boom has effectively passed them
by. They have seen little positive change in their circumstances and with ever increasing inflation, rising food prices, and the rise in the cost of living generally, many have found it harder to make ends meet, irrespective of the social welfare increases that the state has sanctioned during this period. Indeed many now find that they are socially excluded from the day to day ‘consumer experience’ of life in modern Ireland (see Kuhling and Keohane 2007; Nolan and Maitre 2000). Ireland’s risk of poverty rate is “1.25 times the EU average and one of the highest of all member states” (Walsh 2007, p.45) and the Irish situation is unusual in that such high levels of poverty are entirely out of line with our economic affluence (Cousins 2007, p.294). The main explanation identified for such high rates is the poor performance of the welfare system in addressing the risk of poverty after social transfers (Walsh 2007, p.46). Such evidence further supports my argument that the Irish welfare model is indeed corporatism in the service of Neoliberalism.

McCashin and Payne (2006, p.27) suggest an institutionalised approval of a number of measures which maintain obvious and documented inequalities (for example the continuation of the policy which removed 3rd level fees). Additionally it is argued that with the increasing national prosperity experienced in Ireland as a result of the Celtic Tiger boom, we may see declining public support for welfare provision (Payne and McCashin 2005, pp.15-16; Turner and Haynes 2006, p.95). These two factors have enormous implications for the provision of welfare to education programmes as we shall see in subsequent chapters.

5.2 Social Exclusion – Multidimensional factors:
This section examines the concept of social exclusion as it is understood in contemporary sociology. I highlight the multifaceted nature of social exclusion and examine both the ‘weak’ cultural and ‘strong’ structural ideological positions on social exclusion. We will see that most discourse and public policy on the subject tends to be of the ‘weak’ variety which tends to blame the excluded for their own misfortune. However this thesis favours the structural position, which sees certain groups disadvantaged by structured inequalities that exist within society. This section concludes with the adoption of the ‘monopoly paradigm’ as an explanation for class-based social exclusion.
Many would argue social exclusion has effectively become the new buzzword used for poverty, yet the definition of social exclusion that this thesis will advocate is much more complex. There is a consensus that social exclusion involves a much wider range of problems than concepts of poverty and deprivation based only on material deficit; and also that it involves a broad set of inter-related issues over time (Walker and Park 1998; CASE 1999). Madanipour et al. (1988, p.22 cited in Byrne 1999, p.2) clarify the multifaceted nature of social exclusion. They state that social exclusion is a “multi-dimensional process, in which various forms of exclusion are combined: participation in decision making and political processes, access to employment and material resources, and integration into common cultural processes.” Similarly the Partnership 2000 Agreement (1996) defined social exclusion in terms of “cumulative marginalisation: from production (employment), from consumption (income poverty), from social networks (community, family and neighbours), from decision-making and from an adequate quality of life”. Thus social inclusion essentially comes down to access. It is dependant on access to decision making and resources (Madanipour 2003, p.80).

Morris (1994, p.80) identifies two general theoretical or ideological positions with respect to the socially excluded (who have been constructed by governments and dominant discourse as an ‘underclass’). The cultural (‘weak’) position sees the source of social exclusion as lying in the attitudes and behaviour of the underclass itself, while the structural (‘strong’) position sees the source of social exclusion as lying in the structured inequality of the labour market and the state, which disadvantages particular groups in society. For those who accept the weak version of this discourse, the way to bring about social inclusion is by ‘fixing’ the individual failings with which the excluded are afflicted. Proponents of the ‘stronger’ form of the discourse stress the role of those elites who are allowing this exclusion to take place and seek solutions which address the structural aspect of exclusion (Veit-Wilson 1998, p.45).

However it is apparent that most discourse and public policy on the subject tends to be of the weak variety as defined by Viet-Wilson (1998) and the excluded are therefore perceived as having personal deficits (Byrne 1998, p.128). There are several variants of this weak definition of social exclusion that are used in current political debate. Social Integration Discourse sees paid labour as the only way for individuals
of working age to be fully included in contemporary society. Consequently this discourse identifies the excluded as unemployed individuals or those at risk of becoming so (Levitas 2003). However I argue that this perspective ignores the fact that entry to the labour market at (or sometimes below) minimum wage can no more address social exclusion than welfare payments can. Another approach is the Moral Underclass Discourse, which stresses ‘moral’ and ‘cultural’ sources of poverty and exclusion, and is thus primarily obsessed with the ‘moral hazard’ of welfare dependency (Levitas 2000, p.360). This discourse reaffirms long existent themes about dangerous classes (see Skeggs, 1997) stressing the moral and cultural weaknesses of certain groups such as lone parents and the long term unemployed (Levitas 2000, p.360). I argue that in an era of global capitalism equality essentially requires income equality. I wish to make it clear that my argument for inclusion through income equality is not the same as that advocated by Social Integration Discourse, which is in fact not at all concerned with income equality; rather it is simply concerned with placing people in employment. I argue that both the Social Integration and Moral Underclass discourses are concerned with blaming the excluded for the situation they find themselves in and conveniently ignore the structural causes of exclusion which predominate in the current Neoliberal era. “One hears about ‘the marginalized’ and the ‘socially excluded’, but there is little discussion on who is excluding or marginalizing them” (Allen 2000, p.37).

I adopt Morris’s structural explanation for social exclusion and accordingly the monopoly paradigm which sees exclusion as the outcome of the formation of group monopolies. “The monopoly paradigm draws on the work of Weber and emphasises the existence of hierarchical power relations in the constitution of a social order” (De Haan 1999, p.4). Exclusion is thus thought to arise from group monopolies and the relationship between class, status, and political power, and is held to serve the interests of the included (Silver 1994, p.543). Consequently this understanding of exclusion focuses on social class and subordination (Cousins 1997, p.129) where influential elite groups restrict the access of ‘other’ groups to valuable resources such as education through social closure (De Haan 1999, pp.4-5; Edgar et al. 1999, p.19). Chapter four clearly shows that there is a middle class domination of 3rd level education in Ireland with the working class facing significant relative exclusion (ESRI 2006; Higher Education Authority 2004; Clancy 2001; Drudy and Lynch 1993).
is a consequence of the ever increasing commodification of education and the relationship that educational qualifications now have to current labour markets, with social mobility rates significantly impacted upon by educational qualifications (see Warmington 2003; Mulderrig 2003; Drudy and Lynch 1993; Riseborough 1993). In this context I argue that the restriction of access to education is a mechanism of social exclusion.

5.3 Anti Collectivism, Reluctant collectivism, Neoliberalism and the New Right ideology of personal responsibility:

In this section I will examine the emergence of Neoliberalism as a dominant ideology in the 1980s and its rise to a position of global hegemony. We will examine reluctant collectivism, anti collectivism and possessive individualism, on which Neoliberalism is founded. I will show how the emergence of Neoliberalism has resulted in unemployment and social exclusion being understood in a manner, which minimises their consequences for the state. Both are seen to have been depoliticised, and according to the Neoliberal state, result from either voluntary choice or government policies that provided too many incentives for those on welfare and generated dependency (MacKay 1998, pp.50-51). I will show that such discourses create the need for a legitimising ideology, which in this case is identified as the ‘New Right’ ideology of personal responsibility.

Variations of the weak definition of social exclusion have become part of the discourse promoted by Neoliberalism to aid its ongoing project of rolling back the welfare state in contemporary western societies. But why did Neoliberalism emerge as a dominant ideology and in doing so replace the Keynesian world view which had underpinned the welfare state? The Keynesian agenda was put into operation at a time when the level of capital in the economies of the advanced industrial world was low, primarily as a result of the Second World War, with major deficits in housing and transport infrastructure, which needed to be addressed (Byrne 1999, p.35). Additionally there was mass unemployment and the transition from a war economy to a market economy was expected to take some time. The emergence of the welfare state served to address resulting need, but the intention was that welfare provision on this scale would be short term (Ploug and Leksikon 2008b).
A new global economic system emerged after the war and by the 1970s the inherent demand for labour (particularly skilled manual labour) weakened, as the global economy moved from heavy engineering towards a system greatly dependant on the manufacture of electronic commodities and service industries. Another important factor in the decline in support for Keynesian policies was the globalisation of financial resources which was actively encouraged in the UK under Thatcher (Byrne 1999, pp.35-36; Hills 1998) and ultimately resulted in the emergence of the ‘New Right’ and the Neoliberal political agenda. It is my understanding that these two factors in particular allowed the Thatcher administration to embark on a campaign to publicly devalue manual labour. In essence it was the signal for an attack on nationalised industries (such as ship building and coal mining) and a largely successful attempt to destroy the power of the Unions. The rolling back of the welfare state and the rise of Neoliberal doctrine had begun.

The proponents of Neoliberalism come primarily from two political schools of thought, reluctant and anti collectivism. Anti-collectivism which was the dominant political ideology in nineteenth century Britain re-merged in the 1980s and was again academically and politically influential (George and Wilding 1985, p.19). This doctrine holds that if the individual is freed from state interference and given proper incentives, then economic development is inevitable (George and Wilding 1985, p.22). Anti collectivist authors such as Friedman and Friedman (1980, pp.179-182) argued that wherever the market has been permitted the freedom to operate without state interference, citizens have attained a much higher standard of living. Furthermore they argue that this process grants the opportunity for the excluded / poor of today’s society to become tomorrow’s economic success stories, thus promoting hard work and innovation. As a consequence the anti-collectivists are committed to economic inequality, as they believe that unless people are rewarded unequally for their efforts, they won’t maximise their effort to work and provide properly for themselves.

As a result, it is no surprise to see that the anti collectivists are fundamentally opposed to an all encompassing welfare state. There is little opposition to the state providing a basic minimum standard of assistance but they are not in favour of anything more than that (Hills 1998, p.10) as they believe it weakens work enticements and promotes
wastefulness in both the management and utilization of public services (George and Wilding 1985, pp.121-125). At the heart of these concerns are increasing levels of public expenditure. Their argument is that high levels of public expenditure require high rates of taxation, which subsequently remove the incentive for hard work and ultimately takes money (which is needed for new investment) from industry (George and Wilding 1985, p.29; Midgley and Tang 2002, pp.64-65). However I argue that the hostility anti-collectivists have for the welfare state is based on ideological rather than empirical grounds, as there is no evidence that the expansion of public services has undermined either the desire to work hard or the ability of industry to invest capital (George and Wilding 1985, p.137).

Likewise, reluctant collectivists believe in the desirability and inevitability of inequality and extol the virtues of global capitalism, but wish to reduce extreme levels of inequality on compassionate grounds (George and Wilding 1985, p.121, also see Beveridge 1943). They accept the welfare state, but only as an apparatus for supplementing the market, which is prone to unavoidable problems (Galbraith 1992; Hutton 1995). As the market cannot ensure employment for all, there is a justification for a “mandatory social insurance system that maintains personal responsibility, the work ethic and property rights, whilst providing an adequate safety net below which no-one should fall” (Dixon and Hyde 2003, pp.639-640; see also Hyde and Dixon 2002, pp.23-24; Hills 1998, p.28). So while reluctant collectivists espouse state welfare, it must be on these grounds and accordingly is almost always minimalist in its approach. Additionally interventions to relieve problems such as social exclusion, poverty and unemployment must be accompanied by measures designed to cure the problems (of the individual) and not simply ease the burden, as this breeds dependency (George and Wilding 1985, pp.62-65).

“We have to make our own lives in a more active way than was true of previous generations, and we need more actively to accept responsibility for the consequences of what we do and the lifestyle habits we adopt” (Giddens 1998, p.37).

It is important to note, in terms of the focus of this study, that reluctant-collectivists unlike anti-collectivists hold that some welfare expenditure, such as on education, should be regarded as a collective investment, likely to bring about a good return for the state as well as for the individuals concerned (Beveridge 1944, p.163 cited in
George and Wilding 1985, p.65). However, as we will see throughout the rest of the thesis, such beliefs, while they may be accepted in theory by the government are not put into practice in anything more than minimal form.

Neoliberalism is founded on the doctrine of possessive individualism, which emerged from the writings of individuals such as Locke. In fact, the late 18th and early 19th centuries in the UK were a crucial period for the development of certain social ideas, which again regained enormous popularity from the 1980s onwards (Byrne 1999, p.17). Unemployment and social exclusion have since this time become depoliticised and spoken of in a way that minimises their consequences for the state. While unemployment has been depoliticised (and individualised) the global economic system has not. In the modern era of global capitalism governments must (irrespective of their political ideology) encourage economic growth or face the wrath of the electorate. They therefore must take into account the requirements, demands and ideologies of business elites. It is argued therefore that the state is more likely to ensure the interests of big business over the well-being of its least empowered citizens (George and Wilding 1985, pp.136-137) with the resulting “necessary” inequality contributing to social exclusion.

As we will see momentarily, the UK and the USA in particular, are societies where this Neoliberal understanding of the global economy has become the dominant discourse in the political arena. In the UK ‘New Labour’ replacing ‘Old Labour’ has meant that both of the main political parties are now unequivocally committed to servicing the logics of globalisation and the market (Byrne 1999, p.43). The same process has occurred in Ireland. Very little difference is apparent between any of the three major parties in this regard. In contemporary Anglo-American social thought (which readily influences Irish social and political thought), notions of personal blame for social exclusion have become centred around the interconnectedness of an undeserving ‘underclass’ and dependency, and this understanding comprises the nucleus of Neoliberal thought on most social issues. These understandings have (unfortunately) informed public and social policies and, in particular, have resulted in the emergence of activation policies focussed on compelling those reliant on state benefits to move from welfare to work (Byrne 1999, p.19; Allen 2003, p.68).
The emergence of the ‘New Right’ ideology of personal responsibility (Dixon and Hyde 2002, p.25) in the political doctrines of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Regan was a major factor in the acceptance of Neoliberalism in public discourse. In the UK, Thatcher advocated individualism as the basis of what she styled the “Healthy Society”. In this so called “Healthy Society” the vast majority of citizens are encouraged (and where necessary aided) to accept responsibility for the provision of their own welfare, and to live with minimal reliance on the state (Thatcher 1977, p.81 cited in George and Wilding 1985, p.23). Consequently, the explicit aim of the ‘New Right’ was to create an atmosphere of innovation and endeavour among individuals within society so as to provoke a competitive market attitude, placing the burden on individuals to become more responsible and accountable for their own livelihood, thus promoting the idea that it was no longer acceptable to rely on the state for your welfare (Burgess and Parker 1999, p.201; Midgley and Tang 2002, p.59; Dixon and Hyde 2002, p.6; Dixon and Kouzmin 2002, p.38; Hyde and Dixon 2002, pp.25-26).

One way in which this ‘New Right’ / Neoliberal ideology became part of popular discourse was through the use of the media. Thinking about welfare requires us to assess the words used to describe it. Our every day understanding of welfare is communicated to us through language which constructs myths to support the dominant ideology of individual responsibility (Lens 2002, pp.137-138). The existence of these myths promotes the belief that the poor are responsible for their own poverty and consequently absolves the state, and the system of stratification that occurs as a result of global capitalism. Additionally it legitimises the desire of the state to change the attitudes and behaviours of the socially excluded (Edelman 1998, p.134). This discourse is successfully communicated through key words like ‘welfare’, ‘dependency’ and ‘personal responsibility’. These words act as a cognitive prompt, framing the issues of social exclusion and poverty as an individual problem, and function as a linguistic reference facilitating the general public to strengthen previously held beliefs about the causes of social exclusion and those who experience it (Edelman 1998, cited in Lens 2002, p.144).

If the general public is to support high levels of welfare spending, particularly in times of economic well being, then citizens must be kept informed of the needs of the socially excluded, the costs of addressing those needs, and how successful a return the
state is getting for that investment (Lens 2002). Consequently I argue that what is omitted from public discourse is as important as what is included, for example the following two statements both speak of the same situation, but contrast your feelings when you hear about an individual who ‘never worked a day in her life’ with hearing that in fact the same individual ‘spent all of her time raising a young family on her own’. The first representation conveys a message of laziness and fraud, while the other depicts bravery and struggle. Consequently if there is to be widespread public support for well developed (and financed) social welfare, then alternative types of narratives must be introduced into the public discourse, so as to challenge the existing dominant ideology. There are alternative ways of valuing people other than as economic actors, for example think of the contribution that unpaid carers make to our society, but such arguments seems lost on people in an era where we are told we live in an economy and not in a state or society. The failure of the mainstream parties of the Left to disseminate more progressive perspectives is indicative of how far the public discourse on welfare has shifted to the right, and how it is reinforced by the media labelling it as mainstream ideology (Lens 2002, pp.143-149). These points are important in order to situate my discussion of the place of welfare to education programmes in the next section.

5.4 The place of welfare to education programmes in a post-welfare state era:

In this section we see that the responsibilities of the traditional welfare state have been eroded as a consequence of the dominant position of Neoliberalism. In effect we now live in the era of the post-welfare state. Additionally I argue that Irish welfare policy is increasingly influenced by this very Neoliberal agenda, which underpins the welfare policies of both the USA and UK. I have chosen these two countries, given that Neoliberalism was essentially born from the economic and social policies of the Thatcher and Reagan administrations. Furthermore, Ireland has close links to both countries and our social and economic polices are significantly influenced by those in existence in both the USA and the UK. Accordingly I now document the place of welfare to education programmes in these two countries in order to subsequently situate the BTEA in its international context.

The rise of Neoliberal discourse has meant that welfare models act within a controlled capitalist market economy. In many countries, all of the political parties who have
been in government have contributed to the development of the welfare state. Thus, the welfare state represents a national political compromise on how to organise and finance the welfare of the population (Ploug and Leksikon, 2008a). The development of the global economy has had major implications for national welfare policies. The power and sovereignty of the nation state has receded, with some (or many, depending on one’s point of view) power(s) being conceded to supra-national bodies such as the EU, through for example the continuous process of enlargement of the EU Parliament and Commission. Mishra (1999) argues that globalization limits the ability of nation-states to ensure social protection and thus there has been retrenchment in many countries, with a simultaneous increased focus on reducing the range of social services available. To this end it is apparent that in recent years the ‘crisis’ in the welfare state has been high on the wider political agenda.

Ploug and Leksikon (2008b) argue forcefully that it had never been the intention that so many people should receive welfare benefits or that they should receive them for so long. Consequently the financing of the welfare state has become a ‘problem’, which is depicted as posing a real threat to welfare systems in most nation states. Therefore even within what I term the ‘ideal model’ (the Scandinavian model; see Esping-Andersen 1990 for a description) a more fragmented welfare system is slowly but surely emerging (Blomqvist 2004). In all the Scandinavian countries a supplementary welfare system has developed offering superior benefits to those in the labour market. This is a clear departure from the equality principle, which has underpinned the Scandinavian welfare model (Ploug and Leksikon 2008c; Blomqvist 2004). Accordingly the acceptance of the Neoliberal system (spurred on by globalisation) has seen the retraction of the welfare state and the emergence of the post-welfare state era.

5.41 The United States of America:
This section examines the provision of welfare to education programmes in the USA, which is a vital area of interest as in spite of the negative aspects of US welfare reform, policy makers in many countries now (or hope to soon) take a similar approach to welfare provision (see for example Ezawa and Fujiwara 2005, for a discussion on Japan; McDonald and Chenoweth 2006, for a discussion on Australia). I will show how policy in the USA initially encouraged access to education for welfare
recipients and there was (and still is) substantial empirical support for investing in the education of these welfare recipients, which results in benefits not only for the individual but also for the state, with for example higher education offering us the best way to tackle intergenerational exclusion. Despite these strong arguments, severe federal restrictions were imposed on welfare recipients in both 1996 and 2002 as part of the Neoliberal retraction of the welfare state. Reforms expanded workfare and limited access to most of the educational opportunities that had been allowed previously. Opponents of higher level education for welfare recipients utilised the ‘undeserving poor’ and ‘dependency’ discourses in order to ensure popular support for such measures, safe in the knowledge that welfare recipients have little political power or influence with which to retaliate. These policies, which have severely restricted 3rd level educational opportunities for welfare recipients, ensure the continuation of existing social and economic inequalities, and while there has been a reduction in numbers on welfare, there has been an increase in working poverty (Adair 2008; Pandey et al. 2000).

In 1987 up to 350,000 welfare recipients were enrolled in higher education in the USA as a route out of poverty (Wolfe and Gift 1997, cited in Adair, V. 2005, p.5). The Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) program, initiated as part of the Family Support Act of 1988, encouraged welfare recipients to attend college. Through JOBS all but three states allowed welfare recipients attend college while receiving cash assistance (London 2006, p.475). Many argued that education should not be viewed as separate from work, but rather seen as part of a continuum of activities that result in work through life long learning. The logic behind this thinking is that education makes a critical difference to employability, earnings, and job retention (American Association of University Women 2004; Deprez and Butler 2001; Deprez 1999; Pandey et al. 2000; Polakow et al. 2004; Christopher 2005). This logic defies the “work-first” approach of subsequent US welfare reform and offers a real justification for policies that develop human capital (Zhan et al. 2004, pp.87-109; Pandey et al. 2000).

The discussion of welfare reform prior to the PRWFA (The Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Promotion Act 2002) incorporated empirical support for investing in the education of welfare recipients (Pandey et al. 2000, p.115). Some scholars
believed that by failing to act against welfare reform they were allowing a “two-tiered educational and economic system that increasingly widens the gulf between educated and thus economically viable, and undereducated and thus economically underprivileged citizens” to exist unchallenged (Adair 2001a, p.237). Politicians and political pundits were shown longitudinal income calculations, demonstrating that many welfare recipients had moved from being “tax burdens” to being “tax assets” by gaining college degrees and subsequently sourcing secure and stable employment (Adair 2001a).

But by the mid 1990s many states began to restructure their welfare programmes, with several implementing policies that required employment for welfare recipients in return for their welfare payment (Christopher 2004, p.143). Therefore, despite the many studies that confirmed the relationship between higher education and higher earnings (Adair 2001a, p.224), the US Congress passed PRWORA (The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act 1996) and PRWFPA (2002) as part of its welfare reform. These Acts had three main goals: work enforcement, marriage promotion, and a smaller welfare state (Abramovitz 2006, p.337) and should be seen as part of the Neoliberal rolling back on the duties of the state towards its citizens. In the US this began with the Reganomic policies of the 1980s, and continued to limit the role of the federal government, shrinking the welfare state by transferring public responsibility for social welfare to the private sector (Abramovitz 2006, pp.336-352).

As part of this reform process, the PRWORA increased pressure on recipients to get into the labour market at any level by imposing a five-year lifetime limit on receiving federal welfare benefits (and permitting states to impose even shorter time limits), penalizing states that have too few recipients in the workplace, and requiring recipients to take work within two years of receiving benefits (Alfred and Martin 2007, p.3; Polakow et al. 2004; Abramovitz 2006; Handler 2003). To meet the requirements set by PRWORA single parents receiving cash assistance had to work at least thirty hours a week, while two-parent families were required to work at least thirty five hours (Pandey et al. 2000, p.115). PRWFPA compounded these restrictions by allowing a maximum of three months of vocational training during a two-year period and counting only ‘job readiness education’ and not a broader, higher
education that might lead to sustainable employment, as qualifying work activity (Adair 2008, p.11; American Association of University Women 2004). These reforms thus expanded workfare and limited access to most of the educational opportunities that had been allowed previously. Study time was not counted, and even work placements from their course of study were not recognized as work. This made it extremely difficult for qualifying welfare recipients to attend education, and as a result welfare recipient’s enrolment in higher education dropped considerably (Center for Women’s Policy Studies 2002; Christopher 2005; Adair 2001a; Adair 2002; Adair, V. 2005).

This reform process was aided by politicians constructing welfare recipients as undeserving, a strategy which could be undertaken because welfare recipients are a vulnerable and unpopular group, not known for high voter turnout, and so there was little prospect of political repercussions (Abramovitz 2006, p.351). The conservative US political rhetoric of the 1980s and early 1990s directed attention to individual behaviour rather than the structural causes of poverty. Within this framework ‘dependency’ became the root of the welfare problem, so therefore ‘self-sufficiency’ which could be achieved through employment offered the solution (O’Connor 2001, p.284 cited in Christopher 2004, p.161) This ‘dependency discourse’ was sustained by media dissemination and the use of popular stereotypes of welfare recipients as lazy and thus undeserving of support (Christopher 2004, p.161; Abramovitz 2006, Adair 2008). “These productions orchestrate the story of poverty as one of moral and intellectual lack and of chaos, pathology, promiscuity, illogic, and sloth, juxtaposed always against the order, progress, and decency of “deserving” citizens” and offer it for public consumption (Adair 2002, p.455).

In speeches made in the U.S. congress, women on welfare were branded dirty, oversexed and dangerous. Congressman Santorum referred to recipients as “unfit parents who view their children as nothing more than increases in welfare checks” (Gustafson 2004, cited in Adair 2008, p.6). This rhetoric promoted an ideology that saw politicians, and in turn the public, demand that welfare recipients be made to work (Adair 2008, pp.6-7). Additionally, opponents of 3rd level education for welfare recipients argued that allowing them to attend college while on welfare was unfair, as it allowed some low-income students to subsidize their college education with funds
from welfare (London 2006, p.475). Likewise, Wade Horn of the Bush administration used the “they are not smart or motivated enough” argument when stating that education should not be an option as recipients have “failed in the past” (Adair 2007).

Against this backdrop the proposed workfare strategy effectively communicated that its goal was to prevent the deserving from becoming part of the undeserving and to reintegrate them into mainstream society. Additionally, the proposed use of sanctions was an instance of “symbolic politics”, reassuring the majority of society that those “bums are not going to get something for nothing” (Handler 2003, pp.235-239). This was evident when the New York City welfare commissioner argued in 2001 that workplace safety and the Fair Labor Standards Act, should not apply to welfare recipients, who should be subjected to harsher sanctions to make them work (Adair 2001b, p.461). It is as a result of such processes that although studies consistently show that post-secondary education is instrumental in helping people leave welfare, education has been treated as a luxury in the “work-or-else approach” to welfare reform (Tessier 2001).

It is crucial to note that these reforms assume that the road to self-sufficiency begins with employment, irrespective of the earnings or social insurance benefits attached to that job. Gross (2006) argued that the most successful welfare programme he had seen was the Essential Skills Certificate program in the state of Colorado. He argues that the programme provides families with comprehensive support services, essential job skills, education, and problem solving skills, thus ensuring that participants receive the skills necessary to be successful in the labour market. However this model of best practice that Gross refers to merely provide the fundamental job skills for entry-level customer service positions. Such employment hardly increases the sustainability of the positions open to the individuals who have just completed the scheme, and so does little to alter their circumstances or standard of living.

Welfare reforms, and its accompanying rhetoric, implied that investment in higher education for welfare recipients was not worth the cost (Zhan et al. 2004, p.92). But costs only tell part of the picture, there are also huge benefits (Deprez and Butler 2001). Vivyan Adair (2007) speaking of her personal experience of participation in welfare to education programmes explained that
“Education has enabled me to secure employment that has provided my entire family with stability and dignity. It is true that it cost my home state more than $30,000 to support me...while I earned college degrees...I also want to point out that within two years of working at Hamilton College I had paid back well over $30,000 in federal and state taxes...that I would not have paid had I not earned those degrees. Supporting poor single parents as they move from being tax liabilities to tax assets makes fiscal as well as moral sense”.

Additionally research has shown that a mother's educational attainment is strongly linked to her children's educational achievement (see Fuchs and Wößmann 2004, p.13). Children of former welfare recipients demonstrate that seeing their parent (particularly their mother) attend higher education changed their attitude towards education for the better (Rice 1997, cited in Pandey et al. 2000, p.115). This point was given clarity by Vivyan Adair’s’ daughter when she said

“My mothers short stint on the welfare rolls virtually eliminated any possibility of my ever going through the system of aid that was once so instrumental and yet so damaging to our lives. Unlike so many people born into poverty, I have been given a renewed vision of life. In addition to the obvious economic, cultural and social benefits of our transformation, I have gained an intense respect for education, civic responsibility and moral engagement that will aid, shape and inspire me throughout my life” (Adair, H. 2005, p.7).

Policy which allows welfare recipients access to 3rd level education is thus shown to impact positively on future generations (London 2006, pp.472-473). Consequently it is argued that higher education offers us the best way to tackle “intergenerational dependence” (Deprez and Butler 2001, p.223).

But while those in the positions of power and the US general public, believe that access to education is vital for social mobility (four years after enacting PRWORA, President Clinton (cited in Lords 2000, p.34) stated “Our country cannot afford to leave any student behind, simply because they can't afford to pay for college … every American needs more than a high school education... A college education is not a luxury”) welfare recipients are denied that self same opportunity, which could change the course of their lives. Therefore it is clear that there are double standards at work here. The message is that education is critical to the future of the individual and the state but it is not to be offered to those who require it most - welfare recipients (Duprez 1999, cited in Adair 2001a, p.225).
Most welfare recipients in the US are coerced into taking minimum wage jobs, offering few opportunities for advancement and providing neither health insurance nor other benefits (Deprez and Butler 2001; Christopher 2004, p.147), which essentially ensures that they remain below the poverty line. Ironically, while the U.S. economy was booming, more and more people were turning to soup kitchens and other emergency food services to survive (Pandey et al. 2000, p.157; Christopher 2004). As a result, it is argued that working poverty has replaced welfare. This is clear when we see that while numbers in receipt of welfare in the US fell 22% between 1995 and 1997, poverty among families headed by single mothers dropped by only 5% (Carnevale et al. 2000, p.14). So while politicians, policy analysts, and political pundits have celebrated a reduction in the welfare levels since the implementation of welfare reform, moving people off welfare is not the same thing as taking them out of poverty and nearly 1/3 of those who left welfare for work were back on welfare within twelve months. (Adair 2001a, pp.220-222; Christopher 2004)

I argue it is profoundly negative that in spite of the obvious benefits of allowing welfare recipients access higher education and the negative effects of the US welfare reform programme, policy makers in many countries such as Israel, Holland, Germany, the UK and Canada (and I would argue Ireland, though to a lesser extent) have taken a similar approach to welfare provision (Alfred and Martin 2007, pp.4-5). I concur with Handler (2003, p.230) when he doubts the claims made by these states, that their changes, although they resemble the American strategy in some areas, extensively differ from them in ideology and practice.

5.42 The United Kingdom:
It is commonly believed by many (particularly some economists) that the welfare state acts as a barrier to global competition for labour market flexibility, while at the same time encouraging people to be dependent on welfare. In this context many of the European welfare states have undergone some form of alteration leading to the emergence of various activation policies (Barbier 2001, p.5). The UK has been no different. The ‘Third Way’ of New Labour thus emphasises freedom of consumer choice, operating through a Neoliberal understanding of social justice, which focuses on helping individuals to alleviate their difficulties, rather than actually addressing their structural causes (Welsh and Parsons 2006, p.52). Consequently “the promotion
of ‘welfare to work’ in British welfare strategies reflects the growing U.S. emphasis on getting recipients into a job as the first stage in a process that is intended to change their life prospects” (Walker and Wiseman 2002, p.124 cited in Cherry 2007, p.186). So while other countries activation policies were looked at, it was the US reforms that received most consideration. This practice of policy transfer, including underlying ideologies, policy discussion and actual programmes, has existed to some degree since the Reagan and Thatcher administrations formed close working relationships in the 1980s, and further strengthened as the Blair and Clinton administrations embarked on a joint implementation of the ‘Third Way’ policy (Theodore and Peck 2000, p.82).

Therefore the welfare reforms carried out in the UK since ‘New Labour’ came to power in 1997 have included the promotion of paid work, alongside a commitment to tackle social exclusion (Hills and Waldfogel 2004, p.765). However unlike the very complex understanding of the latter term presented at the start of this chapter, New Labour interpreted the concept in a manner that focussed on programmes targeted at particular groups in the population, who were affected by specific social problems, such as teenage pregnancy, truancy, youth crime etc. (Barbier 2001, p.17). Consequently measures introduced to tackle this particular understanding of social exclusion are framed by the understanding that those who are socially excluded are actually ‘undeserving’ poor (see Levitas 2000; Hills and Waldfogel 2004; Walker and Wiseman 2003).

This strategy of constructing welfare recipients as the undeserving poor has very effectively been used to dismantle the traditional welfare state. Across the globe welfare policy has been grounded in the separation of the ‘deserving’ from the ‘undeserving’ poor, with the ‘deserving’ always presented as being at risk of falling into the ranks of the ‘undeserving’. A consequence of this ideological change has been a huge extension to the number of groups now seen as undeserving poor, with most welfare recipients being characterised as such (Chunn and Gavigan 2004, p.231). Furthermore we have seen a shift of public discourse from welfare fraud to welfare as fraud (Chunn and Gavigan 2004, p.219) aided in the UK for example by the BBC television series ‘On the Fiddle’\(^{24}\). This process was given extra momentum by an announcement in April 2007 that benefit claimants in the UK were to face lie

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\(^{24}\) A documentary series following the work of benefit fraud investigators
detector tests. A pilot scheme was introduced where an individual initiating a claim for benefits had to ring a call centre where the Department of Work and Pensions planned to use lie detector technology and people who 'failed' this test would have to provide “extra evidence to support their claim” (Trade Union Congress 2007). This type of strategy encourages a lack of public confidence in the welfare system, whilst simultaneously cultivating the notion that fraud is rampant, and so everyone on welfare needed to be monitored (Chunn and Gavigan 2004, p.230).

This ideology has justified the introduction of harsh measures and the endorsement of two substantial policy directions. The first of these, was that prioritisation of mandatory programmes over voluntary ones, while the second was the conclusion that ‘work first’ strategies designed to move welfare recipients into the labour market as rapidly as possible would yield better results than human capital development through education (Theodore and Peck 2000, p.82). In effect this has allowed the state to roll back on welfare provision without any public outcry, and now as in the nineteenth century, poverty is seen / understood as being the direct result of individual failings. Consequently the solution to that individualised poverty is said to lie in employment (any type) in the labour market and / or in the case of lone parents, marriage (Chunn and Gavigan 2004, pp.230-233) with this new work ethic empowering people to overcome their individual failings and thus move out of poverty.

When examining the resulting UK welfare reforms we find that Jobcentre Plus offices have begun dealing with new claimants with a “work focused interview,” switching the emphasis from “what benefits is the applicant entitled to”, to “what can we do to get you back into the labour market as quickly as possible?” (Hills and Waldfogel 2004, p.772). Lone parents receiving Income Support are invited to an interview with personal advisers to discuss job searching techniques, training options, and the benefits and tax credits which are available to them to boost their incomes if they begin working (Hills and Waldfogel 2004, p.772). In terms of welfare to education programmes, the UK has the Work Based Learning for Adults (WBLA) programme as its flagship scheme (OECD 2004b, p.128). This programme aims to help unemployed people back into work through training and work experience. Individuals over the age of 25 who have been unemployed for at least six months duration qualify. There are some exceptions to the six month rule, including if you have a
disability, are a lone parent or are subject to a large scale redundancy. Once the individual joins the WBLA programme they are presented with a training plan, which can involve training to do a specific job, or study towards a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ), work experience, or a combination of these elements. Additionally if a qualifying applicant is unable to train full-time due to personal circumstances, they may qualify to train part-time. All qualifying individuals receive an allowance equivalent to the welfare benefit they are in receipt of. This allowance is subsequently topped up by £10 a week, with the possibly of financial assistance towards travel and childcare expenses (UK Government 2006).

The ‘New Deal’ is a further scheme designed to ‘help’ unemployed people (Department of Work and Pensions 2008; Baldock et al. 2003, p.136). Qualifying individuals get a personal adviser who examines their experiences, interests and goals and creates a personal plan to ‘suit’ that individual. Those individuals partaking in a full-time education or training option, have their course fees paid and receive financial help towards the costs of books, travel or equipment. The situation in the UK would thus appear to be different to that in the US, in that welfare recipients can undertake training and education courses. Yet it is crucial to note that the decision as to whether or not a welfare recipient avails of these educational opportunities is dependant on the personal plan or training plan created by the individuals’ personal advisor. Thus in effect the UK state, through its welfare department, decides who will be allowed to avail of these educational opportunities. It is not the individual welfare recipient’s choice. Consequently it can be argued that in reality, the policies pursued by both states are a lot closer to each other than appears to be the case at first glance.

While the UK allows welfare to education programmes there is still more of a preoccupation with welfare to work programmes and accordingly it is argued that the provision of welfare to education programmes in the UK is to the benefit of (a functionalist) society, not to the individual or to inter-group equality. Access is improved, but not for reasons of personal fulfilment or equality.

Although the clear consensus (among policy makers) at the present time is that work first models are more effective than any human capital model, the debate has not really been conducted in any intensive manner. It is as if those designing and implementing policy have decided that the work first approach is the way to go and
no amount of information is going to change their opinion (Theodore and Peck 2000, p.83). This would certainly mirror the US scenario where, even when presented with a body of evidence in favour of the human capital approach, it was disregarded in favour of workfare. Therefore bearing in mind what we identified as the apparent limitations to this policy in terms of tackling social exclusion, and combating poverty in the US, we must ask how successful a similar approach can be in the UK.

Research on France, Denmark, Holland, and the UK, indicates that those who are younger, better educated, and with fewer social problems, tend to benefit most from activation programmes (Handler 2003, p.238). Welfare recipients who have a good work history and educational credentials or job skills that are sought after, may well find that welfare-to-work programmes are an appropriate response to their transitory unemployment. But in the context of the UK labour market there are real doubts about just how effective such a strategy can be. For example the assistance provided by the welfare system is needed most in areas that are characterised by high unemployment and low job creation. Yet we are expected to believe that these strategies are still the most appropriate even when there are structural weaknesses in the local labour markets. In such cases the indisputable conclusion is that the state has an obligation to attract employment to these areas as well as ‘activating’ the unemployed (Theodore and Peck 2000, pp.87-91). To simply activate the unemployed serves no purpose if there are no jobs for them to apply for. In fact it may result in the individuals becoming even more excluded. In this case the provision of education for the unemployed would create a ready made educated workforce, making it easier for the state to attract prospective employers into the area, thus successfully addressing both vital needs with a single policy.

The primary goal of the Human Capital Development (HCD) model is to assist welfare recipients in raising their education and skill levels so they will be able to find jobs which provide stability and well-paid employment. Reflecting this long-term perspective, the average duration of these programmes can be quite long, but the durations of employment having obtained these qualifications can be expected to be correspondingly lengthy. For that reason the additional resources dedicated to ‘front-end’ support produce long-term savings in welfare, an increased tax take, and result in low levels of recidivism to welfare (Theodore and Peck 2000, pp.84-85). This
postulation is supported by the data from the US that we spoke of earlier, and the EXSPRO (Social Exclusion and Social Protection) report concludes that the socially excluded are not likely to benefit from activation which simply puts them into any form of employment (see Halpin and Hill 2006 for a similar discussion of the Irish context). Thus we need to provide better access to education and training for the socially excluded if we are to remove them from their exclusion (Handler 2003, pp.238-239).

Consequently I would argue that offering individuals the opportunity to gain valued educational qualifications is far more beneficial to both the state and the individual involved than workfare. However as we have clearly seen, there has been a progressive march internationally towards a situation where the current political climate seems hostile to efforts to further increase access to education for welfare recipients (Polakow et al. 2004).

5.5 The Emergence of Activation policies in Ireland:
Having seen the international context in which the Irish welfare system is situated, we can now examine it in more detail. In this section I explain that activation policies in Ireland place both a written and ‘moral’ obligation on those claiming assistance to take part in education and training in return for their benefit, and to take paid employment when it arises. However, we will see that just as in the UK and the USA there are noteworthy problems with activation policy in Ireland. Finally I will demonstrate that welfare to education programmes are built on the ideology of second chance and as welfare is increasingly conceptualised as an extravagance (Jarvis 1992, p.407), we invariably see equality of opportunity measures introduced in preference to equality of outcome measures.

Activation policy in Ireland emerged as a result of the unemployment and particularly long-term unemployment of the 1980s and 1990s (McCashin 2004). As seen previously in both the US and the UK, government discourse was (and remains) a critical element in both ratifying and legitimising this change. To guarantee an easy shift to activation policies, where the state no longer guarantees financial support, the government must succeed in presenting welfare in a negative evaluative frame, where receipt of welfare becomes ‘dependency’ and moving off welfare becomes
‘empowerment’ (Mulderrig 2003). This discourse is aided and abetted by the acceptance of the now dominant ideology of personal responsibility. In Ireland, the past decade (and in particular with the onset of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ boom) has seen education become irrevocably tied to economic competitiveness, with the system now ultimately concerned with churning out a highly skilled workforce. This combined with the weakening of the welfare state on a global scale, has seen the emergence of welfare to work programmes. Thus it has been argued by Manning (2003, p.72), that citizens “should be active not merely in their pursuit of rights for themselves but also in their contribution to the social context on which we all depend in one form or another”. Ultimately the Neoliberal state and its dominant ideologies see this contribution as occurring only through paid work. It is out of this particular mindset that activation policies (ALMPs’) in Ireland emerged. McCashin (2004, p.217) defines ALMPs’ in Ireland as a

“broad range of policies and measures targeted at people receiving income support or in danger of becoming permanently excluded from the labour market. Often the aim is to assist the target group to enter or re-enter the labour market through various forms of education, vocational education or re-training”.

Yet although policymakers claim that it is primarily the “personal responsibility” of welfare recipients to take full advantage of available “job opportunities”, they are not satisfied to leave the execution of that responsibility to each individual welfare recipient (Street 1997).

As we saw when examining the situation in both the US and UK, there are noteworthy problems with activation policy. Questions remain about how socially inclusive the Irish labour market is, given the number of people in jobless households and the consistent and considerable percentage of early school leavers (McCormick 2003, cited in DSFA 2005, p.17). Additionally research examining the effectiveness of a range of active labour market programmes concluded that those with low levels of educational attainment and poor previous labour market experience tended not to benefit significantly from current labour market interventions (Conniffe and O’Connell 2001, cited in DSFA 2005, p.17).

Crucially, activation policy associates welfare with dependency and employment with self-sufficiency, despite the fact that minimum wage work can no more sustain a
family than welfare can. Secondly advocates of activation policy downplay other explanations for welfare dependence, such as the cost of child care (Street 1997) which in Ireland is extremely expensive. Additionally proponents of welfare to work policies on the one hand advocate market obedience for those from the poorest socio-economic backgrounds, but simultaneously these policies provide employers with incentive and opportunity for hiring welfare recipients even at low levels of pay (minimum wage occupations). Street (1997, speaking in an American context) argues that this process in turn threatens the job security and income of workers who are already employed as it allows the justification for lowering wages, because there will be people who you can hire to do the same job for less money. This process is illustrated in Ireland by the case of Irish Ferries in 2005, which sought to have approximately 500 workers take redundancy so that the company could then hire contract workers to undertake the work at significantly reduced wages. Finally it is somewhat worrying that O’ Connell (2000, p.70) finds participants returning to unemployment after having availed of these welfare to work or welfare to education schemes are counted as newly unemployed even though they may have been long term unemployed prior to starting the scheme. This distorts the figures as to the real balance between short term and long term unemployed and implies that activation policy may be a method in use by governments to paint a better economic picture than is actually the case.

We have seen how internationally post-welfare reforms assume that the road to self-sufficiency begins with employment. The preceding discussion has also shown that the separation of the deserving and undeserving poor was utilised in both the US and UK to enable the state to roll back on welfare provision and prioritise welfare to work as the way forward in addressing social exclusion, with welfare to education programmes assuming a subservient position. So how did welfare to education programmes emerge in Ireland then in this climate?

Historically in Ireland adult and continuing education has been provided by voluntary organisations, and religious groups (O’ Sullivan 1992). Lamm (1990, cited in Jarvis 1992, p.407) has claimed that government supported adult education only developed because of the ideology of ‘second chance’ (See section 4.21), which holds that it is fair (in certain circumstances) to allow those adult individuals who have failed,
dropped out of, or not completed their education for whatever reason, a ‘second chance’ opportunity to obtain those now valuable educational credentials. However it is my view that on a certain level this creates a dichotomy (for some civil servant to solve) as to whether the individual applying for this ‘second chance’ is actually deserving of it, given that they have ‘failed’ in the past. Furthermore it conveniently ignores the fact that for many who seek to avail of this ‘second chance’ opportunity to attend 3rd level, it is in fact their ‘first chance’. This is because the structural inequalities that exist in our society ensure that accessing 3rd level education by traditional routes if you come from certain disadvantaged communities or socio-economic groups is extremely difficult (or even 2nd level education in certain areas). Consequently Jarvis (1992) argues that there has always been a tendency to regard certain forms of adult education as social welfare provision for the needy.

In 1995 the development of a National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) was initiated by the government. Its purpose was to deal with the pressing social issues of poverty, social exclusion and inequality. Some of the primary objectives acknowledged in relation to education were a need to eradicate the costs of educational involvement for those on social welfare or on low income, together with the removal of additional barriers to educational participation (Healy 1997, p.10) To meet these objectives the state made a commitment to promote equality of access and participation and to provide monetary assistance to enable this to occur. Additionally 1997, saw the Department of Enterprise and Employment publish a White Paper on ‘Human Resource Development’ which fortified the government’s pledge to lifelong learning. However once more this was defined first and foremost in terms of the need for people to obtain commercially viable qualifications which would guarantee Ireland’s competitiveness in the global market (Healy 1997, p.11). This lifelong learning agenda is regarded as key to ensuring employability and social inclusion by facilitating individuals to access higher quality jobs (Government of Ireland 2002a, cited in DSFA 2005, p.25).

In relation to the ‘second chance’ education policies that emerged from these discussions we invariably see equality of opportunity measures introduced in preference to equality of participation measures. Equality of opportunity measures only create a society that is more ‘acceptably’ unequal (Whitty 2002) in the eyes of
functionalists. This has profound implications for the welfare to education programme that we are focusing on, namely the BTEA, of which more shortly. Nonetheless Whitty (2002, pp.122-123) offers a defence of equality of opportunity measures when he says that in the current political climate it is difficult for governments to pursue policies that may challenge middle-class privilege (as considerably increasing the participation rates of those from lower socio-economic groups relative to those of the higher socio-economic groups would surely do). The rational being that policies must be amiable, particularly to middle-class and aspiring middle-class voters who comprise the ‘swing’ vote that can mean the difference between winning and losing elections. Additionally, the movement (politically) in Europe towards the right since the early 1980s has meant that welfare is increasingly regarded as “an expensive luxury and one upon which taxpayers money can only be spent sparingly” (Jarvis 1992, p.407). This ensures that in relation to ‘second chance’ education we invariably see equality of opportunity measures introduced in preference to equality of participation measures. In spite of this fact we must continually reflect on whether we intend education purely for training competency or whether we should also view education as a tool to enhance citizenship and social justice (Andruske 1999b). This alternative view of education provides a balance to the functionalist view. It sees education as providing the individual not only with an occupation but also with the skills / tools necessary for their empowerment, which can ensure they become a more active citizen with all that entails. If, as I believe, education can and should serve both purposes then we should be trying to introduce measures that will ensure equality of participation and given that we have the BTEA to work with, we should be looking at how we can use such a scheme to ensure just that.

5.6 The Back to Education Allowance – A History:
I now detail a brief history of the evolution of the Back to Education Allowance. This will provide a context in which to situate the experiences of my participants in relation to the BTEA in the subsequent chapters. As touched upon previously, the link between unemployment and poverty, and the association between poor educational attainment and long-term unemployment were among the factors which first prompted the DSFA to offer people in receipt of certain social welfare payments an opportunity to avail of education programmes as a stepping stone to employment. On December 11th 1989 the Social Welfare Regulations 1989 came into operation. This was a means
by which those people who wished to pursue second level courses of study could be facilitated. Statutory Instrument 328 of the Social Welfare Regulations 1989 established that those long-term unemployed claiming unemployment assistance (UA) could be deemed to be available for employment while pursuing an approved second level course of study. Consequently in July 1990 the Third Level Allowance (TLA) was introduced on a pilot basis. The primary objective of this particular scheme was the removal of the barrier to participation in 3rd level education faced by the long-term unemployed. Healy (1997) argues that the main objective underlying both of these schemes was to provide incentives for unemployed people to improve their employment prospects by gaining additional qualifications, which were necessary to participate in the labour market of that period.

In order to meet the qualifying criteria, an applicant had to be at least twenty three years of age and unemployed for at least fifteen months prior to starting an approved full-time 3rd level course of study\textsuperscript{25}. When the Third Level Allowance Scheme was introduced in 1990, the number of participants was extremely low. In the 1990/91 academic year, only sixty seven applications were approved (See Table 5.2). In 1993 the qualifying period was reduced to twelve months and the scheme was further extended to include recipients of One-Parent Family Payments, Deserted Wife’s Benefit, Widow’s and Widower’s Contributory Pension. However it is important to note that many participants on the scheme were not even aware of its name in this era as they simply continued to receive the same social welfare payments under the same name, (for example unemployment assistance (UA), unemployment benefit (UB), lone parent’s allowance, etc.) (Healy 1997). The age requirement was reduced to twenty-one years of age and the qualifying period was reduced to six months (156 days) in 1995 in order to make the scheme more accessible. Additionally for the first time the scheme was extended to include those people who were at least twenty four years of age and wished to pursue a postgraduate qualification provided the applicant

\textsuperscript{25} The course must either be recognised by the Department of Education and Science for the Higher Education Grant Scheme, the Vocational Education Committee’s Scholarship Scheme, the Third Level Maintenance Grants Scheme for Trainees or have Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) recognition. Additionally full-time day undergraduate courses in the United Kingdom and other European Union countries which are recognised for Higher Education Grant purposes are also recognised for TLO. Other approved TLO courses include full time day courses provided by TEAGASC. The course must be validated by the Higher Education Training and Awards Council (HETAC) (DSFA 2005, p.31)
was on the live register for at least six months after completing their primary degree (DSFA 2007).

As mentioned previously, Healy (1997) argues that initially the justification for the Third Level Allowance scheme was that registering as unemployed should not act as an obstruction or deterrent to those wishing to advance their employment prospects through the pursuit of a 3rd level qualification. However, in 1996 the DSCFA moved from a position of accommodation to a more pro-active position and changes were made to encourage unemployed people to try to acquire further educational credentials (Healy 1997). Payment of the BTEA was now made at the maximum standard rate and as the scheme was not means-tested it allowed participants to avail of employment if they so needed or wished. Before this change, some people had received a lower rate of payment because they were either categorised as ‘short-term’ unemployed (less than fifteen months) or else their ‘means’ affected their level of payment (Healy 1997). A continuation of the payment during the summer became a feature of the scheme and a book allowance of €127.00 was introduced. Additionally the requirement for the postgraduate option, that the applicant had to be on the live register for six months after completing their primary degree, was abolished (DSFA 2007).

In 1996 we also saw an assurance given that the TLA payment would be paid for the full duration of the course. This was an important step, as Healy (1997) reports that prior to this date some participants discovered midway through their chosen course of study, that they lost entitlement to the TLA because they had either married or had moved from contributory unemployment benefit (which ended after fifteen months) to non-contributory unemployment assistance. Another important improvement was the removal of the requirement to sign-on every month at local DSCFA offices, as this defined the scheme as more than merely another form of social welfare payment. The introduction of these measures resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of participants on the scheme between 1995 and 1997 (See Table 5.2).
Table 5.2: Level of BTEA participation since 1990:

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Source: O'Dea 2005a.

In January 1998 both the 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} level schemes were merged into a unified Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) scheme which was also non-statutory. This year saw the Disability Allowance became a qualifying payment for the BTEA scheme with a qualifying age of eighteen years. Additionally the cost of education allowance, which prior to this had been called a book allowance was increased to €190.00. This cost of education allowance was subsequently further increased to €254.00 in 1999.

The BTEA scheme was extended to those in receipt of Invalidity Pension, Unemployability Supplement and Carer's Allowance in 2000. Furthermore the spousal swap\textsuperscript{26} was introduced and any periods of time spent on the Back to Work Allowance, Job Initiative and or Job Start were now to count towards the qualifying period. From September 2001 early school leavers (18-20 year olds) qualified for the BTEA if they had been out of formal education for at least 2 years prior to gaining a place on a recognised 3rd level course. Those with disabilities who had accessed Community Employment Schemes through the National Disability Authority also became eligible to participate on the BTEA Scheme without having to establish a social welfare entitlement.

In 2002 the BTEA scheme was extended such that people in receipt of Deserted Wife's Allowance/Benefit, Widows Contributory/ Non-Contributory Pension and Prisoners Wife's Allowance without child dependents became eligible to participate. The scheme was further extended to include those people who had been in receipt of Disability Benefit for 3 years or more, while the qualified adult dependent of a social welfare recipient became eligible in his / her own right. All of these changes saw the

\textsuperscript{26} The Qualified Adult of a BTEA eligible welfare recipient could "take over" the relevant social payment in order to access the BTEA scheme. (see http://www.welfare.ie/foi/bte_all.html)
number of participants on the scheme grow from sixty seven in its inaugural year, to five thousand four hundred and fifty eight in the 2003/2004 academic year. Thus it can be argued that measures introduced up to this point had extended opportunities to a broader base of social welfare recipients in order that they could obtain qualifications necessary to participate in the modern labour market.

However, in 2003 the summer payment to BTEA participants previously on an unemployment payment was discontinued. Furthermore it was decided that the postgraduate option was now to be restricted only to those who wished to pursue a Higher Diploma (H.Dip.) or Graduate Diploma in Primary School Teaching. This was followed up in 2004 by the decision to extend the qualifying period for the 3rd level option of the BTEA to fifteen months. After these changes were in place, a review group was set up to examine the efficiency and effectiveness of the scheme. It was very interesting to note that following the review process, the government performed a u-turn of sorts in 2005 in relation to the qualifying period for the 3rd level option of the BTEA and from September of that year it was once more reduced to twelve months (or nine months if you were assessed and approved by FÁS under the National Employment Action Plan). The cost of education payment was increased to €400.00. From 2006 any periods spent on supplementary welfare allowance or direct provision from the Health Service Executive were to count towards the qualifying period for the scheme. Further extensions to those eligible to apply was made in 2007, when the qualifying period for Illness Benefit was reduced to 2 years and people that were awarded statutory redundancy could access the BTEA provided entitlement to a relevant social welfare payment was established prior to commencing the approved course of study (DSFA 2007).

To conclude, it is clear from this short history of the BTEA that the scheme was extended so that a broader base of social welfare recipients would be eligible to apply for the allowance up until the changes were made to the scheme in 2003 / 2004. The changes then imposed important restrictions in three key areas (1) qualifying duration, (2) restriction to the level of education that can be pursued, and (3) restrictions on the benefits available through the scheme. The process of extending the groups who are eligible for the BTEA has continued again in the last few years, but as we will see in subsequent chapters, that policy alone will not make any serious inroads into the
inequality that exists in access to 3rd level education for welfare recipients in this country.

**Conclusion:**
This chapter has argued that Ireland has a minimalist system of welfare provision and it situated the BTEA in the context of the Neoliberal project to roll back the welfare state. The chapter highlighted how the ‘New Right’ ideology of personal responsibility aided by a discourse which has created an understanding of welfare recipients as the undeserving poor has allowed this project to proceed. Finally it examined the limitations to the work first approach to welfare provision, whose implementation has seen working poverty replace welfare poverty. In Ireland we have higher levels of low skilled workers, and our levels of life long learning are lower than many of our economic competitors. Additionally our “make work pay policies have increased the number of ‘Working Poor’ households” (NESF 2005, p.2). I argue that there is a significant difference between ‘second chance’ policies that enable real increases in the relative participation of disadvantaged groups and those that merely permit disadvantaged individuals to enter open competition for entry to 3rd level. Consequently the central argument of this chapter is that there is a pressing need for a policy, which facilitates equitable participation in 3rd level education, so welfare recipients can obtain jobs of a sufficient standard that allows them to move away from welfare on a more permanent basis. I argue that the BTEA can (and should) be the instrument to achieve just that.
CHAPTER SIX

A PREFERENCE FOR WELFARE TO EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

Introduction:
This chapter aims to develop a macro level understanding of the dynamics of the BTEA. A strong ‘structural’ position is adopted in this thesis, which sees the source of social exclusion as lying in the structured inequality of the labour market and the state, which disadvantages particular groups in society (Morris 1994, p.80). Consequently, in order to address social exclusion we must address these issues and not simply promote policy, which adopts a weak ‘cultural’ position (Morris 1994, p.80), that ultimately blames the excluded for their own misfortune. To this end this thesis proposes that the best way to successfully do this is through the provision of education, and 3rd level education in particular.

The chapter begins by examining welfare to education programmes. I argue that there is a pressing need for policy, which supports the access of welfare recipients to education, so that those who otherwise move in and out of, or are entirely excluded from employment can obtain jobs of a sufficient standard to allow them to move away from welfare on a more permanent basis. I will show that Neoliberal views favouring welfare to work programmes hold a dominant position within the DSFA, explaining the continued subservience of welfare to education programmes despite their obvious and accepted successes. The chapter then progresses to examine the administrative status of BTEA. I find that the administrative nature of the scheme impacts negatively on the experiences of BTEA participants and also serves to discourage potential applicants.

I then move on to examine how welfare recipients in Ireland have been constructed as the undeserving poor. It is argued that this process is part of the Neoliberal project to retract the welfare state, and consequently this construction has offered a justification for a short-term approach being taken to the BTEA. The next section of the chapter examines the changes to the criteria for the BTEA introduced in 2003 / 2004. I claim that these changes have had a detrimental impact on both BTEA participants and
potential applicants. Finally I examine the route the DSFA wish to take in relation to the progression of the BTEA scheme.

6.1 A Preference for Welfare to education Programmes:

It is my belief that we can achieve social inclusion by bringing about changes in the education system, particularly in relation to achieving equity of access to 3rd level education. Access to education and employment and social inclusion are inextricably linked. Without access to education it becomes increasingly more difficult to find employment, which in turn can cause an increased dependence on the state, leading to social exclusion (Chard and Couch 1998, p.608). To this end the provision of welfare to education programmes, which have been restricted in the post-welfare state era, is of paramount importance. This section will evidence that this argument is grounded in and supported by my data.

6.11: A Need for welfare to education programmes:

All of my key informants identified a vital need for 3rd level education given the direction our economy is taking. The senior civil servant from the DSFA highlighted that

“the impact of globalisation is probably going to be a key factor
...given the way that the labour market in Ireland has gone and
is continuing to go I think that over time 3rd level will be the
minimum requirement.”

Similarly, Joan Burton T.D. believes that “the bar for a lot of jobs now is effectively a 3rd level qualification. Twenty years ago the required education might have been leaving cert”. Minister O’ Dea stated that “as time goes on the sort of education a person has will be more and more important, the level of education and also the ability to be able to stop and come back in and up skill”. He argued that Ireland is on the threshold of the era of life long learning, as people will have to change jobs numerous times during their lifetime. Thus people will have to repeatedly up-skill in order to maintain their employability.

Michael Ring T.D. highlighted the link between economic globalisation and the movement of employment from one jurisdiction to another. He believes that as a consequence of a globalised labour market, Irish citizens who do not have 3rd level
qualifications will struggle in the future to access sufficient and sustainable employment. He noted

“The whole manufacturing industry has collapsed because of the high costs of labour in this country and we see it happening every single day. I see it in my own constituency; I saw it up in Donegal on Friday night at a function. Since 1997 they have lost almost 10,000 manufacturing jobs…. We are going to be going out there to get high tech industries into this country and we are going to have the people for it and god help anybody that hasn’t got first of all 3rd level. I mean it’s going to be difficult for them in the future to get a job because the manufacturing jobs are not going to be there for them. The manufacturing jobs... it brings the more weaker in society, the people even who have no education at all, they have an opportunity maybe of getting some kind of work if there is a bit of manufacturing going on. But that is not going to happen at all”.

However Proinsias De Rossa M.E.P. disagreed somewhat with this assessment in stating

“If 50% of new jobs require 3rd level qualifications, then obviously the other 50% require less than 3rd level. However, all the evidence indicates that poor education equals poor job prospects, poor income and consequently social exclusion”.

With the identification of the increasing importance of 3rd level education, all of my key informants perceived a need for second chance education. Joan Burton for example states that she has

“always been strongly in favour of educational opportunities, that if for some reason people have not had a good experience of the education system the first time round that there should be a second time round and maybe even a third time round, because people mature and grow, they move away from a bad experience, they themselves mature, they might be a bit wild when they are young and school might seem very boring... my experiencing of people opting into second chance education... has been very positive”.

She therefore argued that second chance education has to be flexible and open. In essence that is what the senior civil servant from the DSFA argued that the BTEA achieves.

“As the scheme is presently structured it’s an actually self selecting process and essentially what the Department of Social and Family Affairs is doing is providing an income support to someone to have a second chance opportunity of going into education” (Civil Servant).
However an important caveat to Minister O’ Dea’s understanding of life long learning was that unlike 3rd level courses eligible for BTEA support it would not necessarily involve “leaving employment full time but maybe taking night courses or whatever to up-skill as the world becomes more complex”. Additionally Joan Burton stated

“I think life long learning... I mean there is an awful lot of sort of sociological jargon nowadays. I think it’s more about opportunity... I just think that whole notion of lifelong opportunity to learn is very important. It’s very important as well for us though as an economy... because we need people with appropriate skills if we are to stay ahead of the curve in terms of attracting and retaining both inward investment and high skills job bases”.

These views reflect a functionalist understanding of life long learning and essentially favour equality of opportunity policies. However we have already seen the shortfalls in the effectiveness of such policies, which allow existing inequalities to continue largely unchecked (see chapter four).

As the numbers completing higher education continuously rise, we may see 3rd level educational credentials losing their value, both in the competition for attractive jobs in the labour market, and as cultural capital. This has ominous connotations for people who have not obtained 3rd level qualifications, as they stand to lose even more as a result of such devaluation (Bourdieu 1984). Moreover socio-economic inequalities increase with the level of education and are greater the more prestigious the field of study (Whelan and Whelan 1984, p.7; Clancy 1988). Consequently, to begin to start to offset inequalities in education and thus social mobility rates, we must offer welfare recipients the opportunity to gain valued educational qualifications (Drudy and Lynch 1993, p.267) and the BTEA is the best route available at present to do that.

Two informants linked the idea of second chance education to social justice. Proinsias De Rossa argued that this new necessity for ever increasing educational credentials “has to be accompanied by a flexi-security approach to social protection to ensure that in a rapidly changing labour market, people rather than jobs are protected”. Additionally Michael Ring highlighted that globalisation without the safety net of second chance education may pose dangers to society. He argued that without second chance education routes (and subsequent employment opportunities) there is no future for those who do not possess the requisite education levels and that is
“dangerous for society. It’s dangerous on the basis that if they see no future or no hope out there for them... it puts them in a place where they may feel crime is the only way out for them and that’s not good for society”.

An alternative argument in favour of second chance education was made by two of my lone parent participants. Maxine spoke of having spent four years training in a field which she is no longer interested. However she argued that

“at the age of 17 or 18, I think it’s very hard... I think it’s very unfair to them to have to make the decision as to what they want to do for the rest of their lives. I know that out of the six of us girls that were at college there is only one working in what she did at college now”.

Diane agreed with this assessment and said that she has an

“eighteen year old son, and he is doing business and it is not his course. He has no more interest than the cat, and I know that he is just going to go through the motions and go onto something else...”

If we cannot be expected to know what we want to do for the rest of our lives at the age of seventeen or eighteen then we should be given the opportunity to avail of educational possibilities later in life when we do know what we wish to do. The role of the state in this process of life-long learning also came under scrutiny in my discussions with the BTEA participants. They perceived that in the 1980s the state focused on the long-term unemployed and concentrated on placing them in FÁS training schemes and this policy worked well at that time. However participants perceived that the state needs to recognize that in the current economic context, life long learning is vital for those in receipt of welfare payments. Peter made an interesting argument that the process of life-long learning is in fact “class-based”. He argued that life-long learning (as it currently stands) is oriented to people already within the labour market that have specific jobs which require them to upgrade their skills (effectively mirroring the views of Minister O’Dea) and that it is not for those who could be termed “worse off”.

Indeed, the vast majority of my participants made reference to class inequalities in 3rd level education in Ireland. Claire spoke of how she was from the “wrong class” to

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27 Three BTEA students with a disability, one lone parent and eight BTEA students who were previously unemployed.
attend 3rd level. She explained that people from her class background are expected to “leave school and get married and you have kids”. Peter expressed similar views and argued that those from working class backgrounds simply could not afford 3rd level education. “I was reared up the road there and I often passed through here (the University) but it was only people with shillings that came here and none of us had it” (Peter). The overwhelming majority of my participants perceived the state as seeking to reduce its role in assuring the welfare of individuals, and an emerging discourse that suggests it is your own responsibility to educate yourself. This understanding mirrors the unequivocal aim of the ‘New Right’ to place the onus on the individual to become more responsible and accountable for their own income without relying too heavily on financial support from public sources (Burgess and Parker 1999, p.201). In essence, participants hold that they are trying to react to the market as the state requires under Neoliberalism, by gaining required educational qualifications, but they are not being facilitated in achieving this because of the ideology of personal responsibility. One informant thus explained the inconsistency in, and difficulty with, this ‘New Right’ ideology.

“The government want people to get educated but they don’t want to use OUR money to educate us. They want you to use your own money to educate yourself and where are you going to get that money if you are a working class person?”(Peter)

Additionally Diane made similar points associating the cost of education with its role in the reproduction of class-based inequality.

“Why is it so expensive to educate yourself? It is always the haves and the have-nots. That divide will always be there and it will always be the people who have it that will have more... the path is smoother for them, it will always be a lot harder for the person who starts off in a social welfare situation than for the person who starts off with mummy and daddy footing the bill”.

The majority of participants28 perceived that the BTEA scheme is also run or administered along class lines. These participants held that those in a position of power in relation to the scheme are fearful of encroachment on their privilege, if those from welfare backgrounds continue to get access to 3rd level education through the BTEA. Denis highlighted this belief when he argued that

28 Two lone parents, three BTEA students with a disability & four BTEA students who were unemployed previous to commencing their course.
There is a certain level that they are comfortable with. You can do your leaving cert while you are on the dole but if you move from that... you are receiving social welfare and you want to get a degree? What’s wrong with you? There is something wrong with this fellow.... I came across that a lot. It makes no sense to me that attitude. You want to do a degree? Yes so that I can give back the invalidity pension and earn about 3 or 4 times more. But they still kind of look at you like there is something wrong with this fellow. You see you are moving out of your designated area”.

It was suggested that that the enlarged middle classes have a lot to lose from the encroachment of the working class into what was their traditional bastion, namely 3rd level education. It was argued that the middle classes perceive a need to protect that privilege. The argument was made that those in positions of power in relation to determining and implementing educational policy believe that if society is to continue to work properly, there must always be a supply of people who never get degrees in order to fill the lower end jobs in the economy. Denis stated “Oh that mindset is there all right. Who is going to clean the house or dig the garden if all these people have degrees?” Thus it is apparent that my BTEA participants believe they are the victims of material oppression, which occurs when “the material welfare of one group of people depends on the material deprivation of another, and the material deprivation of the oppressed group depends upon the exclusion of the oppressed group from access to productive resources” in this case 3rd level qualifications (McMullin 2004, p.35). As a consequence it was perceived that shortfalls in the effectiveness and accessibility of the BTEA (detailed in chapter 7) serve the interests of these privileged sections of society in order to preserve their material welfare. Diane argued

“They are in a position... they are the ones who make the decisions. They are the ones in the civil service jobs with good power and that is the way that they use it”.

Finally, it is worth noting the argument that adult education as it currently stands, may strengthen existing societal inequalities, as currently those most likely to return to adult education are the most educationally advantaged (Drudy and Lynch 1993, p.262; Devereux 2006). This means the middle classes are likely to be over represented in adult education courses and once again this provides a challenge to the idea that adult education gives people from disadvantaged backgrounds a second chance at gaining educational capital. I would argue that life long learning, as it stands at present, is primarily a mechanism through which society’s inequalities are
reproduced. It is apparent that current provision is oriented to the benefit of a functionalist society, and accordingly does not deal with the ‘structural’ understanding of social exclusion, for as great a number as it could.

6.12: The value of welfare to education programmes:
All of my key informants expressed the view that the BTEA offered a pathway of entry to those welfare recipients wanting to return to education. The civil servant from DSFA held that the primary strength of the BTEA scheme was in providing “the opportunity for somebody to go and receive the necessary education that will allow them enter certain sectors of the labour market”. Similarly, Joan Burton believed that the BTEA provided an opportunity for welfare recipients to get training / education and subsequently gain entry into the labour market.

“When I was involved as Minister of State in the Department for Social Welfare from 1993 to the end of ’94, the critical thing at that time was that there was an enormous amount of unemployment, there was an enormous amount of people who had little or no opportunity, there were people who were living on social welfare and families in the big estates around Dublin, the big estates in Limerick who were going into generations of social welfare, so my own view was we give people opportunity and a lot of people will take that opportunity”.

In this context Minster O’ Dea stated that

“the BTEA certainly is not perfect, you know we probably should be spending more money on it, but never the less it has opened the door for a lot of people, it has allowed a lot of people who generally had the ability and wanted to come back in but couldn’t find a way back in to actually find a way back into the system and that is essentially why it was introduced”.

All of my key informants believed that the BTEA has been a successful scheme, which has given the state a good return on its investment. Proinsias de Rossa spoke of how “a number of people particularly lone parents over the years have approached me to thank me for ‘having changed their lives for the better’”. Michael Ring recounted similar experiences

“I saw people that came to me that had been on welfare or in very low paid jobs and got back into the education system and are now doing very well”.

Furthermore Minister O’ Dea argued that the state has received an extremely good return from the BTEA in a number of areas.
“Certainly it’s an area that, I found anyway when I was in education, that you get an awful lot of benefits, you get very good value for the money you are spending and you couldn’t say that with all public projects unfortunately. But certainly good value has been got out of that particular scheme. Year after year very good value has been got from it, both from the point of view of society and from the point of view of the economy”.

My BTEA participants reflected the views expressed by my key informants. They held that the state will see a return in the form of an increased tax take from former welfare recipients turned 3rd level graduates. Fiona explained that with her present level of skills she would expect a starting salary of €15,000. However she highlighted that once she graduates the estimated started salary for her degree programme is about €25,000 a year. This increase in salary obviously means an increased tax take for the state\(^\text{29}\), which is an automatic return on its initial investment. Informants also explained that along with the increased direct tax take, the state will also benefit from an increase in indirect taxes through the spending power of the individuals concerned.

My participants also believed the BTEA scheme benefits the state because of our economy’s reliance on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). They expressed awareness that Ireland’s highly educated workforce is one of the factors that attracts FDI here, and without it our economy would suffer. In fact Ireland requires a graduate output in the top 25% of OECD countries to ensure national economic competitiveness (Department of Education and Science 2003, p.14). Participants were aware that the qualification they will obtain will add to the national pool of 3rd level graduates and ensure that the country can continue to attract FDI. Adam perceived that

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\text{\textit{the country can’t survive without the big businesses. Not alone does it need to educate the population to work in those businesses but they need the population so highly educated to try and get the R&D departments of those big businesses into the country. \ldots So the government needs as many highly qualified people as they can, in order to encourage in the R&D departments. If we don’t get the R&D departments... we are certainly going to lose the manufacturing jobs and where will we be then? We will be on the boat again}}
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\(^{29}\) While there have been a number of reductions in taxation in Ireland over the last decade reducing overall income tax, the fact remains that many workers on average industrial wages continue to pay income tax at the top rate of 42\% (Kuhling and Keohane 2007, p.167). When discussing the impact of taxation, an individual’s personal and PAYE (married or single person’s) tax credit would have to be taken into account in order to calculate the tax (if any) that they would pay from their salary. To understand how the Irish tax system works see \url{www.revenue.ie}.
Current labour markets are very much qualification orientated and the education system thus controls levels of social mobility (Drudy and Lynch 1993, p.26). This gives further weight to the argument put forward by the BTEA participants that 3rd level education is the best route to take if they wish to get off welfare permanently and into sustainable employment. Gus argued that, in particular, if the state “invested in lone parents going back to education they would never see them again and they would see lone parent families improving their lot”. The views of the informants reflect the views expressed by both McCoy and Smyth (2003, p.92) and the Department of Education and Science (2003, p.7), that the benefits of education accrue not only to individuals but to the broader society, with increased educational investment associated with a reduction in welfare costs and crime levels, and an increase in active citizenship, and taxation.

Consequently I argue that the return to the state on the investment in the BTEA will be considerably higher in the long term than the return from somebody on a more traditional welfare to work scheme. In fact Gus, who had participated on a welfare to work scheme prior to the BTEA, believed he had learned nothing from that scheme that would enable him to access good quality sustainable employment. Furthermore he argued that the scheme was of no benefit to the state. The work that he undertook on the “Great Gardens of Ireland” project was simply left go to ruin despite the state having spent a considerable sum of money on it. Thus he argued that this money was effectively wasted and would be far better utilised by investing it in education programmes for those on welfare. To this end the prioritising of the welfare to work programmes was somewhat puzzling to Adam.

“They spend lots of time going around every year calling them in and offering them a FÁS scheme somewhere out in a golf course or wherever. They put an awful lot of resources into that but they put no resources into coming after people like us and saying hey guys there is something there for you”.

It is noteworthy that in spite of the obvious acceptance of the value of the BTEA scheme by all of my key informants, two of them still reflected Neoliberal views that favour welfare to work programmes. Minister O’Dea believed that “the greatest antidote to poverty is to get a job obviously” while the civil servant from DSFA stated that
“the over riding mission of the Department or the over riding thought policy that would be here... the Department is of the view and the Minister is of the view that the best route out of poverty is into a job”.

He further added that the overall objective (of the BTEA) in terms of sustainable employment is challenging; it is “a stretching one and it is one that from a value for money point of view you have to be able to demonstrate that the investment gives a yield at the end”. In contrast to this apparent necessity to prove that investment in an education programme such as the BTEA is worthwhile, the civil servant spoke of the range of supports available under welfare to work.

“...There are a number of support services then for the unemployed which are technical assistance and training supports, which are grants to individuals in terms of supporting them if they were going back to work, for example if they needed some assistance with a CV, that kind of thing. Also what are called special projects, family services projects, we would have monies available to us to actually fund groups to self start or self support”.

Yet we saw in chapter five that simple activation via welfare to work programmes have resulted in growing numbers of working poor and accordingly do little to address social exclusion. In comparison to the level of support for welfare to work programmes, we will see in chapter seven that the BTEA provides very little apart from a monetary support to those wishing to avail of it. I argue that the contrasting range of additional supports available to those availing of welfare to work programmes shows the dominant position that welfare to work holds within the DSFA strategy, while the Neoliberal ideologies expressed by key informants explains the continued subservience of welfare to education programmes despite their obvious (and accepted) success. Nonetheless, data from both my key informants and BTEA participants give weight to Beveridges’ argument that welfare expenditure on education should be regarded as a communal venture, likely to bring a good return (Beveridge 1944 p.163 cited in George and Wilding 1985, p.65). Consequently, I argue that it makes more sense to give welfare recipients the opportunity to avail of 3rd level education, rather than restrict them to traditional welfare to work programmes.
6.2 The administrative status of the BTEA:

In this section I examine the implications of keeping the BTEA on an administrative rather than a legislative footing, for participants on the scheme and those endeavoring to access it. I argue that while those designing the scheme feel its administrative nature allows a flexibility that benefits the potential applicant, the reality on the ground suggests otherwise. This section shows that BTEA participants held that the administrative nature of the BTEA has a negative bearing on their participation at 3rd level as the criteria concerning entitlements are not applied consistently.

“They are administrative schemes so they are monitored on an ongoing basis to see is there a need to actually restructure them to meet the changing labour market... to meet the changing socio-economic context... so to that extent they would be subject to periodic review. Its regular review because each year you are looking at what is the most appropriate... so if you look at the period 2000 – 2006 there has been a lot of different changes and different eligibility criteria and different cohorts added to it”.

(Civil Servant)

The above quote would appear to advantage potential participants through an openness to those who need to access the BTEA. Yet I argue that the absence of a statutory footing gives enormous power to individual welfare officers who may act (even subconsciously) on beliefs resulting from the dominant discourse of undeserving poor. In chapter seven we will see that participants reported numerous negative experiences when seeking access to accurate information. It is important to note here that social welfare recipients who are unhappy with a decision given by a Deciding Officer in relation to the DSFAs statutory schemes are entitled to appeal to the Independent Social Welfare Appeals Office. In contrast, it is noteworthy that similar recourse is not provided in respect of non-statutory schemes such as the BTEA. Instead, a person who is dissatisfied with a ruling on a BTEA application can request that a review of the initial ruling be made by an officer of a higher grade than the officer who made that initial ruling (DSFA 2005, p.33). In the 2003/04 academic year, there were five hundred requests for reviews, with more than 60% of these being successful, compared to a success rate of 46% under the Social Welfare Appeals process (DSFA 2005, p.43). Such proportions of successful reviews raise serious questions about whether deciding officers have access to the proper criteria when making a decision. Therefore

“while the non-statutory nature of the scheme allows for more discretion in the decision making process, ... the high number of
I argue that it is unacceptable for employees, without access to clear criteria, to make decisions relating to key financial supports. The argument that high numbers of successful reviews illustrate that the system does indeed work is perverse and merely highlights the large numbers of eligible individuals who are wrongly being denied access to the BTEA. Only those who have appropriate levels of cultural and or social capital are likely to look for a review. Those who do not have such capital are unlikely to seek a review even when they have been wrongly turned down. Additionally, as welfare applicants are perceived as ‘undeserving’ and not to be trusted, civil servants are “less likely to admit errors, which means that they are also less likely to rectify them” (Gallagher and Komito 1999, p.225).

The senior civil servant argued that there were positives from a potential applicant’s point of view, in having the scheme on an administrative basis as

“You don’t have to be hard and fast. You do around eligibility criteria around the age and duration, that kind of thing, but again if somebody is coming to us and they are almost there you are not going to blow them out of the water. That’s the kind of flexibility”.

However, bureaucracies such as the DSFA develop definite characteristics like “inflexibility, obsession with precedent, secretiveness, rigid adherence to the rules, and perhaps impatience with people who do not fully understand the system. In Ireland the ‘culture’ that develops within a department is not tempered by the introduction of new personnel at middle or upper levels” (Gallagher and Komito 1999, p.221). It is significant that the newest civil servants are usually the ones dealing with the public (Gallagher and Komito 1999, p.224) and they are more likely to lack a full understanding of the workings of the system and of people’s entitlements. Accordingly while those at the senior level of the civil service envisaged this flexibility working in favour of potential applicants, experiences on the ground do not support such assumptions. Mark for example spoke of the inflexibility he encountered when a DSFA officer told him that he wasn’t entitled to the BTEA because he wasn’t out of work for fifteen months. “At the time I was out of work something like fourteen months, three weeks and I was seven days short of the
qualifying period”. Mark’s experience accordingly contradicts how the senior civil servant envisages this process working.

Half of my BTEA sample\textsuperscript{30} held that the BTEA being an administrative scheme, which is constantly under review, has a negative bearing on their participation at 3rd level. The perception among these individuals was that the state can “take stuff away from you at any time if they decide that” (Adam). Brendan highlighted that there are now many more restrictions to circumvent than when he first accessed the scheme. This led him to perceive that potential applicants are being discouraged, as “you are restricted in every avenue, where you can live and in what you can access”. All of the BTEA participants held that those already on the scheme should not be detrimentally affected by any changes made subsequent to them beginning their course of study. This belief was also held by two of my key informants. All of these individuals held that the changes introduced in 2003 /2004 should only have applied to the next cohort beginning college the following September. When I discussed this point with Minister O’ Dea he felt that in hindsight this may have been a better way to have proceeded. Additionally, when I asked him if it would be normal procedure for changes to a scheme like this to affect those already in the system; he stated, “It would be unusual but not unprecedented”. Michael Ring was much more forthright in his views concerning this issue. He was adamant that any changes should not impact on those already on the scheme.

“The courts have proved me right on that. I said that myself in the Dáil,\textsuperscript{31} that the people who were there shouldn’t be affected by it and they shouldn’t do what they did...It was wrong I wasn’t in favour of the change but if it had to be done that’s the way it should have been done. It was wrong to have an agreement...they had already entered into a contract, into an agreement, and I was glad that the courts made that very correct decision”\textsuperscript{32}.

Mathew believed that if the state is serious about people going back to education then they should “play ball with them but they seem to change the rules on a whim”.

\textsuperscript{30} The other half of my sample offered no opinion on this matter.

\textsuperscript{31} See Dáil debates on Social Welfare Benefits conducted on March 27\textsuperscript{th} 2003.

\textsuperscript{32} The court case that Deputy Ring refers to involved a UCD student Michael Power, who successfully challenged the legitimacy of the changes made in 2003. For the legal judgement see http://www.courts.ie/judgments.nsf/597645521f07ae9a80256ef30048ca52/fe3c1aade4a71ee98025718c0042ea82?OpenDocument
6.3 The Undeserving poor and the short term approach to the BTEA:

In this section I focus on the construction of welfare recipients as the ‘undeserving’ poor. In this section I examine how that construction has taken place. I focus primarily on lone parents by way of example (one of the three welfare categories who can avail of the BTEA, the others being those on a disability payment and the unemployed) as this particular group of welfare recipients has been aggressively constructed as undeserving. I hold that this construction, which is part of a Neoliberal project to retract the welfare state, has offered a justification for a short-term approach being taken to the BTEA. Consequently this section offers explanations for decisions taken in relation to the BTEA, discussed in the remainder of the chapter.

The link between media discourse and state policy is identified clearly in the research literature. The greatest hostility towards the poor and the welfare state in the 1970s was expressed by the low paid (Pond 1983, p.43). These public attitudes to poverty, which are shaped by the media, tend to blame the victim both for their own circumstances and the resultant ‘drain’ on the state (Golding and Middleton 1982). Thus, Neoliberal policies in favouring the ‘restructuring’ of the welfare state were aided by a ‘moral panic’ discourse in the media (Golding and Middleton 1982; Clarke and Newman 1997; Roche 1992). In fact it “would not be surprising if future generations look upon our era as ‘the age of newspeak’ or doublespeak: half-truths and lies being used to justify policies and actions which are in opposition to established norms of morality and decency grounded in the dominant democratic ideology” (Hersh 2004, p.3). The media often give us inaccurate visions of the political and social world, where we are informed about some issues but not others. Through controlling the type of information that reaches the general public, the media potentially shapes and / or limits our social knowledge and the way in which we construct our social world (McCullough 2002, p.22). The media thus operates as a powerful institution for the dissemination of ideologies and discourses (Devereux 2003, p.103) which have been used to cultivate and shape national consciousness (Adair 2001, p.454) to construct welfare recipients (and lone parents in particular) as the ‘undeserving poor’ (Golding and Middleton 1983; OPEN 2006, p.3; Healy 2004, p.22; see also Adair 2008, for a discussion of the American context, which is alluded to in section 5.51).
Golding and Middleton (1982) show that in disseminating moral panic about welfare, the media were successful in constructing an understanding of certain sections of the poor as ‘undeserving’, which allowed / justified greater reduction of the welfare state (Devereux 1998, p.4). Such moral panics incite demands for strong actions against these groups and ultimately leads to the silencing of any dissenting voices on the subject (Renvall and Vehkalahti 2002, pp.259-260). When welfare recipients are visible in the media they are constructed as the ‘other’ to the middle class audience (Devereux 1998, p.127) thus the media can be viewed as disseminating the dominant ideology (usually of the ruling classes) about the provision of welfare and the need for a welfare state, and ensuring the continuation of the existing social order (Devereux 1998, p.3).

During the 1980s, social welfare recipients, particularly the long-term unemployed, were defined as the undeserving poor in media discourse in Ireland. Internationally, such discourse ultimately represents the excluded as criminal / immoral making wild generalisations about the debilitating effects of welfare dependency (Renvall and Vehkalahti 2002, pp.251-252). I argue that public discourse attributes agency to lone parents in their lack of participation in the labour force, while ignoring the integral role of the structural, social and political forces in determining their employment status (Lens 2002, p.140). The basic term ‘lone-parent’ in itself encapsulates an entire ideology; one preset with negative connotations of ‘welfare dependency’ and idleness (Lens 2002, p.144), illegitimate child conception and individuals who are “devoid of discipline” (Adair 2001, p.462). Such discourses evidently manifest in media content, in which lone parents have been labelled as “Mothers of Bastards” who are “unmotivated, confused, backward and lazy” (Myers 2005). Consequently, welfare recipients have become scorned (Adair 2001, p.455), with discourses reflecting their construction as a liability to the ‘decency’ of the ‘deserving’ working members of the Celtic Tiger Irish economy (Culleton et al. 2005, p.3; see Adair 2005, p.823 for the US context). A ‘moral panic’ is thus created, which is reinforced by the rhetoric of political figures (Linne and Jones 2000, p.59).

Although the discourse of ‘undeserving poor’, which sees the state as sub-venting a lazy life-style for welfare recipients, is hegemonic, it is important to recognise that counter-hegemonic ideologies have emerged, reflecting a conceptualisation of lone-
parenthood which recognises the difficulties and struggles inherent in their daily lives (see for example Kiernan 2007; Lens 2002; Adair 2001; Adair 2003a; Adair 2005), though these have been far fewer in number and have not penetrated into popular discourse to a similar extent. The Walsh / Myers debate\(^{33}\) provides a recent example of the application of the ‘undeserving poor’ construction to lone parents, while the public reaction against this framework of understanding provides evidence of the existence of a counter hegemonic discourse. Nonetheless, it is quite conceivable that even this counter-hegemonic discourse is the property of a middle-class liberal minority, a claim sustained by data which suggests that the working class also support the idea of the undeserving poor (Skeggs 1997; Golding and Middleton 1982; Pond 1983). One can also note that the label of ‘undeserving poor’ is applied on a classed basis, whereby working class lone parents and middle class lone parents are not branded in the same manner. One is feckless and undeserving while the other is not subjected to the same process of demonisation (because they are not seen as relying on the state to support them).

I thus argue that the manner in which state policy is organised envelops two qualitatively different discourses; which both fundamentally perpetuate the stigmatisation of lone-mothers, their reliance on welfare and their location in the lower end of employment positions (Edwards and Duncan 1996, p.115). The initial discourse denigrates lone-mothers as ‘undeserving’ welfare recipients (Bergmann 2001, p.111) reflected by benefits to lone-mothers being predominantly means-tested and inadequate in terms of relative income (Tovey and Share 2003, p.453). The subsequent discourse of self-sufficiency ensures lone parents are trapped by punitive policy strategies (Edwards and Duncan 1996, p.115). For instance, upon qualification for Family Income Supplement and Supplementary Welfare Allowance, a lone-parent must be working at least nineteen hours per week or not exceeding thirty hours per week, respectively (Citizens Information Board, 2007). This concentrates lone-parents in low-paid, part-time or contract work (Hardey and Glover 1991, p.90); hampering mobility to higher incomes due to potential loss of welfare benefits (Tovey and Share

\[^{33}\text{During January / February 2005 excerpts from a speech from Dr. Ed Walsh and an opinion piece “An Irishman’s Diary” by Kevin Myers were published in the Irish Times. They both problematised lone parents and spoke of the generous welfare benefits ensuring that these individuals kept themselves welfare ‘dependant’ and the resultant ills this was causing for Irish society. It provoked a backlash and subsequent apology (see appendix V)\]
I therefore argue that state welfare policy dissuades, reprimands and denigrates lone-parents and compels their participation in economically unsustainable employment, (Culleton et al. 2005, p.37) which ultimately fosters a cycle of dependency forcing lone parents to continually access welfare schemes (OPEN 2006, p.1).

The stigmatisation of welfare recipients (Hardey and Crow 1991, p.4) and the concurrent dissemination of an ideology of self-sufficiency; operate as a justification for the reduction of state responsibility for welfare provision (Lens 2002, p.143). In addition, this stigmatisation may discourage individuals from registering for welfare benefits; forcing entrance into predominantly part-time or contract employment as a means to survive (Edwards and Duncan 1996, p.114). This fails to constitute a permanent exit route from welfare in the way that education can, and so is of little use in combating social exclusion.

Three of my key informants spoke directly or indirectly about welfare recipients being branded as undeserving poor. Joan Burton made reference to the dual manner in which those who avail of welfare schemes are constructed as undeserving and the inaccuracies of such wide generalisations. She spoke of how

“word seemed to have somehow got around that a lot of these schemes were either feather bedding people or were the subject of abuse...I don’t think that that was so and I have never seen any evidence or research to suggest that was so. But clearly in the debates in the Dáil that was the underlying message that was coming across”.

Furthermore the construction of welfare recipients as undeserving moved Michael Ring to ask, “Sometimes you often wonder how some people think within the Department” (DSFA). This was an interesting question given that the third informant to speak of this issue was the civil servant from the DSFA who asked me if I, like others, had prolonged my unemployment in order to avail of the scheme. This question reflects an underlying assumption that all welfare recipients are potentially ‘ripping off the system’ and thus undeserving. Seán spoke of a similar experience.

“I had contact with a former government Minister a couple of years ago and he asked me what I was doing. I said I am on the BTEA in UL and his attitude basically was oh yeah you are sponging off the state”.

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It was held by several of the BTEA participants that the discourse of the undeserving poor has been perpetrated in the media in relation to welfare recipients in general. The following quote evidences the awareness of my participants of such a discourse.

“If you read the papers, if you read Fintan O’ Toole or Kevin Myers, you know exactly what these boys are going to say on various subjects. I could nearly write it for them. There is no point in actually reading them any more because they never come up with anything original. Stereotypes… You know the pub talk kind of thing, particularly if people are very well off and they are well ensconced in wherever they are, they will be talking about these layabouts, they are out drinking every day, and this sort of thing, but that’s not the case…Well right wing commentators like Brenda Power…There is far too much feather bedding. People should be made, particularly the long term unemployed, people who are long term unemployed, she doesn’t have a brain, but if she had a brain she would be able to find out that people are not long term unemployed for no reason”. (John)

I argue that the Irish state has adopted Neoliberal (and increasingly Americanised) initiatives, which promote individualism; comprising of a philosophy, which “stresses the importance of the individual and the value attached to individual freedom and individual choice” (Scott and Marshall 2005, p.297). This renders welfare recipients as personally responsible for their own position and well being (Lens 2002, p.137). We have seen how these Neoliberal individualistic ideologies ultimately inject myths into public discourse (see section 5.3), which embrace postulations that lone-parents for example are autonomous actors exercising rational choice of lone-parenthood as a means to engage in a life of benefit-dependency (Millar 1996, p.98). Lone parents have become increasingly classified as a homogenous group despite their various entry routes to lone parenthood (Hardey and Crowe 1991, p.4). This stereotyping, ultimately leads to their denigration and demonisation (Silva 1996, p.7) with the media playing a major role in this process. In fact, lone parents are particularly vulnerable to poverty in Ireland; with 27% of one-parent families living in consistent poverty (Central Statistics Office, 2005, p.2). The primary payment is the One-Parent Family Payment, which is a means-tested payment payable to lone parents constituting both a personal maximum weekly payment of €185.80 for the parent and €22.00 for each dependent child (Citizens Information Board 2007). The state additionally provides benefits to all parents in the form of Child Benefit and Early Childcare Supplement.
The process of constructing myths as ‘fact’ has stigmatised welfare and constructed its recipients as ‘undeserving’ of the assistance that they receive (Lens 2002, p.144).

“Even my mother in law the other day said these single parents sure they are getting everything, getting houses thrown at them and all. I just looked at her and thought where did this come out of? I have been a single parent for 12 years and she knew I was struggling. I don’t think it ever registered how difficult it was and how difficult it still is. I think peoples’ view of lone parents is warped and I think there is still as stigma about it. I hear we have moved on and we are a very liberal and broad minded society but that is a load of bullshit” (Gus).

The promotion and indeed acceptance of this ideology demonises welfare recipients and justifies minimalist social welfare provision on the grounds that expansive schemes cannot be allowed as there are too many people that will fraudulently avail of them.

“It’s the old system of demonising… you know like the British used to demonise some chief in Africa and it was ok then to go in and kill them because they are not really human and it’s the same here” (John).

The construction of dependency and empowerment myths renders participation in the workforce as a ‘normal’ empowering process (Adair 2001, p.461); stigmatising those who do not conform as a deviant ‘other’ (Devereux 2003, p.127), who choose a life of dependency on state welfare and are a resultant drain on wider society (Adair 2001, p.161-162). Participation in employment is thus advocated as possessing the necessary emancipatory potential, to enable welfare recipients to retrieve their respect (Adair 2005, pp.823-824) and relieve themselves from the constraints of welfare dependency (Lens 2002, p.145). This again reflects Neoliberal ideologies and ensures a ‘cultural’ understanding of social exclusion, which is experienced by welfare recipients when they interact with DSFA officers.

“The attitude in the social welfare office was like... the impression I got was that you are a bum, go out and look for a job. You shouldn’t be here looking to go out and get a qualification, you are 44, go out and get a job” (Mark).

The predominant preclusion of lone-parents in particular from the achievement of 3rd level qualifications is an avenue where enhanced state policy recognition is necessitated. The direct welfare to work route underpins the majority of state policy, while 3rd level education, as a means to bring about more long-term and economically rewarding employment opportunities to welfare recipients is given lower priority
Culleton et al. 2005, pp.143-144). I argue that this is directly related to and indeed justified by the construction and public acceptance of welfare recipients as undeserving. These arguments were borne out in the informants’ experiences of the administration of the BTEA (see chapter 7), which suggest that they are perceived as ‘undeserving’ (MacGregor 1999, p.110) particularly given the success of our Celtic Tiger economy. Frank reflects the prevailing perception when he stated

“The approach of the cabinet, the Dáil, the majority of the TD’s in the Dáil, the civil service, the Department of Education, the people that you meet in the welfare office that you have to deal with, is condescending. They feel that you are not suitable and that you somehow are not worthy of their efforts.”

I therefore argue that all of these added pressures make it even harder for students from welfare backgrounds to succeed. The fact that they do, in spite of the lack of supports available to them, speaks volumes for their commitment and desire to obtain valuable educational qualifications, and flies in the face of the nonsensical notion that these individuals are undeserving of our assistance. Throughout section 6.4 I will show how the general acceptance of this dominant discourse of welfare recipients as ‘undeserving’ has justified a short term approach being taken to the BTEA programme with the changes made to the scheme in 2003 /2004.

6.4 Changes to the criteria of the BTEA:

This section of the chapter examines each of the three changes (extension of the qualifying period, removal of the summer payment for those previously on an unemployment payment, and the restriction of the BTEA) made to the BTEA in 2003 / 2004. I argue that these changes have had a detrimental impact on both BTEA participants and potential applicants. Mutchs’ adaptation of Bourdieu’s field theory provides a theoretical understanding of how these restrictive changes to the BTEA occurred.

All of my key informants who spoke about the changes made to the scheme in 2003 / 2004 believed them to have been unnecessary and wrong. Joan Burton argued that the changes were wrong because the “money that you spend in terms of educational opportunity for 95% it comes back in so many ways as a return”. Michael Ring while acknowledging the cutbacks were made at a time of a small downturn in the economy
argued that the money, which was saved, was small in relative terms. Furthermore he believed that these cuts were aimed at the “most vulnerable in society”.

“What really upset me was the mean fisted, it was the amount of money that they were saving and the people that they were targeting... it was actually keeping them out of the whole system and making sure that they never got anywhere and it was wrong. It was wrong. If the government wanted at that time to save money there were many other areas that they could have targeted to save that bit of money that they did”. (Michael Ring)

Minister O’ Dea was adamant that he wouldn’t have recommended the changes to the government had he been in the Department of Education or the DSFA. He further stated that he “wasn’t persuaded of the need for the changes and I remain unpersuaded”. The Minister’s negative opinion was formed as a result of these changes serving to “discourage people. I’d like to see more people encouraged so I mean they have impacted negatively”.

As most of my key informants were against the changes, I sought to use Mutch's adaptation of Bourdieu’s field theory to form a theoretical understanding of how and why these restrictive changes to the BTEA occurred. As mentioned in chapter two Mutch identified that in developing policy, a field is created where the ‘game’ to arrive at those decisions is played out. The ‘players’ involved in the ‘game’ “use capital to gain access to and position themselves on the field” (Mutch 2006, p.156). She argues that it is important to note “who was granted entry to the field and why? Which ideological positions were favoured and why? Who was excluded and why?” (Mutch 2006, p.157) In the context of this and all ‘games’ there are additional political, social and economic factors at work, which influence what happens within the field.

In utilising Mutch’s theoretical framework we must first identify the ‘players’ on the field, which in this particular situation were the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, senior civil servants from her department, and the Minister for Finance and senior civil servants from that department. We then examine the level of capital the players bring, and what position this allows them on the field. Finally we must acknowledge that the field sits within a particular context, identify what that context is and consequently theorise how the decisions were made (Mutch 2006, p.163).
In relation to the capital that the players bring to the field, we can organise it, and consequently the ‘players’, in terms of its importance and influence. It is arguable that the most important person on the field in terms of their capital was the Minister of Finance. He after all controls the budget allocation to each individual government department. Next in terms of importance would be the Minister for Social and Family Affairs followed by the civil servants from the Department of Finance and finally those from DSFA. However that does not appear to have been the way that the players actually lined up on the field.

Time restrictions on individual Ministers often result in them having little political input into ongoing policy development, with the civil service mainly dealing with such matters (Connolly and O’ Halpin 1999, p.261). Research has further shown that it is general practice for Ministers to consult with senior civil servants on major policy issues, (Zimmerman 1997, pp.538-540) as was the case with the decision to alter the BTEA scheme. Such practices means that the position of senior civil servants allows them the opportunity (if they so wish) to block policy they do not agree with and promote those that they do agree with (Connolly and O’ Halpin 1999, p.261).

Some of my key informants supported the relevance of these findings. Joan Burton for example told me that there was fierce hostility to the cost of the BTEA from both the Minister of Finance and his senior civil servants even when she was the Minister of State for Social Welfare. She further explained that the way the Irish budgetary process works means that “the Department of Finance object to most expenditure unless the people putting forward the expenditures make a very strong case”.

Additionally Minister O’ Dea informed me that

“there isn’t sufficient long term thinking and that has traditionally been the case no matter who the Minister for Finance was. Short term-ism is still too pronounced as it were in the Department of Finance and this frustrates all spending Ministers. You know, they look ahead the 12 months and say ok well this is the budget for the next 12 months. Now from their point of view they have to manage the economy and you can’t be spending a billion for something that might come into effect in 2016 or something like that. But there is that conflict; there is that conflict in the system”

This caused me to conclude that it was in fact the senior civil servants from the Department of Finance who brought the most capital, power and influence to the field in this instance. Accordingly I argue that they are the ones who are ultimately
dictating policy. Michael Ring supports such an argument and believes that we have handed over too much power to civil servants and non-elected officials, when in reality “Ministers should have overall responsibility. Ministers should be making decisions”.

To situate this field in its context, it is important to acknowledge the political, social and economic factors that had an influence on it. In terms of the political factors at work, the field operated at a time when a global Neoliberal project was very effectively embarking on a rolling back of the traditional welfare state. Even ‘left wing’ politicians who once favoured state enterprise and publicly owned industry have become reluctant collectivists and succumbed to the lure of the mixed economy. The new buzzwords of the economic and political elite (and increasingly the enlarged middle classes) are ‘the economy’, ‘enterprise culture’, ‘low taxation’, ‘the market’, and ‘personal responsibility’ to provide for your own welfare. Simultaneously, unemployment below a certain figure (full employment) has been accepted as an inevitable feature of the economy (Devereux 1998, p.142) and Irish society is happy to operate at such levels. Socially and economically during this period (1990s to 2003), Ireland had experienced an unprecedented era of growth, with full employment, and a rise in wages, and living standards. This served to legitimise the construction of welfare recipients as ‘undeserving’ (see Breen and Devereux 2003) and many among the general public believed that if an individual was unemployed in ‘Celtic Tiger Ireland’ then it must be the result of an individual failing.

Finally, the changes to the BTEA of 2003 / 2004 were ultimately implemented in the context of a recommendation in relation to the estimates as put forward by the independent estimates review committee. As a result of these estimates the DSFA and other departments were told by the Minister for Finance to see where they could make savings, as the spending budget had to be reduced. The ‘game’ played out on the field had to take account of this new budget.

\[ ^{34} \] An unemployment level below 5% is regarded as full employment, where virtually everyone who wants a job has one. It allows for frictional unemployment - the notion that a small share of the workforce is seeking jobs and will soon find them (see Bernstein and Baker 2002). The cost of such a system of ‘full’ employment, which leaves up to 5% of those of working age without employment, falls disproportionately on the working class. Once a country reaches this magic figure of full employment it reduces the necessity to provide / attract / create employment for the remaining 5%.
“I’ll refer you to the background in relation to how those changes came about… it was on a recommendation in relation to the estimates as put forward by the independent estimates review committee, it was acceptable government at the time” (Civil Servant).

Joan Burton suggested, “That’s what happens in politics. You have to argue your case and that’s how you make political progress…. It’s a question of finances at the time”.

The civil servant from the DSFA thus explained that as a result of these new budgetary constraints

“from our own perspective ... if people wouldn’t have completed 2nd level they are probably at far greater risk, and we figured that at a time of high employment we need to be particularly focusing on those that are most distant from the labour market.”.

Consequently while we saw the qualifying period for the 3rd level option of the BTEA extended, the qualifying period for the second level option remained unchanged. Michael Ring argues that we must also consider the issue of priorities.

“At that time there was a small bit of a downturn and it looked like all departments were going to have a cutback at the end of the year on the basis that they had over spent and as it turned out at the end of that month and the end of that year there was record receipts in relation to taxation coming into this country”.

He believes that this scheme was not a priority for the civil servants in the DSFA and that ultimately Minister Coughlan was a weak Minister who allowed her department to tell her what to do.

“Mary Coughlan, she runs the Department, she signs off and she depends on her officials. She was told by the Minister of Finance whatever cutback ... whatever it was it was small money at the time. She was told look this has to be done by the end of the year. The civil service came in and said look this is the way we are going to do it. She looked at it and said ok I’ll go with it instead of saying... looking through it herself and going out there and checking it herself. She would never have signed that off if she had done that. I honestly believe that....... She failed as Minister and I told her in the Dáil what she should have done. She should have told the Minister for Finance and the PD’s that if they were doing this that she would resign. I mean if they wanted to cutback in the Department they should have found some other way to cutback but not on the backs of the weak and the poor and the people that needed it most”.

Additionally Joan Burton believes that the Minister didn’t “appreciate or value the scheme sufficiently”.

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“Suggestion at the time as well was that Minister Coughlan was a very weak Minister to have accepted those cuts put up to her by her colleague Charlie McCreaey in the Department of Finance. I mean Charlie McCreaey has lots of admirable qualities but he is not by and large in favour of state supported initiatives”.

I believe that it is highly conceivable that by taking the decision to introduce the measures that she did, Minister Coughlan was conscious of her position in the field, and chose the soft option in terms of political repercussions for the decisions taken. While the Irish political system is characterised by clientalism / brokerage\textsuperscript{35} (Gallagher and Komito 1999, p.219) I argue that as welfare recipients are a vulnerable and unpopular group not known for high voter turnout (Abramovitz 2006, p.351), welfare provision was a legitimate and soft target for reform, as the affected individuals were extremely unlikely (and or unable) to take electoral revenge on those introducing the cuts. In fact one of my BTEA participants professed that Minister Coughlan made these changes safe in the knowledge that the people the cuts would affect “have no power and they have no voice” (Diane). Michael Ring made a similar argument. He stated

“there were around 6000 and I think there were 185 in Mayo. You can spread those 6000 throughout the country, a 100 here, a hundred in Galway, 200 in Dublin, 300 here. Do you know what I am saying to you? So they are really dispersed and they didn’t really matter and that’s what happened and it is wrong. It’s wrong. It was an easy decision to make but it was a wrong decision”

As a result of the decision taken to introduce the cuts, I argue that all of the players came out of the interaction having more or less achieved their aims relative to their position on the field. The civil servants from the Department of Finance being the most important in terms of the capital that they brought to the field, achieved the outcome they required, as the cutbacks would ensure that they could ‘balance the books’ for that year. Michael Ring, who held that “Finance doesn’t care once they balance the books, supports this hypothesis. That’s all they care about. That’s their job”. Likewise the Minister for Finance being next in line, achieved the outcome he desired, which was the acquiescence of the Minister for Social and Family Affairs who bowed to his demand for a monetary saving, consequently keeping his

\textsuperscript{35} A system where our parliamentarians believe their election prospects are affected by the work they do on the ground in their constituency, helping individual constituents with problems they are experiencing.
Department happy. Finally I argue that the outcome for Minister Coughlan, given her position on the field, was not too unfavourable, as while there would be a short term political backlash, the fact that the cut backs were imposed on welfare recipients, who were predominantly seen as undeserving, would ensure that backlash would be short lived.

Despite apparently successful outcomes for all of the players on the field, the vast majority of my key informants held that these decisions were underpinned by ‘short-termism’.

“I feel that the government has been very short sighted, the government themselves a number of years ago showed... the sooner you can identify people and the sooner you can get them back into the education system the better for society and the better for these people. The percentage of these people that actually never go back to social welfare has been very high. So it does prove that it has worked. Because it was so successful that is why they started targeting it” (Michael Ring).

Furthermore Deputy Ring argued that the DSFA “went through all the schemes and said ... we will save this here and save that there, and when you see it on those sixteen cutbacks you are saving €1 million here and there., small money in the overall budget but the effect it had on people was terrible”. Finally Joan Burton argued that Ireland has to maximise our levels of skilled educated people to continue our economic success, which not only assists the individual on the BTEA but is also a “long term investment from the point of view of the economy and I would think that was absolutely essential. All of the studies show it and I would think that maybe the Department of Finance should read some of those studies”. However in spite of these arguments Minister Coughlan argued that “savings are savings”36.

To conclude, it is clear from this discussion that the ‘game’ resulting in the changes introduced in 2003 / 2004 was underpinned by a functionalist logic. The system had become dysfunctional (there was a shortfall in the amount of money generated according to the book of estimates) therefore the various ‘players’ (in this case the Departments of Finance and the DSFA) worked together in order to restore the system to a state of equilibrium. This desired outcome was achieved by making the monetary savings that were required, ensuring the system became functional again. So in

36 See Dáil debates on Social Welfare Benefits conducted on March 27th 2003.
essence everyone was happy with the outcome, apart from (and most importantly) those that the decision would affect on a day-to-day basis. This also has functional overtones in that the system is prepared to tolerate certain amounts of inequality as long as the system remains functional overall. I argue that the fact that those who were going to experience that inequality first hand had been constructed as the undeserving poor, just made the decision all the more palatable for the general public to consume.

6.41 Change in qualifying period:
From 2004 the qualifying period for the Third Level Option of the BTEA was extended to fifteen months. I argue that extending the qualifying period was a justifiable policy decision; however I believe that extending the qualifying period to fifteen months was too severe, and had a detrimental impact on potential applicants. On December 2nd 2003 (Dáil Debates) the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, responded to questions from two TDs asking for the reasons behind her decision to increase the unemployment period for eligibility for the BTEA from six months to fifteen months, and for estimates of the numbers applying for BTEA who would be affected by the change in qualification criteria. Minister Coughlan replied

“One of the factors that influenced me in taking this approach is the concern that some people are going on the live register for six months or so specifically to qualify for the back to education allowance. The scheme... is not intended to be a parallel 3rd level grant scheme for people who were already planning to study at 3rd level. It is estimated, based on the numbers who actually came forward for the scheme in the 2002-03 academic year, that up to 1,200 people who might otherwise have qualified for the scheme in 2004 will not now qualify.”

The civil servant from the DSFA reiterated this argument.

“Internal research would have indicated to us that you had situations where people may have been actually gravitating to unemployment to qualify for the BTEA support, certainly when both of them were at the six month phase. I know anecdotally, my own nieces and nephews when the changes were made to it were complaining that they had figured out that leaving work and signing on for six months... that’s where it needs to be more focused”.

Both of these statements reflect a view of welfare recipients as undeserving. Moreover they promote the idea of welfare recipients acting fraudulently, which can
in turn be absorbed as ‘welfare as fraud’. Joan Burton and Michael Ring identified problems with this approach.

“I think Mary Coughlan was of the view in her statements that people were scamming in relation to BTEA. Now perhaps some people were. When you set up universal schemes there may always be very clever people who say I’m going to get the best deal out of this... but the vast majority of people who take up these schemes are genuine” (Joan Burton).

“You have it since our Lord came onto earth with every scheme that every government has ever introduced there has always been abuses of it. So what you do is that you don’t affect everybody while correcting the 5 or 6% of people that are abusing it. And to be fair to the people that were in employment they knew that if they didn’t get on the BTEA they just couldn’t go back to education because the minute they left work they didn’t have the resources to sustain them over the 3 or 4 years of education. So they weren’t really abusing it. They were just using a scheme that was there to help them to get back into” (Michael Ring).

BTEA participants perceived that welfare recipients could be hindered in their plans to go to college as a result of this change to the scheme. They held that an individual could have applied and or been accepted, and then the criteria for entitlement to BTEA could change, meaning that an applicant who was eligible when they applied was no longer eligible by the time it came to enrol. I argue that the change which saw the qualifying period extended from six to fifteen months was too restrictive and served to discourage potential applicants rather than to optimise the chances of those who were most distant from the labour market.

“They kept moving the qualifying period and it’s too long. It’s too long to have them out of the workforce, to have them out of the educational system”. (Michael Ring)

Since then, the qualifying period has again been reduced to twelve months or nine months if the person has been assessed and approved by FÁS. I believe that a twelve-month qualifying duration is the optimum waiting period in terms of getting those most distant from the labour market on to the scheme. This is after all whom the scheme is targeted at. As we will see in chapter seven, BTEA participants need reasonable levels of cultural and / or social capital to access the BTEA and courses in college. Accordingly those who are most distant from the labour market are less likely to have the levels of capital required to access the BTEA when faced with competition from those who have been unemployed in the previous six months. These ‘newly
unemployed’ will tend to have greater levels of the required cultural and social capital. I argue that the 12-month qualifying period is long enough in duration to discourage those who may have been graduating to unemployment with the intention of accessing the BTEA. Accordingly it gives those who are most distant from the labour market and who genuinely need the BTEA a greater chance of accessing it.

Finally, I do not believe that the change should have denied the 1200 potential recipients a chance to avail of the scheme that September. I hold that the change should only have applied to those who obtained a place in college after September 2004. Yet, I argue this change (and the others as we will shortly see) was implemented at a time of an apparent fiscal crisis and hence Neoliberal demands for monetary savings through the restriction of welfare expenditure came to the fore in terms of policy.

6.42 Change in summer payment:

From 2003 the BTEA was no longer payable over the summer months to those who had previously been on an unemployment payment. In this section I examine my key informants’ assessment of this change and my participants’ experience of it. As a caveat to this particular change, it was decided to have a safety net in place so that those BTEA students who could not obtain employment during the summer could apply for unemployment welfare payments. However as we shall see, that safety net failed to catch a considerable proportion of my sample.

Only one of my key informants did not hold that this alteration was unnecessary and was having a negative effect on those already participating on the scheme as well as potential applicants. That informant was the senior civil servant who was unable to answer questions concerning this aspect of the BTEA, as it was the subject of judicial proceedings. However he argued that the “concept at the time was that there wouldn’t be any hardship... it was done against the backdrop of a buoyant economy. A lot of students source work during the summer period anyway and the fallback position was that if you didn’t get work you could always sign back on anyway for that period”.

Minister O’ Dea failed to see the logic in such a decision. “It seems to me to be a bit ridiculous that if somebody is on the BTEA they are knocked off for the summer. They obviously go
back to social welfare for the summer months. That seems to me to be a bit farcical because it means the state is paying the money anyway”.

In fact 74% of BTEA participants re-applied for their unemployment payment in 2003, and while the number fell to 62% in 2004, this figure is still very high (DSFA 2005, p.54). Michael Ring and Minister O’ Dea believe that this policy decision was a big disincentive for BTEA participants and potential applicants. Deputy Ring explained how this impacts on potential BTEA students and serves to discourage them.

“They need that scheme to be running for the duration of their course…. because people are afraid to take risks, to take chances because some of them can be married, they can be in relationships or whatever and it helps these people to know that this social welfare scheme is there for them throughout”.

Minister O’ Dea perceived this change as having a negative impact on current BTEA participants. He states “It’s a big hassle to have to go back into social welfare officials and persuade them that you are available and looking for work and sign on again… it’s a big ordeal and it’s a huge disincentive”. Several of my participants spoke of the difficulties that they experienced in relation to this change. In particular, attention was drawn to the psychological impact created by the pressure to get a job when they should have been concentrating on exams. The following passages from Mary express this difficulty.

“You’re doing your exams in May so your focus should be on those. Your focus shouldn’t be on ‘shit I am going to have to get a job’. My BTEA is going to run out and I might have to sign on and I might be without money for a couple of weeks. Then I am going to have to sign back off, so your mind is turned up. You should be very focused on your education, which is why you came back in the first place. It beggars belief to be quite honest”.

“So taking away the BTEA over the summer time puts a lot of pressure on… you should be focussed firmly on exams for Christ sake. It’s the reason you came back in the first place”.

Additionally, in light of the civil servants reference to this policy decision being taken against the backdrop of students easily sourcing summer work, it was highlighted that not all students are the same. Joan Burton spoke of this anomaly when she said

“if you are talking about somebody going back into education who has for instance heavy family commitments, their capacity to work in the same way that a student might go off to a building
“site in Boston or Dublin nowadays or Limerick is not there in the same way”.

My participants had personal experience of this scenario and held that there were problems in accessing employment for the summer months, which had not been given consideration when the state had arrived at this decision. The following passages from one of my focus groups illustrate this issue.

Mary: They think sure you’re going to college so you can get a job for the summer. The point is that anyone who is long term unemployed cannot get a job. That’s the whole point of it.

Luke: The whole social welfare system is to get you into employment. Correct? Grand, its summer time and you go looking for employment and the employer says how long will you be here for? I’ll be here for about 10 weeks. Will you take me on for the 10 weeks?

Mary and Luke: NO!!

Mary: I have a good friend working in the recruitment business and I hit her up for a job for the summer but she said look if we place you somewhere and you leave again in September we have to give back 20% of their fee.

Martin: So they won’t place you?

Mary: She said we won’t place you and she said I don’t know any other recruitment agency that will place you either. If they do place you and you do that one year they won’t touch you the next year. So from that perspective I’d love to work for the summer and make somewhat decent money but the chances of that are slim to nothing. Seriously!

Furthermore, a change in circumstances while attending college resulted in some participants no longer being entitled to a welfare payment during the summer months even if they could not source employment. This contrasts the civil servants statement that there wouldn’t be any hardship as a result of no longer paying the BTEA over the summer.

“I am not entitled to social welfare because my wife works so I was just signing on every 2 or 3 weeks for tax credits...well I had a bad experience of it. Even though because my wife was working I wasn’t getting anything I still had the supervisor coming in and saying I want your P-60, your bank accounts, credit union books, this that and the other. I want to see your total income” (Mark).
Fiona no longer qualified for a payment during the summer break either and she experienced “huge problems trying to get back on” the BTEA in September. Likewise John experienced a two-week delay in receiving a payment when he signed on in the summer and a further two-week delay when he returned to the BTEA in September. Mary’s experience was the most severe. She experienced a two-week delay in the summer but received no payment for 7 weeks when she returned to the BTEA in September.

Mary: It’s just the administration sorting everything out or that’s what I was told. Interestingly and this I find funny... somebody who had remained signing on for the summer and not found work seemed to have gotten their money in September a lot quicker than those who signed off and did manage to get work, which is what they want you to do in the first place.

Martin: So basically what you are saying then is that between the start of June and October, of those 5 months there were 9 weeks where you didn’t get paid? You were paid all of it eventually but there was 9 weeks where you got no money?

Mary: Yes.

Such delays in payment have the potential to create major economic hardship for BTEA participants, when in reality the process of switching from one payment to another should be seamless.

Finally Deputy Burton believed that for BTEA participants “in the summer aside from family commitments there should be time for them to continue reading and studying. So again my own view is that it is short sighted”. The experiences of my participants reflected such views. Many had previously used the summer period to read ahead on modules they would be taking in the autumn semester, while others had exams to take as a result of being ill during the year. These participants held that being able to read and study during the summer period was crucial to their ultimate outcome. However this particular change to the BTEA now impacts upon their ability to do that. The following discussion is used to illustrate their concerns.

Mark: I was intending on working on my FYP (Final Year Project) over the summer when I got to this stage but I have to go out and get a job now.
Luke: I have 2 I grades\textsuperscript{37} to do this summer. I was sick at Christmas so I got I grades and that is complete... one chance, no repeats.

John: You have no choice; you have got to do well to get through.

Luke: Therefore if I work I sacrifice...

Mary: That's the point. The whole idea is to get as good a degree as possible but if you have to... certainly if you are doing your FYP, your concentration needs to be on that because that might push you up from a 2.1 to a 1.1, which determines whether you are going to get a good job or a mediocre job or a minimum wage job, which is obviously the reason that you came back in the first place, to ensure that you wouldn't have to be shuffling fries in McDonalds or hammering in so and so's metal factory. So there is a psychological thing. Certainly when you have I grades or an FYP and you have to work during the summer, when you have that on your plate there is an awful lot of anxiety going on inside.

In summary, the vast majority of both my key informants and BTEA participants believed that this change has had a detrimental impact. Minister O’ Dea argued that this change was a “pointless exercise” which has resulted in the creation of “more work for the officials in social welfare” and

“It’s creating huge psychological problems and a huge practical barrier in many cases for a lot of the student and at the end of the day who is gaining anything from it? I mean the state and the taxpayers aren’t gaining from it because if a guy isn’t paid under one heading and he doesn’t get work he is entitled to get paid under another heading. So what’s the purpose? You know ... (laughs) nobody ever clearly explained to me what the purpose of this is”.

This is a profound statement given that Minister O’ Dea is a member of the cabinet, which can rescind this change if they so wish. I argue the fact that nothing has been done to alter this situation suggests that those elites responsible for policy in the DSFA and the last three Ministers for Social and Family Affairs (all of whom declined to take part in this research) do not hold similar views to my key informants. I accordingly argue that the pursuance of this policy is part of the Neoliberal retraction of the welfare state, where savings on welfare budgets (no matter how

\textsuperscript{37} I grades are awarded in cases where the student has not completed all of the requirements for a module and has submitted certifiable evidence of medical and/or psychological illness or immediate family bereavement. These I Grades must be cleared at repeat exam time.
small) become of paramount importance. However such ideology does not sit easily with those who are forced to endure the resulting actualities.

*Martin*: If you look at it from the state’s point of view if even one person signs off for the summer isn’t that X amount of money that they have saved?

*Mary*: This is every penny counts. Is it? I think that would be a poor argument if that was their position. A very poor argument.

### 6.43 Restriction on postgraduate option:

The final change to the BTEA that I will examine was the decision to restrict the postgraduate option for the BTEA to only those wanting to pursue a Higher Diploma in education or a Graduate Diploma in education. I argue that the restriction of the postgraduate option of the BTEA reflects the Neoliberal ideology of personal responsibility where individuals are responsible for and invest in their own economic welfare through continuous education, meaning that the state no longer bears that responsibility.

The senior civil servant in the DSFA offered an explanation as to why this particular change was introduced. He argued that the DSFA took a decision in

> “its strategy statement to actually focus on people of working age who are most distant from the labour market and bring them to a certain level, and devote whatever monies are available under budget to that. That’s what it is doing and what the Minister at the time figured was …once somebody had actually obtained a primary degree that should be sufficient for them to actually access the labour market, and acknowledged where there was the need for the higher diploma that would be facilitated”.

In fact Minister Coughlan reasoned in her Dáil defence of this change[^38] that “few members of this House have postgraduate qualifications and they have done quite well”. However my civil servant participant conceded that the “better the education I suppose the better the opportunity in sourcing that sustainable job down the road”. This seems to contradict his defence of the change and is more in line with the recommendations of the Review Group of the BTEA, that sustainable employment be the objective of the scheme. Both Joan Burton and Michael Ring continued on this theme and argued that there is evidence of degree inflation having a practical effect. Deputy Ring stated “I now have people coming into me complaining that they can’t

[^38]: See Dáil debates on Social Welfare Benefits conducted on March 27th 2003.
get work. Genuinely can’t get work because they are competing with people now who have far higher education than them”

Minister O’ Dea believed that from a social justice and economic point of view it would be a good idea if the BTEA “was extended to post-grad, it would be a good idea if some of the restrictions were lifted”. I argue that on the one hand the state is promoting the idea of life long learning, yet on the other it is denying the chance for certain sections of society to further their education to postgraduate level. Minister O’Dea agreed with me on this point.

Martin: So is there something of an anomaly there in that we need more students but then we are stopping certain people from doing just that?

WOD: Well yes

Michael Ring also identified that the restriction on postgraduate education presents major problems for those from lower socio-economic groups.

“The other thing then after that is that while the government is promoting one thing and saying there is a change in society, a change in that people are going to have to be educated at different times in their lives but the people that are going to be educated are the people who can afford to go and get educated and at the same time their jobs will be there for them and their income will be there for them but if somebody is on low income and they are on a BTEA scheme and they do that and then they want to go on further and do a Masters degree or whatever the support and the backup is not there for them”.

These views are very significant given the belief among almost all of my participants that the degree is becoming devalued. It was now seen by some as effectively the ‘new leaving certificate’, resulting in an increased need to undertake postgraduate study. The institutionalised cultural capital gained from an undergraduate degree is becoming devalued in terms of the exchange rate it will have when the holder tries to convert it to economic capital.

“Have you heard the notion that the degree is the new leaving cert? I think that they raise the barrier every 10 years. 15 years ago the leaving cert was all that you needed, now it’s a degree, next it will be post-grad, then it will be the 4th level. They will move it to 4th level eventually”. (Denis)

“Ah the degree now... it’s like the leaving cert was 20 years ago. It’s as common now as the leaving cert was 20 years ago. I think the degree now is slightly devalued and then age wise I am competing with people younger than me with the same
qualification but if I go in with an MA instead of a BA there is a better chance that I will get work from it”. (Mark)

If we examine the salaries of all graduates from 2005 (HEA 2007b, pp.20-33) we find that 42% of all postgraduate diploma graduates earned more than €33,000, with 72% earning more than €25,000. Furthermore 31% of taught Masters graduates earned salaries over €33,000, with 66% earning more than €25,000 within nine months of graduation. The equivalent figures for those graduating from research Masters show that 79% earned more than €25000. Finally 86% of PhD graduates earned more than €33,000 with 93% earning more than €25000. In contrast while 55% of Honours Bachelor Degree graduates earned more than €25000 only 16% earned more than €33,000. There were also significant variations when examining Honours Bachelor Degree salaries by faculty. Only 22.3% of Honours graduates from arts / humanities / social science (as we will see in chapter seven BTEA students are significantly over represented in this field) earned salaries in excess of €25,000. Furthermore only 9.7% of Honours Bachelor Degree graduates from these faculty earned salaries in excess of €33,000. Thus it is apparent that higher qualifications can add significant value to a graduate’s employability particularly in terms of starting salary. Furthermore, six BTEA participants held that they would need a postgraduate qualification to give them an edge in the labour market given that they were a certain age. The following quotations capture that belief.

“If you are a mature student and you are in my age group, the mid 40s and you are going in competing against people straight out of school with the same qualifications I think that you are on a bit of a loser because employers assume... they can afford to pay them less whereas someone in their mid 40s is going to have those responsibilities and will expect more.” (Seán)

“The age we are we need to be thinking about heading towards a PhD. Anyone over 25 with a BA like is at nothing.” (Mark)

In summary, the degree was seen by most of my participants as being a stepping-stone that you have to acquire prior to progressing on to postgraduate study, which is seen as being the desired level of qualification to obtain. Thus the restrictions imposed on the postgraduate option of the BTEA cause difficulties for these students as there is an important dichotomy between the personal responsibility to educate yourself and the cost of education.
“A lot of people can’t afford the cost of education. Even to do this Masters course next year, the price for the Masters that I applied for is nearly €5000. Hopefully the county council would pay for that and I would get a grant, but the grant would be about €800, €2400 for the year. I assumed I’d get the BTEA on top of that. So if I am not entitled to that I am up the creek”. (Mark)

Consequently my participants perceived that post-grad qualifications are becoming the property of the middle classes and the onset of degree inflation will ensure once more the best jobs will remain in the hands of those who can afford to obtain the highest educational qualifications.

“They will always be the ones... we start off in education and struggle the whole way up and if our path was smooth the whole way to Masters or whatever we would be right up there with them. But it isn’t. It is harder and there will always be less of us” (Diane).

BTEA participants perceive that the restrictions on the postgraduate options of the BTEA can only hasten that outcome. Diane explained that for those from the lower classes

“If you don’t have the money when you are doing a degree how the hell do they think that you will have it to do a post-grad? Where do they think that you are going to get it?”

The decision to restrict access to postgraduate study (through lack of economic capital on the part of BTEA participants) will ensure that the amount of students from lower class backgrounds going on to gain higher educational qualifications “will be seriously slowed down and it will once again leave the best paid jobs to people whose families can fund them” (Carmel). However Peter believed that is how it has always been in Irish society. “We don’t want you getting too far now because… it’s always been the attitude in this country. Always!!” As a consequence the informants held that they were expected to know their place in society by those in positions of power in relation to the scheme.

“It appears that because we come from a social welfare background we are only entitled to so much of a job, a certain type of job, we are not entitled to go on and become a professor or whatever. ‘You will only get your degree? Sure you are on social welfare, you should be glad of that!!’” (Diane)

This perception appears to be borne out in the civil servants assertion in section 6.12 that the BTEA allows welfare recipients to obtain educational qualifications which
“allow them enter certain sectors of the labour market”. In this context, the decision to restrict the postgraduate option to only those pursuing a Higher Diploma (H.Dip.) or Graduate Diploma in primary school teaching is profoundly negative. We will see in chapter seven how Healy’s (1997) report and indeed my own sample, show that increasing numbers of those on the BTEA had been going on to undertake postgraduate study (prior to the changes introduced in 2003) as postgraduate qualifications were seen as having a bearing on ones position of entry to the labour force and with it ones earning potential. Figure 6.1 shows that the number of BTEA students progressing to Masters Courses increased from 2001/02 to 2002/03 before falling considerably in 2003/04. Thus the decision to stop this process can only be seen in a negative light. Furthermore it shows that Higher Diploma courses were much less popular than Masters courses prior to the change. This is extremely noteworthy given that this was one of only two postgraduate options retained after the changes made to the BTEA in 2003.

**Figure 6.1: Qualifications Pursued through BTEA (Third Level Option):**

![Figure 6.1: Qualifications Pursued through BTEA (Third Level Option):](source)


The OECD has said that Ireland has a shortfall in the amount of Masters and PhDs (See Department of Education and Science 2003, p.10). Thus Michael Ring argued that from a financial point of view this decision didn’t make sense. He states that the BTEA is

“an investment. The government has gone 90% of the way and they should go the other 10%. It’s common sense. I mean, money that is put into education is never wasted. Never wasted. The situation is that the government is far better off to put the money
I argue that the financial returns on the states’ investment are not as profound as they could be. The return on a person emerging with a degree will not be as high as it will be from a person emerging with a postgraduate qualification. Those emerging with postgraduate qualifications will enter the labour market at a higher level, typically earn more money and thus pay more income tax, meaning that the return on the initial investment made by the government is higher. Consequently I believe that it makes far more financial sense for the government to fund those in receipt of the BTEA who wish to undertake postgraduate studies for at least one year, thus increasing the return on its initial investment. However in spite of these arguments the Working Group on the Review of the BTEA (DSFA 2005, p.53) have examined the current postgraduate provisions of the scheme, and decided that it did not merit adjustment at this point.

I argue that the decision to effectively remove the postgraduate option has Neoliberal undertones. Postgraduate study remains open to BTEA students who meet the qualifying criteria but if they wish to undertake these programmes then it is their own ‘personal responsibility’ (largely dictated by their economic capital) to pay for them. The restrictions were imposed as part of the Neoliberal project to shrink the costs associated with the welfare state, as more and more BTEA students had been availing of this option, consequently pushing the costs of welfare provision upwards.

In summary, I argue we are seeing a functionalist approach being taken to the design of the BTEA scheme. A pool of postgraduates is needed for a functional society in order to ensure continuing economic competitiveness. The system of obtaining these qualifications is functional for the majority, so a policy of equality of opportunity is implemented in relation to the matter. The resultant implementation of a functionalist equality of opportunity policy in relation to life long learning is identical to the situation in the USA (see chapter five), where education is seen as being vital to the future of the state and the individual, but the message is that it is not to be made available to those who are most in need of that assistance (welfare recipients).

The strong appeal of the functionalist approach is its ability to appear compassionate, helpful and promising while simultaneously posing no real risk to the status quo (George and Wilding 1985, p.9). Ryan argues that a liberal, progressive person faced
with the dilemma of having to resolve inequalities, which they believe to be wrong in principal, with their own privileged position in society, resorts to the “blaming the victim” formula. (Ryan 1971, p.27 cited in George and Wilding 1985, p.9) This allows them to reject any solutions, which might bring about radical change on the pretext of it being too extreme, while in fact they reject change because it poses a challenge to their own privileged position in society. This inevitably leads to a compromise resolution that is acceptable to their conscience and which leaves the status quo unaltered. (George and Wilding 1985, p.9) The BTEA participants perceive that those from the middle classes in positions of power in relation to the design of the BTEA have made decisions, which are protecting the interests of those sections of society. It is therefore argued that protecting these middle class interests is achieved by keeping the numbers from the lower classes accessing 3rd level education through the BTEA limited and by limiting how far a BTEA student can go in their educational career. Frank thus argued that the BTEA will be

“tinkered with to make it look like its being made available to more people when in actual fact the numbers who participate in it may increase slightly but are more likely to stay the same”.

Further weight was added to this argument when it was muted that Ireland is

“allegedly based on a meritocratic education system. The fact that the way the BTEA is managed shabbily to say the least proves conclusively how flawed that alleged theory is. And also the fact that the BTEA pigeonholes people through it only being available at postgraduate level for the H-Dip just goes to prove the class distinction that is alive and well in Leinster House” (Seán).

My participants strongly and very vocally argued that these equality of opportunity policies are essentially paying the subject matter lip service, which ensures that those in positions of power can protect their privileges while at the same time be seen to be addressing these inequalities. Finally it was argued that as those who are administering the system come from a certain strata of society they are thus

“perfectly positioned to look after their own and therefore they will always be on top, whereas we are perfectly positioned to struggle. Perfectly positioned to always be looking and begging and please help me, and if you just help me I can do this or that, and filling out forms and standing in queues, and it is a struggle” (Diane).
These beliefs support a conflict view of the state, which acknowledges that some ‘elite’ groups in society, (in this case the civil service) always exercise more power than others, and the state, willingly or unwillingly, has to take note of the interests of these elite groups in society. (George and Wilding 1985, p.7; Murphy 1999, pp.271-293) The civil service have two avenues by which to exercise this power. Firstly they have power in setting ‘the limits of policy-making’ as regards both policies which are introduced and policies which are not included in government plans (Hall et al. 1975, pp.150-152 cited in George and Wilding 1985, p.7; see also the field discussed earlier and in section 6.54). Furthermore by adapting Birnbaum’s conclusion that “property owners and managers have the capacity if not to impress their will on the state at least to severely limit programs undesirable to their interests” (Birnbaum 1969, p.5 cited in George and Wilding 1985, p.8) we can see how those within the civil service can limit the effectiveness of the BTEA through their often haphazard administration of the scheme. We will see clear evidence of this practice in relation to the difficulties experienced by BTEA applicants in obtaining information on the scheme, etc. in chapter seven, thus the argument that these elites are restricting the effectiveness of the BTEA is evidenced in my data.

6.5 The future directions of the BTEA:
This section begins by elaborating the improvements the key informants and BTEA participants would like to see made to the BTEA scheme. It then examines the direction proposed by the Working Group on the Review of the BTEA. I then analyse the ‘field’ on which the Working Group operated, in order to develop a theoretical understanding of how decisions on the future direction of the BTEA were reached.

6.5.1 Key informants’ suggestions to improve the BTEA:
Four of my key informants felt that the BTEA should be made more accessible to potential applicants. The senior civil servant felt that the DSFA are trying to make the system more seamless because “some people might feel because they have to apply for a new payment there might be a fear factor involved”. Thus taking away this fear factor would make the scheme more accessible to these individuals. Minister O’ Dea believed that “there is probably potential for more to avail of it and obviously the way… would be to make the rules a bit more lax to make the thing a bit more accessible”. Accordingly he stated that he would “argue very strongly that it should be
extended, and it should be extended particularly given the importance of life long learning now”.

Former Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Proinsias De Rossa spoke of “inadequate mechanisms to guide and prepare those who did not have a sufficiently developed educational background”. Additionally, he recalled from his time in office that the local employment services had the responsibility of offering applicants direct assistance in relation to obtaining a place in 3rd level. This responsibility (as we will see in section 7.5) is not being lived up to. Direct assistance to potential applicants in applying for college places is thus advocated as a way of increasing the uptake of the scheme. With this in mind it was interesting to note that the senior civil servant from the DSFA stated

“I think in terms of sourcing the course I think that is probably ultimately where the scheme and those within the scheme want it to go, in that it was no longer a self referral, it was actually a guided referral to an appropriate course for you. If that led to somebody endeavouring to find a position for you I think that would be just part of the logical customer service you would be getting”.

Another area where my key informants wished to see changes to the scheme was in relation to targeting (proactive recruitment of) individuals to participate in the scheme. All bar the senior civil servant made reference to their desire to see this happen in the future. Joan Burton believed that

“You really have to tell people about it, I think you have to encourage people so that they know that it is there and particularly if people have had a bad experience of education the first time round or if they have been in a school where there has been no climate of hope or of opportunity for the kids in the school”.

Moreover Minister O’ Dea believed that

“resources should now be devoted to sort of helping people... encouraging people who are thinking vaguely about this, make them think more positively about it by saying to them look if you come into us we will explain the whole thing to you and we will try to help you find a place etc, etc”.

However Proinsias De Rossa argued that the very long term unemployed are “unlikely to be assisted by a 3rd level scheme. One needs to look at various factors of long term unemployment in order to focus more specific remedies on a person-by-person basis”. While I strongly disagree with his assessment, the idea of specific remedies on an
individual basis is something that I believe would add to the scheme if used as a way of supporting individuals applying for it. Michael Ring also referred to the idea of different circumstances being taken into account when stating “you are not going to have everybody on the same… and if there are people that need a bit more money for different reasons that should be there”. Thus it was interesting to hear the senior civil servant speak of tailored universalism as a potential option for the direction of the scheme.

Civil Servant: Essentially that’s meeting need, supporting people on an individual basis. If you can develop a system like that you are into customer profiling. What are the needs of a customer? That moves you away from any kind of eligibility criteria like age or duration? It works in certain countries but it’s not a model that has been adopted in Ireland.

Martin: Do you think it is something that could be used successfully here?

Civil Servant: I think it could but I think there would be a huge degree of change involved and I suppose a part of that change would be cultural change….the concepts of meeting needs is very good and take away all the eligibility criteria…. It’s like trying to square the circle. It needs this joined up approach and we are going down the route towards that.

6.52 What improvements to the BTEA did those who participate in it suggest?
Analysis of my data showed several areas where BTEA participants identified improvements that could be made to the BTEA scheme. Likewise, participants in Healy’s (1997) study made a number of suggestions as to how that BTEA scheme could be improved. In that study 80% of his participants believed that it could be improved and a broad assortment of suggestions were made.

Almost all of my participants identified the need for accurate information on the scheme, while 23% of Healy’s’ participants (1997, p.57) expressed similar sentiments and wished to see the scheme more widely publicised. However as we will see in chapter seven this has not really occurred. Two of my BTEA participants wished to see an allowance introduced which would allow BTEA students to obtain broadband or internet access at home. The provision of extra allowances for additional expenses was cited by 20% of Healy’s sample in 1997, yet it remains an issue for BTEA participants today. The DSFA would point to an increase in the ‘cost of education allowance’ as addressing this in some form. Seven percent of Healy’s sample (1997,
p.57) wished to see changes to the operation of the grant system, as did four of my participants. While the grant system has been changed with the introduction of the top up grant for disadvantaged students, I argue that the qualifying income levels have been set too low to make a considerable difference to the take up of this grant.

Thirteen BTEA participants in my sample held that the targeting of qualifying welfare recipients would improve the scheme (see section 7.5 for more details). Several of my participants also felt that providing potential applicants with assistance to access a college course would be valuable.

“If there was something... even a FÁS centre or something that they would say that this is what you are going to need to get into college or this is what you could be preparing yourself with or whatever” (Claire).

“There should be more encouragement because it can be really daunting having to fill out all of those forms and stuff” (Diane).

Additionally all of my BTEA participants expressed a strong desire for the reversal of the changes that were introduced in relation to both the summer payment and the restrictions imposed on the postgraduate option of the BTEA.

“It should be furthered. They should broaden it and give over this nonsense of putting impediments in your way when you are half way through it or a third of the way through it and if you want to go on and do a doctorate then they should by all means because you are going to contribute to society when you come out of here and in a major fashion”. (Peter)

Finally, 15% of Healy’s (1997, p.57) participants had suggested that eligibility criteria should be changed to allow greater access to the BTEA. It was suggested that the required six months signing period should be reduced and the age restriction be lowered. However we know that the opposite has since happened with the qualifying period being extended to fifteen months in 2005 and it currently stands at twelve months or nine months if the applicant has been approved by FÁS.

“It is important that any assessment of the scheme’s effectiveness also takes into account the opinions of the participants themselves” (DSFA 2005, p.51). In light of this statement from the Working Group, it is extremely disappointing to see that almost none of the suggested improvements cited in Healy’s 1997 report have been
acted upon. Accordingly there is little evidence to suggest the improvements suggested by my participants or key informants will be acted upon either. Therefore while that statement from the Working Group is encouraging I argue that it needs to be acted upon.

6.53 The future direction of the BTEA as proposed by the DSFA:
The Working Group reviewing the BTEA recommended that the objective of the scheme be revised “to facilitate participation in education by social welfare customers of working age who are most distant from the labour market in order to enhance their employability and assist them in accessing sustainable employment” (DSFA 2005, p.9). Additionally they concluded that it is essential to separate out the roles of the DSFA, which should provide the income support, and the Department of Education, which should supply the courses and educational supports (DSFA 2005, p.64). Furthermore, it was recommended that eligibility for the scheme should be extended to other welfare schemes, reviews of all applications should be carried out centrally in the Employment Support Services (ESS) Section of the DSFA, and all policy in relation to income support for BTEA participants should be formulated centrally in the ESS section in consultation with the Department of Education (DSFA 2005, p.67).

The working group argue that there will be significant advantages to going down the proposed route and from an applicants perspective the process would be more streamlined. They held that several points of contact can lead to confusion for the individual in relation to their application and the decision making process. To this end they proposed that a “localisation programme will enable quicker decisions, access to a service delivered locally and access to information on the range of services available through the local office network” (DSFA 2005, p.42). It is proposed that the local VEC will be the first point of contact for eligible individuals, which will contribute to the speedy processing of applications for courses at local level (DSFA 2005, p.70). However questions arise as to whether this will work given the issues raised in chapter seven about the lack of clarity and uniformity in the information that is provided by those in the local DSFA offices, which in fact are, and always will be the first point of contact for eligible individuals. Additionally it is not clear how this proposed change will impact those who wish to attend 3rd level colleges outside of their local area.
It is also argued by the working group that the proposed route for the BTEA would eradicate the administrative work involved in closing the primary payment and registering and awarding the BTEA and will allow a full review of the summer payment arrangements, which was deemed necessary due to the high numbers of BTEA participants signing back on for the summer since 2003 (DSFA 2005, pp.69-70). However if the working group feels that a full review of the summer arrangements must take place, then surely it should not be dependent on a restructuring of the administrative side of the scheme.

Finally, we saw in chapter five that those on a reduced rate of a Social Welfare payment are entitled to the maximum personal rate of payment while participating in the BTEA scheme. It is estimated that 1,400 of the 7,648 in receipt of BTEA (combination of 2nd and 3rd level options) in 2003/2004 had their payment increased to the maximum rate at a cost of €1,759,200 per annum with approximately 97% of these payments being means based. It could be argued that this is inequitable as it is increasing payment for those who had greater means without providing any equivalent increase for those who did not (DSFA 2005, pp.53-54). Therefore the working group suggest that “consideration should be given to not increasing the primary payment to the maximum rate but that instead the appropriate level of supports required to meet educational costs should be provided through education provision” (DSFA 2005, pp.53-54).

I argue that this again is a functionalist approach to the problem. The situation where those with means were getting their payments increased to the maximum rate was inequitable, however the proposal of the working group may also be inequitable as they are in favour of appropriate level of supports required to meet educational costs being provided through education provision. This still gives those with means an extra benefit, just in a different form, while not making it clear whether those without means will be entitled to similar supports. It also fails to recognise the additional living costs (there are more than just educational costs) associated with attending college. Ultimately, such a decision seeks to move financial responsibility from the DSFA to the Department of Education and the individual BTEA participants, without any mention of where the increased budget that the Department of Education will need (to provide these educational supports) is to come from.
A theoretical understanding of the proposed future direction for the BTEA:

I again applied Mutch’s theoretical framework to develop an understanding of the review of the BTEA undertaken by the DSFA between 2003 and 2005. The Working Group reported to a joint Department of Finance / DSFA Steering Group (DSFA 2005, p.11). When examining the ‘players’ on this particular ‘field’ we find that it was composed of thirteen personnel from the DSFA, two each from the Departments of Finance and Education, one from the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment and two from FÁS (DSFA 2005, P.12). The field was constrained by boundaries, which were its terms of reference. As a result of these boundaries the field was only concerned with the efficiency and effectiveness of the BTEA. Under the terms of reference, efficiency was deemed to be about delivering service at optimum cost, while effectiveness was concerned with the extent to which the objectives of the scheme have been achieved (DSFA 2005, p.8). Accordingly, in assessing the effectiveness of the scheme, the Working Group considered uptake, the impact of the scheme in getting people back to work, the eligibility criteria, the BTEA payment, and awareness of the scheme (DSFA 2005, pp.44-45).

I argue that it is important to examine the sources of information that those on the field had access to when making decisions about the future direction of the BTEA. The TLA Recording System registers applications for BTEA and details of decisions made on such applications, yet these recorded details refer only to applications from persons previously on an unemployment payment. The PPS No., name, address, date of birth claim status, type of qualification pursued, title of course, and college name are also recorded. These details are maintained for statistical purposes and to assist in answering parliamentary questions, letters from customers (though apparently not mine, as I was told this information was not available) and public representatives, Freedom of Information requests and most importantly to enlighten decision making for the annual Budget (DSFA 2005, pp.34-35). However serious questions are raised about the ability to make informed decisions on the BTEA scheme when the statistical information recorded refers only to applications from persons previously on an unemployment payment. In such circumstance we cannot say that an informed decision can be reached concerning those on a lone parent’s payment or a disability payment because the TLA recording does not record data on recipients with disabilities or who are lone parents.
In terms of who else was allowed access to the field, I note that as part of the review, a consultation process took place where various organisations offered their opinions on the future direction of the scheme. Of the eight groups mentioned in the report (including the National University of Ireland, Galway, University College Cork, and The Teachers’ Union of Ireland) none were in favour of the changes made in 2003 / 2004. Additionally most stated their desire to have these alterations reversed (DFSA 2005, pp.73-76). While there was no direct input into the field for them, given the stature of some of these interest groups, they may have held important (but limited) capital that was taken account of in the decision making process.

Furthermore a survey was conducted on behalf of the DSFA to gauge the opinions of participants on the scheme (I mention the obstacles I faced in accessing information about this survey in chapter three). All of the interviews with BTEA participants were conducted between November 24th and December 5th 2003, along with supplementary interviews with lone parents (there was no mention of BTEA students who had a disability), which were completed between March 5th and March 12th 2004. The results show that the vast majority of those surveyed held positive attitudes towards the scheme. However I noted that only 44% of the informants interviewed had been in receipt of the payment in the previous 2 years. (DSFA 2005, pp.77-78) Consequently the majority of those interviewed were offering their opinions on a scheme that was no longer in operation, as a result of the changes that were made in 2003 / 2004. Additionally I have concerns around the true value of the data collected, given the types of questions posed. An individual can only answer those questions they are asked and the survey neglected to solicit information on the difficulties experienced by individuals on the scheme, and how these difficulties could be addressed. I acknowledge that the survey was bounded by the terms of reference, but questions like these also must be asked (as Healy’s 1997 study did) in order to gain a balanced view of participation in the scheme.

I argue that shortfalls in this survey had serious implications, as “the LMR survey formed part of the overall review process and the data and information gathered added to the information available” (DSFA spokesperson, 2007) when the review group was making a decision on the future direction of the scheme. Thus important questions are
raised about the ability of the Review Group to make informed decisions on the future of the BTEA scheme with such shortfalls in the data held by the DSFA.

In examining the context within which this particular field sits, we find that it was similar to that in place when the changes were implemented in 2003 / 2004. A dominant global Neoliberal voice still advocated the retraction of welfare provision, and welfare recipients were still seen as undeserving by society at large. One important difference was that the fiscal crisis brought about by the estimates in 2003 was no longer in existence and the country’s finances were very healthy. In terms of the capital that the players brought to the field and the position it allowed them on it, we can clearly see from the amount of civil servants present from the DSFA relative to those from the Department of Education, that this was their ‘ball park’ and they were firmly in control. We can also see the reduced role of the Department of Finance, reflecting the improved financial position this field had to work with. However the fact that individuals from the Department of Finance were on this field at all, shows they still held a strategic position in policy decision-making. The other groups with direct entry onto the field also held important subservient positions.

To conclude, I argue that this field produced policy recommendations, which ensured that most of the ‘players’ achieved positive outcomes relative to their place on the field. In essence, there were 3 changes (introduced in 2003 / 2004) that they could have reversed and they chose the one that would cost the exchequer the least. The decision to expand eligibility, but not expand the availability of places is essentially a functionalist approach to ‘solving’ the problem, a point succinctly made by one of my BTEA participants who stated “You can only extend the scheme if you get more people on to it. If it is taken up, if it’s not taken up you are not extending anything” (Seán). The removal of the summer payment and the restriction of the postgraduate option (made in a more restricted economic climate in 2003 /2004) were the key policy decisions taken on the original field that I analysed. These changes saved money by reducing the costs associated with those who were already accessing the BTEA scheme. The decision to increase the qualifying duration (made in 2003 / 2004 and rescinded as a result of this review) only limited the amounts of people who were eligible to try to gain access to the scheme. This option would have been the easiest to reverse as there are only so many places that are available in 3rd level each year so
increasing eligibility only increases the competition for those places (equality of opportunity), and thus in theory the numbers on the scheme should remain relatively constant. This means that the costs involved in removing that restriction were negligible. However, there would be considerably more costs involved in removing either of the other restrictions as they apply to individuals who have already successfully accessed the scheme, ensuring that there is a high probability that payment costs will increase. This would run counter to the outcomes that were desired by the important ‘players’ on the ‘field’.

Thus the ‘players’ from the Department of Finance achieved a successful outcome in that there were no tangible extra costs incurred as a result of the recommendations, while those from the DSFA would have been content as the scheme continued largely unchanged and they would still administer the financial payments (DSFA 2005, p.72). Finally by extending the eligibility to other groups of welfare recipient and recommending that the current BTEA summer payment arrangements for persons previously unemployed should be monitored, the working group offered the hope that the changes made in 2003 / 2004 might be reversed at some time in the future, thus keeping those who took part in the consultation process relatively content.

**Conclusions:**
Between 1998 and 2002 the BTEA underwent a series of changes that widened the groups who were eligible to apply for the scheme. However a series of changes to the BTEA scheme beginning in 2003 had profound implications for enabling access to 3rd level education and consequently combating social exclusion. I argue that the changes introduced by Minister Coughlan overturned many of the achievements made in increasing access to 3rd level education for welfare recipients over the previous decade.

From 2004 the qualifying period for the Third Level Option of the BTEA was extended to fifteen months. I have argued that this policy decision has detrimentally impacted on potential applicants rather than optimising the chances of those who were most distant from the labour market. This decision was underpinned by a discourse, which had constructed the BTEA as ‘welfare as fraud’. I argued that a twelve-month qualifying duration is sufficient to discourage those who may have been graduating to unemployment. Accordingly it gives those who are most distant from the labour
market and who genuinely need the BTEA a greater chance of accessing it. I argue that the decision to implement this change to the BTEA was taken as a result of Neoliberal ideologies that seek to restrict welfare spending particularly in times of fiscal crisis (or potential crisis).

I assert that the change, which saw the BTEA no longer being paid during the summer months to those formerly in receipt of an unemployment payment was not properly thought out, as it is assumed that students can obtain employment for the summer (and that ‘summer work’ will be sufficient to sustain them). This assumption is made despite the fact that the majority of BTEA students will have been long term unemployed prior to commencing their course of study and little if anything will have changed until the individual graduates. This type of thinking again reflects the ideology that any type of employment will do, as employment is sufficiency and welfare is dependence. It was thus discouraging to find that the report of the Working Group on the Review of the BTEA does not recommend any change to this measure but instead insists the position should continue to be monitored (DSFA 2005, p. 54).

I contend that the restrictions imposed on the postgraduate option of the BTEA are counter productive. I believe that those who design and administer the scheme need to take account of the courses that BTEA students are undertaking. The evidence suggests that BTEA students are over represented in Arts / Humanities courses, which increasingly require postgraduate study in order to specialise in a particular area so that the individual concerned can obtain the most benefit when entering the labour market. Consequently I argue that while education and particularly 3rd level education is the best route to tackle a structural understanding of social exclusion, the BTEA as it stands (and indeed the proposed direction for the scheme) can only have limited success in enabling access to and participation in that education. While the scheme proves very beneficial to those who have managed to access it, the design and more importantly the implementation of the scheme limits the amount of people who can avail of it.

I have illustrated how welfare recipients in Ireland have been constructed as the undeserving poor. As in the USA and UK, the construction of welfare recipients as undeserving has offered a justification for minimal welfare provision and a preference for welfare to work programmes. This has allowed the state to effectively roll back on
welfare provision relative to the states’ current fiscal position. The highly ideological tone of political utterances on welfare costs have served to disseminate legitimizing discourses, while neglecting to articulate the underlying causes of the need for welfare provision in the first place. It is argued that this ideology works as a “false consciousness, as a rationalisation not so much of class interests, but of group feelings... and behind middle-class protests there may well have been a vigilance in maintaining and guarding … the security which once had been the sole privilege of the propertied classes” (De Swaan 1989, p.268). I argue that the short-term approach to the progression of the BTEA can thus be seen as being part of the Neoliberal agenda of rolling back on the welfare state and as the protection of middle class spheres of interest. BTEA participants made particular reference to their belief that a social welfare system should be about helping people. However they did not feel that this is what was happening. The dominant opinion held by these participants was that the changes made to the scheme have implications for those thinking of accessing the scheme as well as those already on the scheme, thus impacting social mobility. Denis explained that

“perception is everything. If you perceive that something is going to be a struggle and you come up against barriers... you will probably get your degree but on the road to getting that degree there is so many things put in your way that you probably got the degree in spite of them”.

The participants argued that they are doing what the state wants, which is to get off welfare. However they feel in spite of this, the social welfare system constantly places obstacles in their way. Diane explained that the state is “very short sighted worrying about people grabbing and sponging when really it is exactly the opposite. We are going to get off the social welfare books, so really it’s a short term pain for long term gain”. I argue that the state needs to look at the BTEA scheme as a long-term investment rather than focusing on short-term costs. My findings inform an evaluation of the state response to the BTEA as minimalist, wherein the evident lack of will to maximize the BTEA’s potential is reinforced by dominant Neoliberal ideologies. To conclude, it must be noted that policy decisions taken on the micro level field have implications at a macro level. These macro level policies are in turn implemented on the micro-level, in the day-to-day interactions of BTEA participants and DSFA officers. It is to this that I turn my attention in the next chapter.
CHAPTER SEVEN
A MICRO – ANALYSIS OF THE PROVISION AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE BTEA

Introduction:
This penultimate chapter aims to connect the micro to the macro, as the ability of a scheme such as the BTEA to address social exclusion is impacted at both levels. Additionally the chapter shows how class is lived and experienced by those who either wish to, or are availing of the BTEA scheme. In chapter five we briefly saw how the numbers eligible for the BTEA and consequently the numbers availing of the scheme have increased since its inception. Additionally a comparison of the socio-economic status of BTEA participants before and after college showed upward social mobility from the lower non-manual and manual categories to the lower professional category (Healy 1997, p.64). All of this suggests a positive impact on the social exclusion of recipients. However the more important question to be answered in relation to addressing the social exclusion of welfare recipients as a group is ‘who gets access to the BTEA scheme and why?’

Throughout this chapter I draw heavily on Healy’s (1997) study, which was conducted with the assistance of the DSFA. In chapter three I detailed the problems I encountered in accessing statistics on the BTEA from the DSFA, consequently the Healy report is a crucial source of secondary statistical data on the experience of BTEA participants’ and their opinions on the benefits and shortfalls of the scheme. I utilize this data in order to contextualise my sample and as a point of comparison with other studies to permit the tracking of trends over time.

The chapter will begin by examining the motivations that the participants in this research expressed for returning to 3rd level education and the challenges that they face in achieving their aspirations. I then move to develop a micro level understanding of my participants’ experiences of the administration of the BTEA and how it affects both access to and participation in 3rd level education. In particular we will see that the ability to access information can be a major obstacle to entering the scheme. I argue that cultural and social capital is instrumental to acquiring both information and
entitlements. This chapter uses Bourdieu’s concepts of capital to understand class relations in this context. I argue that welfare recipients who possess such cultural and/or social capital can successfully negotiate administrative obstacles.

The chapter then progresses to examine the population availing of the BTEA, how these people access 3rd level courses and the types of course that they choose. I find that BTEA students are significantly over represented in humanities/arts programmes which has major implications for the significance of the restrictions on access to the BTEA for the purpose of postgraduate education as elaborated in chapter six. I then examine how participants discover, obtain and maintain the various entitlements they have while participating in the BTEA scheme. I argue that even the positive approaches that have been taken on the macro level to facilitate access (see chapter six) are restricted in scope and substantially modified in practice on the micro level as a consequence of “power ritual” interactions (Kemper and Collins 1990) between welfare recipients and DSFA officers. Accordingly I argue that levels of both social and cultural capital influence one’s ability to achieve a successful outcome in these interactions, and ultimately have a major effect on the overall outcomes for potential and actual participants on the BTEA scheme.

7.1 Motivations of the BTEA students for returning to education and the challenges faced in achieving these motivational goals:

The BTEA participants in this study exhibited three distinct motivations for deciding to attend 3rd level education. These have been classified as economic motivations, status-related motivations, and a motivation to achieve intergenerational benefits, which their children will reap. This section of the chapter documents each class of motivation (addressed in order of their importance as defined by the BTEA participants) before examining the challenges that participants have to overcome to achieve these aspirations. It is argued that when my sample made the decision to return to education, they did so to convert one form of capital into another. Almost all of the participants sought to turn their own cultural and social capital into higher levels of cultural capital through the acquisition of valuable educational credentials, which were then to be converted into economic capital in the labour market, and in turn utilized to combat their social exclusion.
7.11 Economic Motivations:

Thirteen\(^\text{39}\) of my participants made reference to the perceived necessity of 3rd level education in today's society. Claire believed that when you are looking for employment then you must “show that you have some form of education... I think there are very few employers these days who go on Oh I am willing to do a good job”.

She further added that she thought that the labour market in Ireland was especially credentialist, even for what she termed menial jobs.

“I suppose I can say this because I am English, but here as opposed to the UK people need to have a CV even if they are going for a job in McDonalds and I just think that is something they do here, as opposed to England if you are just going to sweep the roads its where did you work before but here it is geared towards education from day one, pushing for people to have CV’s and things”

With this in mind Luke argued that if you “don’t have the experience, or limited experience, or you don’t have the relevant qualification, employers are not going to go near you. You need that piece of paper”. This reflects an awareness of the commodification of education and the rise of credentialism outlined in chapter four.

Six of these participants\(^\text{40}\) believed that given their particular circumstances they needed to obtain a 3rd level education if they were going to be able to source the non-manual employment that they required. Frank, Seán, and Diane saw no way that they could undertake manual work in the future given their physical condition. Both Frank and Seán had received back injuries and as a result they perceived that if they wished to move off welfare the only job they would be able to acquire / sustain was a non-manual one and this usually requires 3rd level qualifications. Seán explained

“I had a leaving cert so the chances are that the best job I was going to get was a manual or some sort of semi skilled job and with the back problem nobody wanted to know so you had to try and get some sort of qualification where that was not going to be an issue and I had experience of that, of applying for the same type of job twice, once before the accident and once afterwards and seeing the impact... So there really was no other option. If I was going to have any sort of a job in the future I was going to have to get a qualification that would allow me to get a job where the back injury was not going to be an issue”.

\(^{39}\) Three students with a disability, three lone parents & seven BTEA students who were previously unemployed

\(^{40}\) Four students with a disability and two lone parents
Diane was in a similar position in that she had been employed in a very physically demanding job. Over time she felt that it was becoming too much and she felt the need to obtain an educational qualification to improve her employability, allowing her to move into a less physically demanding position. For Gus the fact that he had a young child to care for was of overriding importance. He believed that if he was to source a sustainable non manual job that would offer him family friendly working hours then he required a 3rd level qualification. He explained

“Now people say to me why don’t you work in a factory? I said I can’t do shift work because I have a child or I can’t do overtime because I have a child. Now if I can get into a county council and go in as a grade 3 or a grade 4 you are earning a reasonable income and you have flexi time”

Most if not all employment via welfare to work programmes will result in manual / low grade / low paid occupations. Consequently for these individuals, simple activation via welfare to work, which is the preferred option of the state (see chapter five), would serve no purpose, as they are unable to sustain this type of employment.

Both Claire and Gus identified that there will always be a need for skilled manual labour. Consequently they believed that getting a trade also gives people options and allows them to make ‘real’ money in the same manner as obtaining a 3rd level qualification would. Yet in light of the slowdown in the construction sector of our economy at present and the rapid loss of jobs in this sector, I argue that 3rd level education is the best route to more sustainable, secure work in an economy whose competitive edge increasingly lies in high value added activities. This argument is supported by the fact that the unemployment rate among those with higher education is one third of the rate of those with lower levels of educational attainment (Department of Education and Science 2003, p.7). Additionally when unemployment is experienced, it lasts for a shorter period among those with higher education. Research on a representative sample of the Irish population, using data gathered in a period of unprecedented economic growth found that unqualified people were six times more likely to be continuously unemployed or in low paying jobs than those who had a 3rd level qualification. (Layte et al. 2003, cited in McCoy and Smyth 2003, p.87)
As the divide between marginal labour and the newly enlarged middle class grows, the value of educational qualifications as a potential means of enabling upward mobility from the former group to the latter is reinforced. My participants argued that through successful participation on the BTEA, welfare recipients turned 3rd level graduates will increase their chances of sourcing sustainable employment which will take them “outside the minimum wage, the survival income” (Gus) and thus off welfare on a more permanent basis. Maxine argued that she would need to educate herself to beyond 3rd level if she was going to earn more money and provide a decent standard of living for herself and her children. Likewise Gus argued that if “people take the chance and go back to education they will defiantly move out of poverty and social exclusion”. He explained this belief further when stating

“If I had a 3rd level qualification twelve years ago when my fiancée died and I was left to rear our son... I would not have had to go down the route that I have done. I would have had the security of a good 3rd level educational qualification which would have led me into a good job...It would have made a massive difference but I didn’t have that qualification so I went through the years earning €280 a week”.

The gap between the income and security of those with a 3rd level qualification and those without is reflected in the motivations expressed by the BTEA participants in this study who understand 3rd level education as a means of moving permanently off welfare and away from the uncertainties of the peripheral labour market (for a discussion on this process see Warmington 2003).

For eleven41 of my participants, the desire to escape the periphery of the workforce translated into a perceived need not only for second chance education but specifically for life long learning, the prevailing belief being that people need to continuously update their educational qualifications in order to maintain employability for the duration of their working lives. This dominant view is captured by Seán who stated that “The way the labour market is structured now, it’s so flexible. Every single job you can move in and out of these days”. The vast majority of my participants recognised a link between educational attainment, achieving upward social mobility, and preventing downward mobility, and saw the acquisition of higher educational credentials as the best strategy in ultimately addressing their social exclusion via participation at a sufficient and sustainable level in the labour market.

41 Three lone parents, one student with a disability and seven unemployed participants.
This finding reflects those of Healy’s 1997 study (see Figure 7.1) which found that almost one third of those in receipt of the Third Level Allowance (the fore runner of the BTEA) said they went to college primarily to obtain a qualification and that for most this was seen as a pre-requisite to securing employment. One participant argued that “A degree is now required if you want anything worthwhile. In order to get full-time work in Community/Youth work, a qualification such as the one I gained is essential” (Healy 1997, p.22). This mirrors the argument expressed in chapter four that the rapidly changing nature of work in modern economies has greatly enhanced the importance of educational qualifications over recent decades.

**Figure 7.1: Main Reasons for Starting College Initially:**

![Bar chart showing main reasons for starting college initially.](source: Healy 1997, p.20.)

(Percentages add to over 100 % as more than one reason given)

7.12 Status Related Motivations:

For seven participants the decision to return to education was (to varying degrees) also motivated by a desire to increase their status in society. In contrast to the primacy
of economic motivations among the majority of the participants, four \textsuperscript{42} participants stated that they were primarily attending 3\textsuperscript{rd} level for status related reasons. Claire explained the reasons behind her decision to avail of the opportunity to attend 3\textsuperscript{rd} level, stating

“It was education for educations sake because I won’t physically work again fulltime. It was for my own mind and my own curiosity. It’s just something that I had always wanted to do”.

Additionally for Peter, Fiona and Diane the reason for attending 3\textsuperscript{rd} level was as much to do with getting an education, as is it was to do with gaining an educational qualification to improve their employability. Peter explained that his “motivation is as much for … the actual learning process as opposed to oh that will lead to a qualification”. However he was mindful of the fact that the educational qualification that he will receive on the completion of his course of study will decide what he eventually does. I argue that for these four individuals the levels of status, empowerment, and social capital gained from participating in 3\textsuperscript{rd} level education were perceived as being more important to addressing their particular form of social exclusion than gaining a marketable type of cultural capital in the form of an educational qualification. I argue that Fiona seeks cultural capital in its institutional form for the symbolic value that it holds. Claire and Peter also seek cultural capital but in its embodied rather than institutionalised form, i.e. they are interested in learning rather than the qualification that learning will give them. The following passage from my interview with Fiona illustrates the potential value of increased status and empowerment.

\begin{quote}
Fiona: Having to go down and sign on ... I just don’t want to go back to that under any circumstances. I don’t want to go back to feeling that I have been demeaned.

Martin: So do you think the degree is almost an insurance against ever being demeaned in that way again?

Fiona: Definitely yes, because at least then you can focus on your qualifications... its very obvious and if you are writing down no qualifications held or you have basic secretarial skills or whatever they don’t hold you in the same regard.

Martin: Even the way that you are treated? Do you think if you had to go back and sign on again that once you have written down your degree that the ways people treat you across the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{42} One lone parent, two unemployed participant and one BTEA participant with a disability.
counter will be a lot more civil and respectful because you have those things written down?

Fiona: I don’t think they will, no I don’t but I think my reaction to them will be different because I think it will give me that confidence to say hold on a minute!

Martin: Will that in turn change their reaction towards you?

Fiona: It could possibly yes.

For these four participants the desire to increase their status position and develop a resulting sense of empowerment appears to stem particularly from the negative experiences at primary and second level. While attending school these individuals had effectively been told that they would never amount to anything in society. For these particular BTEA students the physical piece of paper (degree) that they would receive would validate them in the eyes of those in mainstream society, and in particular in the eyes of those who had questioned their ability. The following quotations from Denis and Fiona go some way towards illustrating this perception.

“I had an idea one time that I would line up all the teachers; some of them are dead now. I’d line then all up and say, ‘Do you remember in 1971 when you told me, or 1968 when you told me I would probably spend the rest of my days in and out of jail. That was this grand plan I had… I thought if I do get the degree here I’ll photocopy it and go up to where they are and say do you remember when you told me… the fact that you get a paper with your name on it validates you” (Denis)

“I know how he thinks. I feel that, hopefully I will be able to get the 2:1 degree and hopefully I will be able to go up to the principal of the school and say my graduation now is in a few days time and I have graduated with a 2:1 degree and just to see her face”. (Fiona)

Adam states that even being a recipient of the BTEA

“gives you a certain degree of esteem. That you are getting this payment that in the public eye doesn’t … the public perception of the BTEA is there is this person that is getting a BTEA and they are doing something, whereas they may have a different view of disability allowance or dole or whatever. They might say look at that fucking waster. Public perception of a BTEA is higher.”

For a third of my sample therefore signifiers of status were seen as being important to inclusion in today’s society. This point is paralleled in Warmington’s study (2003, p.96) where Nabila, an Access student states that education
“gives you some kind of stake in society ... if you are on Income Support, you are a nobody... if you have a degree, even though you’ve got no job, you are a somebody: you’ve got an identity all of a sudden”.

7.13 Intergenerational Benefits:

Finally my participants made reference to being motivated by the prospect of being able to advantage their children in achieving upward mobility through improved educational attainment.

“It’s good for your kids coming up, it’s good for everybody”.  
(Diane)

It must be noted that while this was a motivation for five of the participants, it was subservient to their economic motivations in all of those cases. Indeed, economic capital was seen as key to advantaging ones children in acquiring educational credentials.

“The family that can’t afford to invest in education, largely you will find that their children are in low paid employment possibly with no trade or anything like that and it is a complete recycle of the parents exclusion. We saw it back in the 1970s and ’80s where there were families where nobody had worked for 15 years, fathers, sons, daughters, no one had worked”.  
(Gus)

The view was also expressed that by being in 3rd level education, BTEA participants develop different expectations and values in relation to education, which in turn are passed on to their children, subsequently reducing the chances of those children being exposed to intergenerational exclusion. In essence this highlights the participants understanding of the intergenerational benefits of their embodied cultural capital, i.e. their ability to pass on their cultural capital to their children. Gus elaborated on the importance of his embodied cultural capital to his son’s educational attainment

“If I don’t progress then my son doesn’t progress... if I remained on social welfare the chances are that unless I really kept after him then he could go down the same route and that happens and we know it happens and in a lot of cases its no fault of the parents. But I see with my own son that he is getting more interested in History because his dad is studying it, so it is sort of encouraging him along. He always says the fact that he was going to go to college through his own ability but if single parents are given the opportunity to go back into education it means their children are likely to follow the same route”.

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Thus it is apparent that by participating in 3rd level education these BTEA participants perceived that they could advantage their children within the education system through their increased economic and cultural capital and so aid their upward mobility.

7.14 Challenges to these motivations:
Several of my participants spoke of challenges they had to overcome to successfully achieve their aspirations. These challenges are directly related to their levels of economic and cultural capital. The issues presented the greatest challenge to the successful completion of their course of study were in managing money and a lack of social support.

7.14.1 Managing Money:
Members of my sample mentioned that having money problems adversely affects their studies. Mark for example commented that “A big factor for me is that I have no children, it’s just myself and my wife, so all we really have is the household bills, the mortgage, and that’s it. If we had children then I doubt I could do it financially.” Participants who were parents, including some lone parents, were even more likely to experience the financial support of the BTEA as insufficient. The following comments from Diane and Maxine capture some of the hardships that lone parents must cope with.

Maxine: My childcare every week is €240 ... and it was said to me can you not cut back on your childcare but you can’t because of your timetable. ... My brother lives with me... my rent is €850 a month ... my brother pays €180 a month so that helps. Other than that I couldn’t be here.

Diane: I would not be able to do it without support. My parents are great. At least 2 days a week they took the kids and fed them and my ex husband in fairness is pretty much involved with them and he takes them for one or two days and its great that way in that at least you knew that they were fed and that someone was taking care of them when I was in here but without that...

Diane: At the end of the day you cannot educate yourself and live, and I mean we are not talking about holidays and dinners out, far from it. It’s basic, very basic living. There is nothing fancy.
Maxine: Oh nothing. You go to the bargain bin in Tesco’s to get your meat that’s half price because it’s going off Friday or its out of date the following day.

Diane: I don’t know what we would do without ALDI or LIDL. I am living in those places and I don’t buy any where else but you have to live like that and if you are willing to do that surely to god they should help you the rest of the way... You don’t survive otherwise; you only just survive on social welfare. You are not living. You are surviving from day to day which is a horrible and very stressful way to live. Nobody wants to live like that indefinitely and the only way out of that is to educate yourself”.

These views reflect research cited by the DSFA (2005, p.51) which found that from a financial point of view BTEA students who were single and had no dependents had a much more positive experience of college than lone parents who faced financial hardship. Many of Healy’s (1997, p.29) participants expressed similar sentiments.

As participants expressed a concern about managing money it is worthwhile examining what other income if any; participants on the scheme are in receipt of. One of my participants (Dave) was assessed on his parent’s income because he “was living with my folks in the year before I went back to college”. As a result he did not receive a 3rd level local authority grant. It is interesting that adults are no longer assessed in this manner for social welfare purposes, yet the system continues to work against them in relation to accessing 3rd level grants. Furthermore only one of my participants received a local authority top up grant. Adam revealed the apparent inflexibility surrounding eligibility to this particular grant, which hardly seems to benefit those who are most in need of financial assistance in attending college.

“Mysel and my two daughters were going to college but none of us could get the top up grant the reason being that our combined family income is too much ... in effect we were done out of €3000 each of a top up grant because of a line, a demarcation line, you think it should actually be on a sliding scale. The eligibility for a grant is on a sliding scale because of the number of people in your household attending college but yet your eligibility for a top up grant is not and it should be. You can have the situation where a family with 1 person attending college can be €1 below the limit and get the top up grant and another family with three or four in college and their income €1 over and none of them will get the top up grant.”

There was also evidence that BTEA participants in my sample were not always aware of the existence of additional funding sources, or more particularly how a change in
your personal circumstances can change your eligibility for entitlements (and that this process can work both ways, giving as well as removing entitlement). This is highlighted in the following passage where Dave talks about not getting a grant because he had been assessed under his parents’ income.

_Martin:_ You can apply for your grant this September?
_Dave:_ No. You only apply once and then its no for the duration of your course.

_Peter:_ No you can apply in September.
_Martin:_ I think you can apply in September as an independent mature student as long as you can prove that you have been living away from home constantly for the last 12 months.

_Adam:_ Aye under the term change in circumstances, the very last paragraph on the form. The one that doesn’t explain itself very well. Your circumstances have changed, you are not living with your parents, they are not supporting you, and you are trying to support yourself. Therefore you are entitled to a county council grant.

As a result of this conversation Dave reapplied for his grant that September as an independent mature student citing a change in circumstances and was successful in his application. The quote from Adam identifying a paragraph as the one that “doesn’t explain it very well” is profound. I argue that ‘change in circumstance’ is conceptualised in a way that makes people think it only applies to changes, which disallow eligibility. I argue that such a conceptualisation is particularly acute amongst former welfare recipients where ‘change in circumstances / eligibility’ is most definitely associated with an applicant experiencing more favourable circumstances and therefore losing entitlement to their current level of payment. By way of supporting this assertion, Minister Mary Hanafin recently introduced changes to the way people signing on now collect their welfare payment. This was in response to 182 people from a sample of 2048 claiming benefits or levels of benefits to which they were not entitled to (DSFA 2008b). There is no corresponding investigation or information on the numbers of people who are not receiving their full welfare entitlements. Thirteen of my sample (72%), were in receipt of additional sources of income (local authority grants) yet almost 28% of my sample was in receipt of no additional
funding. In keeping with these experiences we see from Figure 7.2 that 74% of BTEA participants in Healy’s (1997) sample were in receipt of grants from local authorities or VECs’. However, 16% received no additional funding at all and some stated they were never even aware of the existence of these funding sources.

**Figure 7.2 Sources of Additional Funding for TLA Students:**

![Bar chart showing sources of additional funding for TLA students](image)

*Source: Healy 1997, p.32.*

In more recent times the Lansdowne Market Research (LMR) study of 2003/2004 found that of those who were receiving other sources of financial assistance in addition to the BTEA, 61% were in receipt of a 3rd level grant from local authorities or VECs’ (DSFA 2005, p.80). As in 1997, the LMR study (even though the figures relate to a combination of both 2nd and 3rd level BTEA participants) shows that there were a significant number of BTEA participants who received no additional sources of funding (DSFA 2005, p.79). Accordingly these figures evidence continuity between from Healy’s (1997) study through to the DSFA report (2005) and to my sample.

The apparently high levels of BTEA participants not receiving additional financial payments is possibly the result of individuals failing the means test for a local
authority grant or other sources of financial aid. Yet the calculation of means can be problematic. Some participants in Healy’s (1997, p.34) study felt that it was grossly unfair that adults residing with their parent(s) were means-tested on the parents’ income when applying for a local authority / VEC grant. In one instance the process of being means testing was seen as humiliating: “I felt that it was an intrusion to have to get a statement of my mother’s financial affairs and was not being assessed on my own circumstances independently” (Healy 1997, p.34). When comparing this person’s situation with Dave’s situation (just referred to), we can clearly see that the same problems exist almost a decade after Healy identified them.

In addition there are issues surrounding securing eligibility for a local authority grant while pursuing postgraduate courses. Individual officers in the grant authorities have stated to three of my participants that an individual is entitled to grant aid for one postgraduate course only, which was going to have implications for these individuals in terms of the postgraduate course that they chose. Seán for example had a dilemma over whether to do a Masters (which he really wanted to do) and receive his grant or undertake a H-Dip and receive a grant and the BTEA but give up on the idea of doing a Masters. His original plan was to do the H-Dip first and continue to receive both his grant and BTEA. When he graduated with this qualification he would subsequently begin a Masters (keeping his grant) and undertake substitute teaching with his H-Dip qualification, thus making up the financial shortfall from the loss of the BTEA. However that seemed to no longer be an option when he was told he would only receive grant funding for one postgraduate course. In fact I had been presented with a similar scenario when I had asked about receiving a grant when registering for my PhD. As a result of my own personal experience in this area I informed all of my participants about clause 7.7 in the notes for the Higher Education Grant Scheme (see Appendix VI). While this clause states “grants shall not be paid to candidates who already hold a postgraduate qualification and are pursuing a second postgraduate qualification” it goes on to clarify the situation and states that candidates may be

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43 I was informed that I would not receive a grant as I had already been funded for my Masters course. I accepted this but was subsequently made aware of clause 7.7 in the notes for the Higher Education Grant Scheme by another student. I returned to my grant authority with this information and was subsequently informed that I would be funded. My social capital was thus vital in securing this source of funding.
deemed eligible for grant aid where they are “progressing to a further postgraduate course which represents progression” or those who “on completion of a one year postgraduate course which has not led to the conferral of a qualification, gain admittance to the second year of a postgraduate course” (Department of Education and Science 2008, p.11). Additionally it states that grant aid for postgraduate students is limited to a maximum of four years. Having been informed of this clause the three participants successfully applied for and received grant aid, and Seán went down the route he had originally planned. This lack of transparency (the information is there but is not made clear to individuals, and in fact in some instances individuals are given incorrect information) reflects the opinions expressed concerning the discovery of entitlements in section 7.61.

One final area where financial difficulties arose was in establishing entitlement to rent allowance (also evident in Healy 1997, p.33). It must be noted that while a lot has been written in recent government publications about making rent allowance available to people on low incomes to enable them to reside in the private rented accommodation sector, evidence suggests that the reality on the ground is that an increasing number of landlords will not take the rent allowance cheques. This is evidenced in the ‘To Let’ sections of many local newspapers with NRA (No Rent Allowance) or the more subtle ‘may suit professionals’ appearing in many of the adverts (see Appendix VII). The refusal of landlords to accept rent allowance is made public through these adverts yet no one has challenged it. This has resulted in an increasing amount of people being excluded from this sector or being faced with no other option than to pay their entire rent themselves, which may prove to be detrimental to the continuation of ones studies, as financial constraints become even more important. Furthermore delays in the payment of rent allowance put added financial pressure on individuals who are in receipt of the payment. Maxine highlighted the impact of such delays when she stated “If I remember I didn’t get my rent allowance either until November so only for my mum I would have been out on the street”.

Analysis of my data showed that all bar one of my participants felt that they would not have been able to attend college without the financial assistance of the BTEA. Claire believed that while the financial assistance wasn’t generous she could not
survive as a student without it. Adam reiterated this point when he stated “without the BTEA I would be knocking at the door of the community welfare officer every second day”. Additionally Peter argued that the abolition of 3rd level tuition fees had made no difference to his circumstances and it was purely the BTEA scheme that gave him the opportunity to go to college. Finally Maxine highlighted the value of this payment to lone parents.

“If I had not gotten the BTEA I would not have been able to educate myself, I would not have been able to do this. I am not in receipt of maintenance for my kids so I wouldn’t have been able to do it”.

These positive views mirror those of Healy’s (1997, p.35) sample, where in spite of the difficulties alluded to previously, 65% of TLA participants felt the overall level of funding received was adequate.

7.142 Lack of Social Support:

Some of the working class participants in this study encountered a lack of social support for their participation in education both from their class group and from the 3rd level institutions, which they attended. More specifically, they experienced challenges to the appropriateness of their involvement in higher education, which can be best understood as resulting from status judgements (Ridgeway 2001, p.324).

Some of the participants who had lower levels of cultural capital themselves, expressed doubts over whether they belonged in 3rd level institutions. Five participants reported feeling that they were ‘out of their place’. Denis still expressed these feelings even though he had spent four years in college and was just about to graduate with a good degree. He expressed this fear in the following extract

“When someone is going to go through it and say ‘How did he get in here? How did he get in here?’...They’ll say right ‘how is this fella fit to do, would you look at what he wrote. So even up to recently I was thinking someone is going to find out about you. What that’s about, I don’t know. The notion is that you are here alright but you shouldn’t be here... My relationship with academia is still one where... it’s a reluctant bride groom and bride relationship. I’m here but I’m not sure, I’m unsure if I..... I’m entitled to be here”.

For a small number of the participants, this fear of not belonging was often reinforced by judgements on the part of peers and family, some of whom placed little value on
3rd level education. The following two extracts from Denis again highlight the lack of support, which he sometimes encountered in his journey through university.

“A friend of mine who has been driving a taxi for 25 years and has his own house says look at me I am driving a taxi, I own this house and you are not even sure if you can get a job with a degree, you don’t have a house, but I don’t put any value on that”.

“My sisters, they would say the same. When are you going to finish that thing? Thing was another one. The thing that you are doing out there. So it’s either the thing or out there. I say it’s not Mars you know its only 3 miles away. My Mother has never physically been out here, my sisters have never physically been out here. My father was out here 2 years ago to meet Terry Wogan because of the football connection and that was the only time in his life that he has been out here and he is 78. So its opposite worlds. ... This is a different world, this is an academic world. It’s a gated world. You know this notion of gatekeepers? It’s a kind of gated world with gatekeepers to protect it so if you speak to somebody who has no conception of what this place is like if they do mention it its when are you going to finish and get out of there?”

In total, a third of my sample held that people, particularly the working class undervalue second chance education because they see it as an easy option, a means by which welfare recipients avoid work, involving little effort in comparison to paid employment.

“Anything is better than work; a fella said that to me one time. You mean I said doing a degree in UL is an alternative to driving a taxi all night dealing with drunks? Why don’t you go out there for one day and see how much of an alternative it is. I guarantee you will be back in that fucking taxi in five minutes flat. As if someone would come out here and do a 3 or 4 year degree and have a holiday” (Denis).

Such challenges were not only presented by the working class however. Participants also expressed a sense of being subject to status judgement (Ridgeway 2001, p.324) inside the institutions, which they attended. More than half my sample expressed some doubts over their academic ability, with many of the participants feeling that in particular, their mastery of academic language and accent was letting them down in college. In this context accent was identified as an indicator of class and status and it was held that people judge you on how you speak, even in ‘enlightened’ 3rd level institutions. Limerick is regarded as a city in which class divisions are still particularly strongly felt and most of the participants attending UL made some
reference to the stereotypical ‘skanger’ that is associated with a strong urban Limerick accent. John argued that in Limerick, accent is a huge factor in how people judge others. This accent or linguistic capital is a form of embodied cultural capital, which is devalued because it is seen as a cultural manifestation of working class identity. However those participants who had such working class accents, while mindful of what it signified, were also proud of their background and had no desire to change how they speak.

“I got the accent thing 7 or 8 times. Someone said it me one time that I had a very strong Limerick accent and I said that is strange that I should have a strong Limerick accent when you consider that I am from Limerick. Would you like it if I had a D4 accent like you? Considering that you are from Cork? She said what’s a D4 accent? I said you all know what a D4 accent is. I could put that on if I wanted to but why would I want to do that?” (Denis)

Such challenges can also add to BTEA participants’ doubts about how their identity will be impacted by their participation in higher education. Denis went through this process and the quote below illustrates this identity struggle.

“You can go around and say well I am from this part of Limerick and no one ever gave me a break, you can start playing a violin and all of that and keep the monkey on your shoulder or you can say ok here is an option that I can take to try and change all of that but don’t change for the worse, don’t forget where you came from. I have a cousin in Kilkenny who is a solicitor and this fella has metamorphosised into a shit head. His accent is worse than the D4, its ridiculous and I knew this fella when things weren’t so good and I said I would never in a million years be like him with this accent and his attitude. That is something I was conscious of when I came here. Will I end up like him, going around with this false accent?”

This “false accent” that Denis referred to is in fact valued cultural capital in its embodied state. Thus Denis was faced with the dilemma of whether to disidentify himself from his working class background or to continue to be identified as working class through his accent. He chose the latter. In conclusion, it is important to note that the BTEA does not provide assistance in relation to the alleviation of any of the difficulties just discussed. Yet in spite of these challenges all of the participants who expressed views on this subject believe that they cope with such judgements and do

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44 A feckless member of the underclass; an Irish equivalent to the English derogatory term Chav.

45 D4 is the postcode of one of the wealthiest areas in Dublin.
not allow them to distract them from their end goal, which is achieving an educational qualification.

### 7.2 Participants understanding of their class location and my analysis of their class situation:

An interesting theme that emerged from the interviews in relation to class identity was that individuals whose socio-economic class was at the higher end of the scale (See Table 7.1) all believed that socio-economic classes are fluid, i.e. people who may appear to be well off financially (socio-economic group) can in fact actually be located in a lower group when everything is taken into account. As such the argument was put forward that socio-economic groups could be misleading. Consequently the argument was advanced by these participants that social welfare recipient should be a socio-economic group in itself. I argue that for many this is the lived reality of life as a welfare recipient. However while the class location of some among my sample is considerably more fluid than might first appear to be the case, there are problems also in constructing a ‘social welfare class’. For example within this ‘social welfare class’, levels of cultural capital and the duration of receiving welfare ultimately gives some members considerable advantages over others within the same ‘class’, particularly when it comes to interacting with DSFA officers and consequently accessing information and or entitlements.

Two participants (John and Gus) who had experienced downward mobility believed that it is often a more difficult experience than being born into a lower socio-economic group, as the individual feels doubly disadvantaged knowing what they have lost. John illustrates this when speaking of the first time that he had to attend a social welfare office to claim benefit.

> “I kind of stayed in the car outside in the car park for a long time first, because you do feel that you have taken as step downwards considerably. At one time in my 30s I had a relation and you know the expression YUPPIE was big in the 1980s and people were saying you are a YUPPIE and I was saying I am actually downwardly mobile, my father was a professional person, and upwardly mobile people were working class people who suddenly became professionals. So when I stepped into the social welfare office I realised that was the fulfillment of the thing I was saying before; that was seriously downwardly mobile” (John).

Despite this understanding of downward mobility John did not see himself as superior
to those with whom he now occupied the same social space.

“there is no way I could walk into that office and feel that I was superior to other people, I was in the line with them, some kind of dodgy looking fellas with hoods and some upstanding men with moustaches, there was all kinds of different people and it really is very interesting, someone should go in there and do a study on that, when you look at them, there are some people who are doing this all of their lives and it doesn’t matter to them and there are other people who look devastated, they look like as if they have been beaten up and they are kind of trundling along, and you can see that in them. So all of a sudden you realise that I am in a group of people and these are my people now” (John).

However he still possessed greater levels of cultural capital particularly in its embodied state, giving him an advantage over other welfare recipients, when dealing with welfare officers, a process I will document in more detail in section 7.73. For now it is sufficient to say that John perceived that in spite of his belief that welfare recipients were in fact a class of their own, when they go to obtain welfare entitlements or information “I still think personally that they are treated according to their original reference group and where they come from.” Yet I argue that even the advantage obtained through the possession of this valuable cultural capital related to ones original class situation, wanes once a certain period of time collecting welfare has passed. This point was made succinctly by Fiona who stated “I think definitely if you are in receipt of welfare over a long period of time, regardless of your background, they look at you as a nuisance and a drain on society”.

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Table 7.1: Participants Socio-Economic group:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Socio-Economic Group</th>
<th>Basis for Judgement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denis</td>
<td>Skilled manual worker</td>
<td>Painter &amp; decorator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seán</td>
<td>Salaried Employee</td>
<td>Worked for semi state body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>Skilled manual worker</td>
<td>Store man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>Employers and Managers</td>
<td>Owned her own business before a serious car accident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gus</td>
<td>Unskilled manual worker</td>
<td>Said he worked in a pub mopping out toilets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxine</td>
<td>Lower Professional</td>
<td>Parent is a teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>Skilled manual worker</td>
<td>Did massage therapy &amp; worked part time for a state body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Unskilled manual worker</td>
<td>Long term unemployed. Left school at twelve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>Unskilled manual worker</td>
<td>Went travelling, returned &amp; signed on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Salaried Employee</td>
<td>Long term unemployed. Was a civil servant prior to becoming unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Salaried Employee</td>
<td>Was an engineer before becoming unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Employers and Managers</td>
<td>Owned his own business before getting ill &amp; ending up on welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>Intermediate non manual worker</td>
<td>Self reported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathew</td>
<td>Unskilled manual worker</td>
<td>Worked as a labourer on building sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Skilled manual worker</td>
<td>Self reported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>Salaried Employee</td>
<td>Worked as a clerical officer in a service industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmel</td>
<td>Employers and Managers</td>
<td>Was a carer. Previously owned a business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brendan</td>
<td>Salaried Employees</td>
<td>Was assistant manager in a shop</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.3 Finding out about the BTEA scheme:

In this section I examine how my participants gained information about access to the BTEA scheme. The overriding theme evident was that participants did not experience the BTEA as a transparent system. Information was not particularly forthcoming from the DSFA and while there have been improvements in the way that information is disseminated; participants still have valid concerns in this area. It will be argued that consequently cultural capital is needed in order to access the requisite information. Where that was found to be lacking, participants made use of their social capital as a means of utilising the cultural capital in their social networks to achieve the same result.
7.31 Accessing Information:

As far back as the early 1990s Healy found that obtaining information about the TLA scheme was very difficult and a general lack of knowledge about the scheme existed in local Social Welfare Offices (Healy 1997, p.27). One participant in that study stated:

“Staff who are responsible for TLA customers should be briefed on all aspects of their management and not have to excuse themselves and go ask several of their colleagues before returning with a brief synopsis of the answer. I’ve had to request to see supervisors on several occasions and eventually resorted to dealing with the Central Office in Townsend Street. I knew more about the Scheme and my entitlements than the staff did!” (Healy 1997, p.38)

Additionally Healy (1997, p.27) reports that only 40% of those availing of the scheme reported receiving any written information. One participant (Healy 1997, p.25) spoke of how they had written to the Taoiseach seeking information about the BTEA.

“Shortly afterwards a reply came from both him and Dr. M. Woods [Minister for Social Welfare at the time] regarding the potential implementation of a Third Level Allowance Scheme”.

It seems quite ludicrous that the Taoiseach and Minister for Social Welfare should speak of the ‘potential implementation’ of a scheme that had been in existence for some time. This quotation shows that the Department of Social Welfare was not effectively distributing information on the scheme. More recently the DSFA would argue that information on the scheme is now available through the Department’s information services, local social welfare offices, Citizen Information Centres, the Department’s website, Booklet SW70 and in the Guide to Social Welfare Services (SW4), which are available from all of the above outlets (DSFA 2005, pp.55-56). Furthermore the DSFA highlights that it has a network of facilitators throughout the country, whose role is to inform and encourage unemployed people and lone parents to avail of the wide range of incentives and options available, and which has achieved significant results in cooperation with other agencies (DSFA 2005, p.23). Additionally it is most welcome that the Higher Education Authority now promotes a website\(^46\) which is user-friendly and contains clear and comprehensive information on financial support for further and higher education, including the BTEA.

\(^46\) [http://www.studentfinance.ie/](http://www.studentfinance.ie/)
However in spite of these initiatives it is worrying to note that the data I collected suggests that misinformation or an information shortage, as identified in Healy’s (1997) report is still being experienced. Seven of my participants made reference to the lack of knowledge that people have concerning social welfare schemes. Claire for example believed that most people in Ireland at present know that they can keep their welfare payment if they return to education. However she qualified that statement slightly when she said “it’s well known but I don’t think it is ever said to you anywhere”. However Diane disagreed and believed that “if the scheme was open to 70,000 people then … half of them don’t even know about it”. With this in mind it is promising to see that the working group on the review of the BTEA (DSFA 2005, pp.55-56) believe that “efforts should be made to create a greater awareness of the scheme particularly among those who are in receipt of a long term welfare payment”.

In this context it was quite disturbing to hear thirteen participants, speaking in 2007, two years after the publication of the working groups’ report (DSFA 2005), make reference to difficulties in obtaining information on the BTEA. Claire, Brendan, and Fiona were particularly adamant that the information they received about the BTEA scheme did not come from the DSFA. However John felt that “the office in Dominic Street (DSFA office in Limerick) is plastered with stuff”. Fiona held a polar opposite view in that as far as she knew “there was one poster that mentioned the BTEA in the social welfare office in Ennis after that no one ever mentioned it”. Peter believed this lack of transparency to be a deliberate policy being undertaken by DSFA offices because “these things are supposed to be displayed in public in the labour exchanges. They are… in the toilet. They are on the wall in the toilet. That’s how they get around it”. Consequently although the local DSFA office is the first point of contact for information, most of my participants found them to be unhelpful in this regard. This view was stated more forcefully by Frank who felt that he was “going up against a brick wall and that it was very cumbersome, very difficult, to get information”. Furthermore Diane argued that not only do you have to actively seek out the information, but you “would have to ask the relevant questions of the relevant people

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47 Two students with a disability, three lone parents and two BTEA students who were unemployed prior to returning to education.

48 Two BTEA students with a disability, two lone parents & 8 BTEA participants who had been unemployed previous to participating on the scheme.
and if you don’t know who they are you run into difficulties”. The following quotes from two participants vocalise the blockages experienced in relation to obtaining the required information from DSFA offices.

“The local dole office was the most unhelpful of the lot. I come from about 20 miles from here. They are obliged by regulation and law to have all of this documentation in relation to all schemes and unemployment benefit etc, the whole schemes; they are obliged to have them all there on display. They have nothing. They had the cheek to refer me to the local volunteer community information office.” (Adam)

“My experience of Dominic Street is that you go to an information desk and after half an hour I got to deal with this member of staff who after listening to me for 5 minutes told me that another member of staff was more familiar with it. Then when she came out, I’m not sure about that but I’ll take your name and I will send you out a form, as you say accurate information, it was about 2 weeks, maybe 3 visits and a follow up letter but I couldn’t find one person who could say right this is what you do, this is the process. It was always oh so and so knows more about that now than I do and you might have to ring Sligo”. (Denis)

It seems that little if anything has changed since Healy (1997, p.27) highlighted that obtaining information about the scheme in the early 1990s was very difficult. Denis’s experience is almost identical to that which Healy’s informant (1997, p.38) related at the beginning of this section. To this end, Claire argued that the BTEA is

“Something that should be advertised a bit more. There are probably a lot of people sitting out there who would say gosh I didn’t know I could keep this, if I did I could actually go and do my degree as well.”

Furthermore, the vast majority of my participants explained that even when they did get information; often that information was not entirely accurate. Luke summarises this predominant belief stating “there are very few people who understand the system completely and there is very little information that gives that information to you in its entirety”. My participants were disapproving of the decision to disseminate information in the form of pamphlets and particularly posters, as they felt that these media could not possibly provide comprehensive knowledge. To highlight this Fiona commented on the BTEA poster that was in her local DSFA office.

“It just mentioned the BTEA; it had BTEA on the top and then a few bullet points and then contact your local social welfare
office. As far as I can remember it also gave the address of the BTEA place above in Dublin”.

Table 7.2 represents the ease / difficulty that I myself had in obtaining information from two particular social welfare offices, which I attended on random dates. On only one occasion was the information on the BTEA readily available to me as a member of the public without having to ask someone specifically about the scheme. On that single occasion when the information was on display, the poster that mentioned the scheme was not an official ‘glossy’ DSFA poster. It was an A4 sized page, which had obviously been printed from a PC on the premises (see Figure 7.3). To me it suggested that this poster resulted from an individual DSFA officer exercising their own initiative rather than a directive or DSFA policy to display information on this particular scheme. On the other occasions there were no posters or booklets on display mentioning the existence of the BTEA. This gives further weight to the argument put forward by my participants that unless you go into a social welfare office knowing about these schemes and what your entitlements are in relation to them (through having sufficient levels of cultural capital) then you run into difficulties trying to access that information.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Social Welfare Office</th>
<th>What information is displayed</th>
<th>What info is available on BTEA</th>
<th>Ease of getting this information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17/6/06</td>
<td>Tralee</td>
<td>27 Booklets on display &amp; several posters including one about not attending college while signing on. None were about BTEA.</td>
<td>Booklet SW70 available from special hatch. Comprehensive information in this booklet.</td>
<td>No information displayed so I had to ask to see somebody about it. That person was very efficient, but may have been influenced by the fact that I had to tell her I was a PhD student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/10/06</td>
<td>Dominick Street, Limerick.</td>
<td>27 Booklets on display &amp; numerous posters including one about not attending college while signing on. None were about BTEA. One poster advertised Colaiste Stiofáin Naofa in Cork (<a href="http://www.csn.ie">www.csn.ie</a>) for further education courses. No mention of BTEA on this poster either.</td>
<td>Booklet SW70 available from special hatch. Good information in this booklet.</td>
<td>No information displayed so I had to ask to see somebody about it. Was sent to a hatch in the corner away from where the people were signing on. There was a note on glass saying you could get BTEA if going to college. Person I spoke to gave me booklet but seemed unsure about what scheme entailed. I had to tell her I was a PhD student. When giving me a booklet she said “I’d better check &amp; make sure that it is an up to date one I am giving you so”. This seemed like a strange comment to make &amp; left me wondering if she would have been as worried about giving me an up to date (&amp; therefore accurate) booklet if I had not informed her that I was a PhD student conducting research on the BTEA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08/4/07</td>
<td>Tralee</td>
<td>27 Booklets on display &amp; several posters including one about not attending college while signing on. None were about BTEA.</td>
<td>Booklet SW70 available from special hatch. Comprehensive information in this booklet.</td>
<td>No information displayed so I asked to see somebody about it. That person was very efficient, but may have been influenced by the fact that I had to tell her I was a PhD student at the beginning of the conversation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/4/07</td>
<td>Dominick Street, Limerick.</td>
<td>27 Booklets on display including one about BTEA. Also there was a poster about BTEA on one of the pillars. This was printed and not an official Department of Social Welfare poster. See picture below.</td>
<td>Booklet SW70 available. Comprehensive information in this booklet.</td>
<td>Booklet SW70 was on display in the centre of the booklets displayed, at eye level. The poster directed people to hatch 16 to seek more information.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 7.3 BTEA Poster in Social Welfare Office:

7.32 Cultural and Social Capital:

In chapter four we saw that Bourdieu’s concept of capital was developed to contribute to our understanding of the reproduction of privilege.

“The system of dispositions people acquire depends on the position(s) they occupy in society that is, on their particular endowment in capital. For Bourdieu (1986), a capital is any resource effective in a given social arena that enables one to appropriate the specific profits arising out of participation and contest in it. Capital comes in three principal species: economic (material and financial assets), cultural (scarce symbolic goods, skills, and titles), and social (resources accrued by virtue of membership in a group). . . . The position of any individual, group, or institution, in social space may thus be charted by two coordinates, the overall volume and the composition of the capital they detain. A third coordinate, variation over time of this volume and composition, records their trajectory through social space and provides invaluable clues as to their habitus by revealing the manner and path through which they reached the position they presently occupy” (Wacquant 1998, p.221).

There are two cross-cutting principles which describe the use and accumulation of economic capital and cultural capital in the ongoing social ‘conflict’ within advanced society. The vertical division sets actors holding large quantities of either capital (the dominant class) against those deprived of both (the dominated class). The horizontal, division takes place among the dominant class, between those who possess a large amount of economic capital but little cultural capital and those whose capital situation is a mirror image. Social actors endeavour to maintain or improve their position in social space by continually seeking to convert one form of capital into another (Wacquant 1998, p.224).

According to Bourdieu (1986) cultural capital can take three different forms, “the embodied state in the form of long-lasting dispositions of mind and body” (such as accent, tone, etc.), “the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods” (books, works of art, etc) and the “institutionalised form” (educational credentials) (Drudy and Lynch 1993, p.155). However it is important to note that demand will determine to what extent cultural capital can be converted into other kinds of capital, such as economic or social capital (Hammer 2003, p.211).

The volume of social capital possessed by any individual is dependant on both the size of their social networks and the volume of capital (economic, cultural and
symbolic) possessed both by the individual concerned and by those to whom they are connected (Bourdieu 1986, p.249). Cultural capital is also the dominant form of symbolic capital and is expressed through the educational system, where degrees and other qualifications from certain universities carry a great deal of weight (Bourdieu 1990, cited in Hammer 2003, p.212). In addition to highlighting that the person has certain qualifications, which can in turn be converted to economic capital through the labour market, these commodified qualifications are “universally recognised and guaranteed symbolic capital, valid on all markets” (Bourdieu 1990, p.136).

When we apply these concepts to the experiences of our participants we find that the battle for information can be described as a manifestation of “vertical division” in relation to the control of the accumulation of cultural and economic capital (Wacquant 1998). I argue that that the participants’ access to cultural (in the embodied and objectified states) and social capital was essential to their ability to access the information they required. Those welfare recipients who possess such cultural and social capital can successfully negotiate the obstacles that were placed in their way while those who do not will struggle to overcome them. All of the participants in this study succeeded in gaining access to the BTEA, by managing to negotiate such obstacles. Mary for example explained that over time she got to know the civil servant at her signing hatch and that it was he who targeted her for the BTEA.

“He said ‘did you ever think of heading back to University?... He gave me all of the forms and told me who to go and see and said you are entitled to it. You are out of work long enough and you can certainly head back’.”

In contrast to Mary’s (and one other participant) situation, the BTEA was not suggested to participants by anyone in the DSFA as an option that they could avail of. My participants perceived that few employees of government departments / agencies will ask qualifying welfare recipients if they have

“ever thought about going to college, have you ever thought of becoming a student... there is nobody who will actually say that to you, not from FÁS, not from the unemployment office, nobody seems to push you down that direction” (Seán).

Fiona argued that in fact the opposite happened and there was a huge amount of pressure put on her to prove that she was actively seeking work. DSFA officers pushed her to get back into the workforce at a time when she was trying to access the BTEA. Ultimately she believed that as long as she was off welfare the officials in the
DSFA office did not care what she did. This again would seem to support the argument that post-welfare reforms assume that the road to self-sufficiency begins with employment, irrespective of the earnings or social insurance benefits attached to that job. Welfare is increasingly regarded as extremely costly to provide, with welfare ‘bills’ being monitored very closely (Jarvis 1992). Consequently it can be argued that recruiting individuals to the BTEA is not seen by the ‘elites’ who design the scheme as a viable option, as the BTEA recipient is guaranteed his welfare / education payment for the duration of their course thus keeping the costs of this ‘expensive extravagance’ high. Additionally it can be argued that it has the potential to increase the amount of encroachment into the preserve of the middle classes, (i.e. 3rd level education) which would not prove popular.

Given the apparent difficulties faced in obtaining accurate information from the DSFA, it is interesting that six participants claim they obtained their information from friends or unofficial sources. These sources were perceived as providing better and more accurate information than that provided through official channels. Informal networks of information (social capital) were used to source information on everything from routes of entry to 3rd level, to the existence of the BTEA and other financial entitlements. Claire spoke of how another student told her that she could apply for entry to 3rd level through the CAO. Fiona made a similar claim when she stated that “Prior to getting here I had a friend who had completed the mature student access course and she had made me aware of that”. Thus for both of these BTEA students the information on their route of entry to 3rd level was obtained through these unofficial channels. Likewise four other participants obtained their information about the existence of the BTEA through their use of social capital.

“A friend of mine said to me… you can go back and get an education and it won’t cost you anything and he sent me all of the forms” (Peter).

However, even though the information received as a result of the participants’ social capital was in these cases beneficial, the potential exists for inaccurate information to result in a loss of entitlement for BTEA participants. As a consequence it is extremely worrying that individuals have to rely on these informal sources of information, when

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49 Three were BTEA students with a disability & three were BTEA participants who were previously unemployed
in reality this information should be obtainable through official channels via the apparatus of the state.

7.4 Accessing a 3rd level course:
There are effectively three avenues which welfare recipients have available to them in order to enter 3rd level education. These are the direct entry route (including through the Central Applications Office), entry via an access course, or through attending a part time evening course. This section will examine all of these options and argue that potential participants increase their chances of accessing a 3rd level course through any route including the BTEA, if they have higher levels of cultural capital (particularly in its institutionalised and embodied states) and / or social capital.

7.41 Who are the BTEA Participants?
In examining how the BTEA has enabled access to 3rd level education it is important to profile those who have availed of the scheme. All bar one of my participants had at least a Leaving Certificate, and three had previously obtained credentials at 3rd level colleges. The make up of my sample was indicative of a trend continuing from Healy’s study (1997), which showed that participants were typically under thirty five years of age (80%), single and had no children (75%). In addition, two out of every three were male. However recent figures show that more females than males now avail of the scheme (BTEA Presentation to DSFA by Lansdowne Market Research March 2004, cited in DSFA 2005, Appendix B). In addition, BTEA participants had a relatively high level of educational achievement (and consequently institutionalised cultural capital) prior to commencing college, with 70% having a leaving certificate, undergraduate diploma or degree (Healy 1997, p.15). In contrast only 14% had a moderately low level of educational attainment, ranging from primary to junior/intermediate certificate level. Consequently I argue that those with higher levels of cultural capital have a much greater chance of participating in the BTEA scheme as their higher levels of education (institutionalised cultural capital) advantage them in accessing 3rd level courses.

Only two of my participants were unemployed for more than two years prior to accessing the scheme. Four were unemployed for less than twelve months and the remainder were unemployed for between one and two years. Likewise, Healy (1997,
reported that the vast majority (81%) of BTEA recipients had worked prior to college yet of those who had worked, 60% had become unemployed in the two years preceding their entry to college. This infers that those people who were unemployed for more than two years (and consequently more socially excluded) were a lot less likely to avail of the scheme. Recent research shows that the number of long term unemployed accessing the scheme fell further still over the following years. Of new applicants in the 2003/04 academic year who were previously on unemployment payments (75% of the total) 63% were unemployed less than twelve months and 90% were less than two years unemployed prior to taking up the scheme (DSFA 2005, p.47). While it should be noted that these figures refer to a combination of both the 2nd and 3rd level options of the BTEA, they are still indicative of an ongoing pattern. Thus we see from the broad make up of my sample and research findings (see DSFA 2005) that those who were unemployed for more than two years are a lot less likely to avail of the scheme.

A social class imbalance is also indicated in the population, with lower socio-economic groups showing a lower level of participation in the scheme and a suggestion by the Working Group on the Review of the BTEA that this imbalance may even be understated (DSFA 2005, p.46). My sample consisted of four individuals from the unskilled manual category; four from the skilled manual category, six salaried employees, one lower professional and three employers and managers. Thus the make up of my sample is again indicative of an ongoing pattern. It is clear from the nature of this imbalance that those from higher socio-economic groups are much more likely to access the scheme.

7.42 Direct Access:

In assessing the effectiveness of the BTEA in facilitating access to 3rd level education for our population of interest, we begin by examining how participants on the scheme obtained a college place via direct entry. Accordingly we must also look at what, if any, assistance was provided by the BTEA to achieve that end. From Healy’s 1997 study we find that most participants in his sample obtained a college place through a combination of factors, which included educational qualifications, interview and / or entrance examination (See table 7.3).
Table 7.3: How Participants Qualified for a College Place:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview and/or Entrance Exam</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving Certificate Only</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On basis of work experience, other qualifications etc.</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As ‘Mature Students’</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Healy 1997, p.28.

On the other hand some of Healy’s participants were unsure as to how they qualified for their college place, as it was not always made clear to them afterwards. A participant who found the process somewhat complicated remarked

“There was nobody able to explain to me the correct process in applying for college. I lost my place in two colleges as I did not send all the documents needed. Different universities use different methods for mature students. Greater direct contact between universities and administrators of the TLA would help.” (Healy 1997, p.27)

It was apparent from my data that only two of the participants had received direct assistance in relation to applying for a qualifying 3rd level course. It is crucial to note that nobody received any direct assistance from the DSFA. In addition to this lack of support, participants expressed concern about the lack of standardised information that BTEA applicants can access in relation to obtaining a place in 3rd level education. Luke captured the desire for this type of standardised information when he said

“What I would like available to me is a page saying how can I get into university? You can do the leaving cert and apply through x, y, and z, the access course, the mature entry route. Basically one page saying these are your access routes to university. Simple, straightforward and anybody can understand it in the sense that it’s on one page. You don’t have to be flicking through 10 pages to figure out its either this way, this way or this way, and then you have different pages saying ok if you chose to go the mature entry route this is how you approach it and these are the contact elements and forms required.”

A careers guidance officer in VTOS assisted Denis. He believed that she was very helpful in explaining the process of applying for a place in university and telling him what the university was going to look for. Gus was assisted in a similar manner by his contact in the Adult Education Resource Centre. Seven participants argued that the DSFA should be directing interested parties to a body that will help them apply for 3rd level courses. Claire expressed a desire for a system that would inform potential

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50 One BTEA student with a disability, one lone parent & six participants who had previously been unemployed.
BTEA applicants of what they are going to need to get into college and how they could prepare for the process. Furthermore Diane, Maxine, Denis and Mark said that they would like to see DSFA offices have a specific person who would help you if you were thinking of going to 3rd level.

Three participants explained that this direct assistance would be beneficial to applicants in that it would take the fear factor / mystique away from applying to college. Claire captured this view best when she explained that the fear of the unknown in the process of applying is often what discourages people from applying in the first place. She commented that taking away this mystery would negate people’s fears and result in an increase in the amount of people applying for and accessing 3rd level.

“I think a lot of people think oh my god write an essay I could never do that and I think that really has to be looked at now because there are more and more mature students looking to come back to education and as you say if someone says to them look its going to mean that you have to write a letter, or do a psychological test or whatever but look you can get a book from so and so and this will help you, or yes it is going to be an essay but they are going to be looking for these particular answers, something about your employment, your character, and so on. If you had all of these supports I think it would be a lot easier for people and you would have a lot more people coming in”.

However four participants expressed a contrasting viewpoint about direct assistance. They had doubts about whether assisting people to get 3rd level places would make the scheme any more effective. Luke argued that the scheme should target those welfare recipients who want a degree in order to improve their employability. He believed that “if you are long term unemployed you will have those who will hum and haw and you will have those who want to get onto the system and get a job to support their families”. It was the latter group that he believed the BTEA should actively target. John was unsure about whether the direct targeting of any qualifying welfare recipients for the BTEA would work. He argued that more people would get into the 3rd level system but that many of these wouldn’t be able to cope. Mary likewise believed that assisting someone to write a supporting statement in their application

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51 Two lone parents and one BTEA student with a disability.

52 All four were BTEA participants who had previously been unemployed. Additionally all four were in the same focus group.
would indeed help people to obtain places at 3rd level. However she argued that this might mean the individual is seen as being articulate “but once the course starts they may not be able for the course and they have taken a place that somebody else could have benefited from”. Additionally Mathew believed that to access the BTEA the applicant has to show “desire to actually further yourself and part of it is filling out forms”. John also felt that “if you can’t go and get all of the pieces of information that you need well maybe you shouldn’t be there”. Accordingly, Claire wondered if this mindset is prevalent among the DSFA officers administering the BTEA.

“Do they all think well if you are going to go down the education route and if you haven’t got the brains to go …and find out for yourself then why should we help you…maybe that is buried in their bureaucracy somewhere. You know you have got the wherewithal to get yourself to university so why do we need offices everywhere to help you?”

In essence these assumptions were based around an understanding that those who were being assisted were giving the appearance of having the requisite cultural capital without actually possessing it, and so once the individual begins their college career their lack of valued cultural capital would become apparent and militate against their educational attainment. I would argue that in expressing these views, these participants evidence that they have in fact internalised the same discourse as was used in the welfare reform debate in the US, which was that welfare recipients have failed before and so can’t really be trusted to succeed in the future (see Adair 2007). These views reflect a ‘cultural’ understanding of social exclusion, and the fact that welfare recipients hold them, goes some way to highlighting just how ingrained into popular culture this dominant discourse has become.

When examining the cultural capital levels of my participants, I found that all bar three (Denis, Peter, and Gus) had relatively high levels of both cultural and social capital, which they utilized in order to access 3rd level courses and the BTEA scheme. However, these three participants regarded their entry to 3rd level as the product of fate or luck. They spoke of being pushed on into 3rd level education by another individual in an almost accidental manner. The following excerpts are used to illustrate this belief / understanding.

“One woman in there, that gives guidance careers, I made an appointment with her. This leaving cert I said there is not a great lot that I can do with it. She said ‘Did you know that you can go to UL.’ No I said I didn’t. To go to university I said you
have to be at a higher level than what I’m doing. This is really kids stuff. Ok she said ok this is not kid’s stuff what do you think of...To go to university I said you have to be highly intelligent. Is that what you think? Of course it is by your very nature. It’s only the best they take in them places. Why would I bother applying there? She said, ‘There is information on the courses in UL read it at least and then come back to me next week and tell me what you think, but at least read it.’ So I read it anyway and I said look I said there is one there that I like, but there is no point in me applying I said, history politics and social science, I like that. OK so she said there is the form. Fill out the form and bring it back to me and if you still don’t want to do it, that’s fine. So I got the form anyway and I said now eh. You can apply through the administration office in UL and if you get an interview, go to the interview at least”. (Denis)

“I applied for a visual art course with VETOS. I was sent up to the adult education resource centre here in Limerick. While we were discussing the VETOS application the girl said to me any chance that you would apply to UL. It was kind of fate like, it was just a chance meeting. That’s the way my life works”. (Gus)

“Peter: I was talking to this woman I met, just chatting about books and she said when were you in university and I said I didn’t even go to school. She said there is an access programme. I said what are you talking about? I’ll send you out the forms. I said sound.

Martin: Did she work here?

Peter: No she is a doctor. She sent them out and I applied”.

The phenomenon I just commented on could be defined as simply “happenstance”, but to describe them as such would be to fail to seek an explanation for their occurrence (Uberoi 2000). These three participants had slightly lower levels of cultural capital in comparison to the rest of the sample, (though it would still have been higher than other welfare recipients) but crucially, they had relatively strong social capital. These individuals had informal / social relationships with individuals who were capable of providing them with information / assistance. It was this social capital that ultimately resulted in these individuals returning to education.

For all of the participants, we must be mindful of the fact that the usefulness of the social capital that they possessed was dependant on the amount of cultural capital that both they and their social networks held. If, where needed, the cultural capital of the participants social contacts could not make up the shortfall in the cultural capital required to access 3rd level, then having high levels of social capital would serve no
purpose for the participants. However in the case of the majority of my participants
the cultural capital held by their social network contacts made up for any shortfall in
their own levels of cultural capital, and aided them in their quest to access 3rd level
education.

It must be acknowledged that while my participants were largely satisfied with the
process of obtaining a place at college, they were the successful ones and there is a
distinct possibility that those who have not been as successful may not feel the same
way. One individual that I assisted in gaining a place at university told me of how he
had applied to various colleges in the preceding two-year period without even being
called for an interview. He was in a similar position to the informant in Healy’s study
(1997, p.27) in that he was unsure what was required to successfully obtain a college
place. I spoke to an acquaintance in the admissions office at UL and asked what they
specifically look for in mature student applications. I then gave this information to
‘Roy’ who with the help of a person in a local area partnership group was able to
tailor his application to take note of the suggestions that I had given him. He was
subsequently successful in obtaining a place at a university and has completed the
third year of his undergraduate degree course.
**Table 7.4: Utilisation of Cultural Capital:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Used their own cultural capital to access course &amp; or the BTEA</th>
<th>Used their social capital to draw on others cultural capital to access their course &amp; or the BTEA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes (mature student &amp; disability officer in University)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denis</td>
<td>Not initially but developed it &amp; used it</td>
<td>Yes (mature student officer in University)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>Quite an amount</td>
<td>Yes (informal networks of friends etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gus</td>
<td>To a certain extent</td>
<td>Yes (mature student officer in University &amp; informal networks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Yes (very much so)</td>
<td>To a very limited extent. His own cultural capital was sufficient for this purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Yes (Had previously been to college)</td>
<td>Yes (used TD to sort difficulties)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Yes (Had previously been to college &amp; had successful career)</td>
<td>Yes (welfare officer that she developed an informal friendship with)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>To a certain extent</td>
<td>Yes (mature student officer in University &amp; informal networks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seán</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>To a very limited extent. His own cultural capital was sufficient for this purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes (used TD to sort difficulties)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes (used a Minister’s secretary to sort difficulties)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxine</td>
<td>Yes (Had previously been to college)</td>
<td>Yes (used her cousin, a TD’s secretary to sort difficulties)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes (mature student officer in University through access course)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>Yes (Had been to college previously, went through Access course &amp; prolonged his unemployment)</td>
<td>Yes (mature student officer in University through access course)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No. He was very well read on everything to do with the scheme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathew</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes (Received encouragement from a person he knew in a small local DSFA office to do it)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmel</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes (mature student officer in University &amp; informal networks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brendan</td>
<td>Yes (went through Access course &amp; prolonged his unemployment)</td>
<td>Yes (mature student officer in University &amp; informal networks)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is crucial to reiterate that the BTEA does not offer applicants any assistance in relation to obtaining a place in 3rd level. The applicants are essentially left to their own devices. This is an area where the potential of the BTEA to increase access can be maximised, yet it is given almost no consideration by those designing the scheme. It is true that there are some educational supports available to this end through VTOS, but the DSFA is the first point of contact and potential applicants are not being directed to those supports at that stage. I argue that the lack of access to such supports again highlights the dominance of a reluctant collectivist position, whereby government provision of a basic social minimum is regarded as moderately
unproblematic but provision beyond that is considered both unnecessary and undesirable. (George and Wilding 1985, p.125) Thus the provision of direct assistance to aid potential BTEA participants obtain a place at 3rd level has to date not been implemented. As a result I argue that the absence of such supports forces applicants to rely on their own social and cultural capital in order to access 3rd level education. This process effectively further advantages those who are already advantaged in this regard.

7.43 Access Programmes:
Ten of my participants gained entry to 3rd level education via an access course (either full or part time). Those who came into college via access courses highlighted the value of this route. Diane made reference to the fact that access courses are designed specifically for people who hadn’t had the chance to be educated to this level previously. In effect the participants were highlighting that participation on an access course was providing them with increased levels of both institutionalized and embodied cultural capital. Consequently Luke argued that this would be a very good entry route for those who were unemployed.

“The access is a very good stepping stone. It’s like if you wanted to do medicine you do a pre-med so why can’t there be a pre college?... where those who are either unemployed for 6 months or long term unemployed have the opportunity to see well this is what university is, this is the kind of commitment that will be required, that kind of thing”.

Furthermore Peter explained the vital benefit that he received from taking part in an access course prior to entering his degree course.

Peter: “Sure I couldn’t read and write properly when I came in here. I couldn’t and that was obvious. A twelve week course, perfect”.

M: So would you have gotten in here without the access course?

Peter: “No .... It was invaluable. I couldn’t have come in here without it. I can’t understand how first years come in here straight from leaving cert and expect to know their way around this campus even though it is small. ... Computer skills, it was amazing. You could not do it without it. They said to me no more writing. I said well I didn’t write anything in thirty years anyway so it doesn’t really matter. You had to learn to type and

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53 Two lone parents, seven unemployed & one BTEA participant with a disability
everything. ... you are actually happy that you are getting an education, something that you always wanted, and they are leaving you to get on with it yourself, what you want to specialise in and that, they tell you everything and there is no mystery to it and you know what you are up against. And you can ask them and you can approach anybody and they are delighted when you do”.

However again there is no uniform process of applying to an access course and the process of application differs from college to college. For some it involved writing a letter of application while for others it “was a very lengthy interview with three interviewers” (Diane). Additionally participants spoke of the increasing difficulty of obtaining a place on certain access courses, which may be influenced by the fact that “if you pass the access course then you are automatically through to do your degree” (Diane). Even in relation to those access courses, which do not provide for direct entry to a degree course the belief is that by doing an access course, you have “more opportunity, more of a chance to actually get on a college course” (Dave). Evidence suggests that more and more places on access courses are now being taken up by retired individuals, etc (see section 4.44). I believe that retirement is significant as the reason for the economic inactivity (as opposed to unemployment) as it is likely to mean greater access to necessary economic capital. I suggest that such individuals have higher levels of valued cultural capital, as they are primarily drawn from the middle classes, and accordingly have a distinct advantage in the competition to get these valuable places. For that reason I argue that it is becoming harder in relative terms for welfare recipients (particularly those with lower levels of cultural capital whom the BTEA was targeted at) to gain places on access courses, which are probably the best entry route they can take into 3rd level education. In much the same manner as those who acquired a place via direct entry, my participants utilised their own cultural capital, or their social capital, (to utilise the cultural capital held by their social contacts) in order to obtain their place on the access course.

While full time access courses are recognised for the BTEA, it was interesting that even among those who obtained a place on an access course some were not in receipt of the BTEA as the access course was a part time course and therefore not recognised. This has implications for those who may have the requisite levels of cultural capital to apply successfully, but insufficient economic capital to allow them to avail of such opportunities. Finally, while most of the participants expressed satisfaction with the
process of obtaining a place on an access course, Peter relates that he was told that he could not take his place on an access course because it had not been organised for him by the DSFA. The following extract illustrates how Peter, drawing on his cultural capital, had to assert his sense of entitlement in order to achieve a favourable outcome in his interaction with the welfare officer (see section 7.62 for an explanation on how this process works). If he had not held the required level of embodied cultural capital, then it is doubtful if he would have accepted his place on the access course or subsequently progressed to his degree course.

“I said sound put your name down in writing for me. Write down there that I can’t do that and sign it and get your boss and he can sign it as well. I said I am not looking for work for anybody ever again. Never! I don’t care what you do. That was it. They stamped everything and god bless you. But you get the usual. They try to stop your money and you know the usual now, are you looking for work? Even with the access programme you had to be looking for work. Now even though you were hopefully going to be going to University in September, you had the usual nonsense”.

Again this serves to highlight that decisions taken on a micro level by individual civil servants can have a bearing on access to education for welfare recipients irrespective of the decisions taken at the more macro government level.

7.44 Evening Courses:
The literature seemed to suggest that long contact hours do not offer optimum conditions for lone parents or those with a disability to pursue a 3rd level course. However evening courses are not eligible for free tuition fees, and so would require those availing of these courses to have surplus economic capital, which welfare recipients are hardly likely to possess. However of the three participants who expressed an opinion on this matter all stated they would not have availed of an evening course option even if it were subject to the same level of supports as a day course. Claire, who has a disability, explained that when she has had intensive contact hours she has had to decide not to attend some lectures because she gets too tired. However she was adamant that

“it is hard enough getting through a day. It is quite tiring and evening time is your home time and to be coming out on cold winter nights and doing evening classes I wouldn’t have been interested”.

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Claire recognised that she didn’t “have small children and there is the other side where people with small children or younger children in school, the option for them to do evenings might suit better”. However two lone parent participants rejected this point. Maxine spoke of how choosing to do an evening course would present its own problems. She spoke of a ‘logistical’ problem of getting a childminder if you were doing an evening course. She argued

“I don’t think it would have helped my situation because you would have to come in from six to ten, three nights a week and then you are looking at weekends as well so you are going to have to get a childminder and to get a childminder for those hours is very, very difficult”.

Diane agreed and felt that “when the kids are in school it’s great that you have the same hours…but at night time I don’t think it would work”. Maxine explained that an evening course could also interfere with maintaining routines, which are healthy and suitable for ones children. “You do have this routine… at the moment the girls go to bed at 8:00 and I had tutorials on a Monday night this semester from six to nine and they were out of sync”.

7.45 Targeting:
Having identified barriers to accessing 3rd level courses, thirteen participants felt the DSFA should be actively encouraging qualifying individuals to enter 3rd level education and participate in the BTEA scheme. It was held that there should be an individual in every DSFA office that specifically targets people who are eligible for the BTEA and gives them the information and encouragement to access 3rd level. Thus there is need for

“a co-ordinator, especially in the major urban centres, who is focussed on explaining and outlining why people should pursue certain courses of action, such as why should you pursue the BTEA and is it suitable for your needs and what requirements are needed to get on it … to help you obtain educational qualifications’(Frank).

The participants argued that this targeting is essential if the state is serious about getting people off welfare via the BTEA, as for a lot of potential mature students the belief will be that 3rd level is far above their capabilities, as their confidence levels will be low. Mathew explained “if you are long term unemployed it can look fairly daunting. I suppose things have to be taken down a peg or two as well because once
you are actually in the system it doesn’t seem that daunting”. The dominant conviction therefore was that the scheme should be proactive, as being on welfare has a psychologically negative effect on those who find themselves in that situation.

“Just saying the scheme is there and it’s up to them to decide whether they want to get on it or not is not going to work. The only people primarily that it will work with in my opinion are people who have been employed for most of their lives and have found themselves in a situation that they have been out of work for whatever reason and are saying I am not going to get into that situation of being stuck taking social welfare... There are still people who have been unemployed not for months but for years. They are never going to be able to get out of that situation unless someone actually physically intervenes and says ok this is what you should do, it will benefit you, you should do it, let’s discuss what channels you can take. Let’s discuss how we can get you from this situation to this situation. It’s not going to happen unless somebody actually does that” (Scán).

This statement highlights the need for a strategy, to aid those who are most distant from the labour market, and who tend to have lower levels of the cultural and / or social capital that is required to access 3rd level courses.

7.5 Choice of Course:
In order to contextualise the participants’ decision regarding choice of course, it is necessary to highlight that occupations granted the highest status in twenty-first century society are those that demand the longest and most expensive forms of training and receive the greatest social and financial rewards. Thus they require significant levels of economic and social capital. These occupations include lawyers, accountants, medical practitioners, etc, and are the occupations that many students aspire to. I argue that social capital comes into play in accessing these occupations as these are often closed systems, for example the need to find a master if one is to train as a solicitor. Simultaneously however, working-class students are

“aware of a different valuation in which the actual labour performed by skilled workers, and the hard-won practical knowledge that makes it possible, is celebrated against the grain of the dominant framework of values even as the hegemony of those values is acknowledged. It is particularly easy for working-class students, who have done no more than pattern their declared aspirations according to commonly recognized valuations, to restructure them should their grades begin to fail or the cost-benefit analysis of a prolonged and expensive course of study appear unattractive as the point of irrevocable decision-making approaches” (Nash 1999, p.119).
Nash (1999, p.119) is thus arguing that working-class families are able to accept the compromise of a lower professional destination and still enjoy the satisfactions to be experienced from the relative degree of upward mobility that is conferred. The illusion of meritocracy is further cultivated by state discourse, as education appears to be free, so enabling social mobility (Jenkins 1992, p.109), though we know this to be far from the truth (see chapter 4). Likewise Collins (1979, p.170) suggests that for people from lower socio-economic backgrounds a position as a technical specialist in the middle ranks of a bureaucratic organisation is an acceptable goal, although it may not be for the upper-middle-class person seeking elite status. Consequently there is a tendency for working-class students to select courses leading to occupations with a lower status than those selected by middle-class students, even when their educational qualifications are the same. Middle-class and working-class students, at the same level of ability, may have characteristically different occupational preferences as a result of their socialisation into value frameworks which have a strong class basis (Nash 1999, p.118).

My sample showed BTEA participants’ field of study was predominantly in arts / humanities programmes. Four students had enrolled in business courses, one in a science programme, one in engineering and eleven in arts / humanities programmes. This is a pattern that has continued since Healy’s (1997) study (see table 7.5). Conversely Clancy (2001, p.156) noted that technology claimed 26% of all new entrants to 3rd level education, 21% went to courses in commerce, 17% to arts / humanities and 12% entered courses in science. Thus it would appear that students on the BTEA were and still are hugely over represented in arts / humanities. One possible reason for this over representation was alluded to by Frank who stated that

> “people are segregated in secondary school. If you are in a certain type of secondary school, or a certain school in certain areas you will receive significant advantages. I know certain schools have smaller class sizes for maths classes and they as a result will have a greater understanding of science based subjects so when it comes to finding out what courses people go on to in 3rd level and when it comes to people who use the BTEA, they will be people who go into more approachable subjects because they won't have the appropriate knowledge in maths / science to handle a degree in physics or to handle a degree in industrial chemistry”.

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My participants expressed concerns over which courses people should pursue, given the very nature of this new flexible global labour market. Their worry was that the qualification offered by a course, and which may seem like a good investment now, may be obsolete by the time the person graduates. Participants when choosing a course of study were thus engaging in a process whereby they were trying to predict the value of the institutionalised cultural capital they would obtain from the course at the time they would come to convert it to economic capital in the labour market. Diane argued that

“There are several different variables there and it’s hard to say from year to year. IT was the big thing there a few years ago and Psychology seems to be the big thing now”.

In keeping with this uncertainty about what qualification to pursue, reference was made to the decline of the manufacturing industry in Ireland. Mary highlighted that manufacturing type jobs are going to the Far East, Poland and India and explained the implications for a highly credentialised person in her social network.

“I have a cousin right now who is just wrapping up his Masters by research here and the reason he is wrapping up his Masters is because he couldn’t actually get a job doing any kind of computer engineering type work in this country. ... Those jobs are going to places like India”.

It becomes ever more apparent that the need for life long learning is perceived as pressing, with people having to change career direction as a result of fluctuations in the labour market. This change in career is facilitated either by gaining a qualification in a different subject area, or gaining a qualification at a higher level. John too evidenced an awareness of these issues when speaking of his daughter who had

**Table 7.5: Field of Study:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts / Social Science</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art &amp; Design / Graphic Design</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horticulture</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine / Health Science</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = (116)

graduated 12 months previously with a degree in software engineering. He stated that “she is gone on to do a Masters on something completely different … because her colleagues are now earning €7.60 an hour”.

In examining the types of courses pursued, Healy (1997, p.18) found that 34% of BTEA participants in his sample studied for a certificate or diploma, 54% studied at primary degree level and 11% studied at higher / postgraduate diploma or a Masters degree level. These figures are significant in relation to entry to the labour market. Evidence presented in section 6.43 suggests that as a result of changes to the labour market and qualification inflation in certain areas (i.e. humanities / arts) postgraduate qualifications are becoming increasingly necessary to compete for better paid more secure positions. The extra year necessary to obtain a postgraduate qualification and thus specialise in a particular area can have a tremendous bearing on position of entry to the labour force and thus earning potential (see my own experiences in section 3.4). This is supported by Healy’s (1997, p.47) finding that 24% of all TLA graduates were either engaged in further education or waiting to be accepted onto a course for the 1997/98 academic year. 59% of those TLA graduates were studying at Masters level, with a further 18% studying for higher or postgraduate diplomas. This is a significant jump from the figure of 11% who were pursuing postgraduate courses in 1993 (Healy 1997, p.18). In addition the vast majority (91%) continued to avail of the TLA scheme. When asked what they hoped to do after completing the course they were currently taking, half said they wanted to obtain employment and the other half said they would like to go on to even further study (Healy 1997, pp.47-48). This gives weight to the argument that postgraduate qualifications are experienced as increasingly requisite, with the result that the numbers of TLA / BTEA graduates going on to postgraduate study rose over this period.
Table 7.6: Type of Course Pursued:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Diploma or Postgraduate Diploma</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Degree</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Diploma</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other – Preliminary Engineering, Qualifier</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Healy 1997, p.19

It was therefore interesting to see the 2004 figures for the numbers pursuing undergraduate degree courses (34%), national certificate (19%), 3rd level undergraduate diploma (10%), postgraduate diploma, and postgraduate degrees (3%) in Ireland (BTEA Presentation to the DSFA by Lansdowne Market Research March 2004, cited in DSFA 2005, Appendix B). These figures again relate to the combined 2nd and 3rd level participants on the BTEA (approx 80% of the sample were in receipt of the 3rd level option). We can see therefore that while the numbers accessing undergraduate certificates or diplomas, and primary degrees remained relatively constant between the Healy study published in 1997 and the LMR study in 2003 / 2004, the numbers progressing on to postgraduate study declined considerably. I argue that this reduction is directly attributable to the restrictions imposed on the postgraduate option of the BTEA. Accordingly I argue that while BTEA participants may have the required cultural capital to progress to postgraduate level they may not have the required economic capital to do so. In this context the decision to restrict the postgraduate option (this is discussed in section 6.43) to only those pursuing a higher diploma (H-Dip.) or graduate diploma in primary school teaching is profoundly negative.

7.6 Entitlements

7.61 Discovering your entitlements:

Analysis of the data evidences a similar pattern to that highlighted in section 7.41 when it comes to participants discovering their welfare and related entitlements. Once more we see that the ability of the participants to obtain information / entitlements is influenced by their social and cultural capital. Healy’s study showed that TLA recipients experienced the same difficulties in the mid 1990’s, and I use this data as our starting point in order to contextualise my current findings.
I discovered recently that Townsend Street [Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs] have sanctioned that it is possible for TLA students to work during the Summer holidays and retain their payments. No one told me - when I could have looked for a job sooner, a job that would have helped reduce my overdraft. There’s nothing in writing about this and the Local Social Welfare Office denied any knowledge of it when I told them” (Healy 1997, p.23).

In order to address such difficulties, a single information agency, where people could obtain advice as to their financial entitlements, and the creation of an amalgamated service to administer the grant, social welfare and rent allowance payments were proposed. The logic underpinning this proposal was that a single agency would make the process more efficient, and more importantly, easier for people to obtain all of their entitlements (Healy 1997, p.38). To date this has not happened. During my analysis of the data it very quickly became obvious that even some of my participants who had successfully managed to get on the BTEA scheme were not always aware what their entitlements were. For example Maxine was unsure if she would receive her lone parent payment for the summer break or whether she would be taken off the BTEA for that period.

As a result of their experiences several of my participants perceive that information is not particularly forthcoming from any government department. Adam argues “it’s a particular thing that has been in operation in this country for ever. Tell us nothing and keep us in the dark because if you don’t know anything you can’t claim your entitlements”. In some instances the lack of knowledge surrounding entitlements has resulted in delays in payments and subsequent financial hardships for the participants in my sample. Moreover the lack of adequate and accurate information resulted in people not applying for all of their entitlements. Gus argued that he had been entitled to an extra social welfare payment, as well as his lone parent payment, and that consequently his BTEA should have been paid at a higher rate. He felt strongly that he “was entitled to that half payment as BTEA and they didn’t give it to me and I didn’t realise it for say a year or a year and a half” by which time it was too late to apply for it.

The evidence suggests that entitlements are not well known, “particularly to people who are entitled to them” (Seán). John felt that “there are quite a few people now who are hugely entitled to lots of things if they only knew about it”. Thus the need for
information, which actually tells people what their entitlements are, becomes of paramount importance. Therefore it was not encouraging to hear Seán argue, “Unless you are aware of them (entitlements) or you go and find out yourself you are not made aware of them”. In fact the dominant belief expressed by my participants was that DSFA officers feel as if they are “the gatekeepers of the purse in the social welfare department and they are trying not to let it go… They feel that it is coming out of their own pockets” (Maxine). It is very disheartening for any individual to be told by a figure of authority that they are not entitled to a particular benefit, especially when that individual has grounds for believing that the administrator is acting in error.

There is strong evidence that this process continues to occur. In fact as recently as the 24\textsuperscript{th} September 2007, an individual working with disability services (‘Jane’) in an Irish university made contact with me on behalf of a student with a disability who had just enrolled at that university. The student in question had asked their local DSFA office in the midlands if they were entitled to any benefits on returning to education but they were told that they were not. Jane had some knowledge of the BTEA so she rang that DSFA office looking for information on the scheme. She told the officer whom she spoke with that she was ringing in her capacity as an employee of the disability services in the university, yet she was informed that the officer had no information on the BTEA and that they were not aware that such a scheme existed. She consequently rang me to find out if the BTEA had been discontinued. From what she told me of the person’s circumstances I was convinced that they were entitled to access the scheme. I forwarded an application form and information booklet to Jane, and the student in question subsequently applied for and received the BTEA.

The participants in this study cite the vital importance of organisations like the Citizens Advice Bureau “because they can break it down very simply and make you aware of what your entitlements are” (Brendan) whereas participants argue that the information that you access from the DSFA regarding the BTEA and your entitlements is very much dependant on the social welfare officer that you engage with.

“Some people that you meet are just fabulous they know everything about it and other people that you meet aren’t” (John).
However participants expressed concerns about having to rely on these types of intermediary organisations. It has to be remembered that the Citizens Advice office “can only give you the information that they have managed to gather” (Brendan) and even an organisation such as this “had problems getting information from the Department of Social Welfare in Dominic Street” (Brendan). Accordingly it is of great concern that little if anything has changed since Healy (1997, p.27) highlighted these very same problems.

7.62 Introduction to Collins’s Theory:

I now examine the role of cultural and social capital in the micro level interactions that occur between welfare recipients and welfare officers, given the obvious power differentials in these situations. I will draw on micro level conflict theory and related ideas regarding the charging of cultural symbols with membership importance for particular groups (Rossel and Collins 2001, p.527). I argue that Collins’ theory offers an excellent insight into the interaction that takes place between welfare officers and welfare recipients, and the subsequent micro level battle that seeks to control / gain access to information and or entitlements.

Microinteractions are the plane on which human agents build and perform relationships, and these interactions usually occur on a face-to-face basis and are influenced by power differentials. Power in this sense involves behaviour by social actors who either have or try to achieve the capability to coerce other actors to do what they don’t want to do. Compliance, when it is obtained is therefore forced. Authority, intimidation, withdrawal of benefits, manipulation, dishonesty, and similar negative sanctions are thus critically important tools to ensure that actors hold the dominant position of power in any interaction. This is very much a Weberian notion of power, whereby actors try to get their own way in spite of the opposition of other actors (Kemper and Collins 1990, pp.33-34). Patterns of hierarchy, material goods and social membership are themselves based on relational courses of action in microinteraction. Consequently social structure is “performed” in recurring microinteractions (Kemper and Collins 1990, p.33). Collins (1975) reconstructed the Weberian theory of stratification on a micro basis, grounding it in processes of face-to-face interaction. His theory of interaction rituals is therefore an attempt to provide

My analysis of interaction rituals and the accumulation of resources through a series of interaction, power, and status rituals show how the main belief of interaction ritual theory explains the appearance of resource discrepancies, stratification and conflict. Accordingly microconflict theory holds that Marxist, Weberian, and Durkheimian theories are reciprocally logical and mutually supporting, once we identify that their convergent centre is an explanation of how groups fight over power, while fashioned, constrained and controlled by possession of, or access to certain resources. Conflict is thus closely associated with Durkheimian solidarity, because the key microprocesses that compose groups give individuals a symbolic catalogue with which to frame their social world (Rossel and Collins 2001, pp.527-528). This conflict is between groups, and therefore solidarity is key to understanding the source of cohesion within groups in conflict with each other. The groups involved in the interaction I am concerned with consist of middle class DSFA officers and ‘undeserving’ working class / welfare class / underclass welfare recipients.

“We are able to understand social solidarity and shared culture and at the same time maintain a realistic picture of conflict and domination by seeing how pockets of solidarity and culture are generated on the microlevel in an endlessly shifting process, instead of assuming that there are fixed macroentities called ‘societies’ (or any other identities or meaning systems) which by definition are characterized by a common solidarity and culture” (Rossel and Collins 2001, p.528).

One theme that was thus strongly evident in the data was the importance of the power differentials that exist between welfare recipients and the civil servants that they interact with in a DSFA office or other state office. These micro level interactions are crucial in determining whether an applicant is granted access to certain resources, and ultimately determines the outcome for the welfare recipient. It is argued (and more importantly evidenced in the data) that the level of cultural capital and the use of that cultural capital possessed and mobilised by the welfare recipient ultimately determines whether they receive a favourable outcome from the interaction.

A micro level understanding of stratification does not see material wealth as the be all and end all, rather ‘emotional energy’ (which is the “quantity of genuineness, self-belief, and endeavor that actors show in social interactions”) (Kemper and Collins
and the acquisition of cultural capital are of paramount interest (Collins, 1993b cited in Rossel and Collins 2001, p.516). Ones emotional energy is ones’ disposition to an interaction. It is impacted positively or negatively by previous interactions and by ones’ cultural capital. In relation to the latter, valued cultural capital is a source of symbolic capital, i.e. of prestige, which advantages one in interactions. Material possessions are valued for their emotional nuance in interaction rituals, as sometimes the ritual focuses on these things and make them sacred emblems of membership of that status group (Rossel and Collins 2001, pp.516 - 517). Therefore status groups are groups whose members share a common culture and prestige and accord each other a minimum of considerate respect, “meaning that individuals are differentially exposed to narrower or more diverse experience, according to the different mixes of status group memberships in their networks of social relations” (Kemper and Collins 1990, p.54; see also Ridgeway 2001, p.323). A key issue that thus emerged was in relation to signifiers of class and status. These signifiers are subsequently used as identifiers (see Kemper and Collins 1990, p.34) and my participants argued that DSFA officers interact with people based on prior assumptions associated with those identifiers.

7.63 Obtaining Entitlements:
Status was identified by the participants as significant when trying to obtain entitlements from DSFA officers. One of the chief signifiers of this status was identified as a person’s accent. Particularly in Limerick, the stereotypical Limerick city accent was perceived as playing a significant role in how people are identified and subsequently judged. Accent is therefore seen as a primary identifier in that the first time you open your mouth and speak you are open to being marked as ‘something’, whether you are or not.

“Our people when they say ‘story bud’ and things like that, I mean they immediately are a working class Dublin person” (John).

Consequently participants argued that if a person goes into a DSFA office and speaks with a strong Limerick accent or a broad Dublin accent, it marks them immediately as a potential ‘chancer’. This understanding relates back to the undeserving poor

54 Someone who is not to be trusted.
ideology that we examined in chapter six. All signifiers (clothes, accent, address etc) have a bearing on what an individual obtains from their interaction with a DSFA officer. So for example participants perceived that there would be a difference in outcomes for a person going in to a DSFA office if they are dressed in a middle class way, do not speak with a working class accent, and have an address in certain locations, compared to someone else who speaks with a strong Limerick accent, is dressed in a tracksuit, and lives in a designated disadvantaged area such as O’Malley Park in Limerick City. It is perceived that from the moment each of these individuals open their mouth (or indeed are seen) they are highly likely to be treated differently by the welfare officer on the other side of the counter. John for example is very well spoken; he believed that his appearance and accent (the embodied state of cultural capital) played a major part in his reasonably positive experiences of dealing with DSFA officers.

“I have never found any problem with that, but then again I would imagine that they see me coming in or hear me speaking. I don’t know how I sound to you, but they probably, I don’t come across as if I am a chancer. If I have to be in a social welfare office it is because I have to be there where as if I am coming in all of the time, the del boy type lad, wiggling and jiggling and all of this kind of thing”.

While these signifiers such as accent, dress, address etc. are perceived to be markers which are decoded by welfare officers as signs that the individual is not to be trusted, it was also interesting to see that John held that being from a more advantageous socio-economic group can work against somebody applying for welfare in much the same way. This is because the minimalist system of welfare provision utilises means testing to determine eligibility for most benefits. Consequently this can sometimes have negative connotations for those with a certain address for example.

“To access certain social welfare you have to have absolutely nothing and they are never going to believe that you have absolutely nothing and they will come out and scrutinise your house a bit more where as if you are living in O’Malley Park you get it straight away. So it can work both ways”. (John)

However, a majority of my sample expressed a strong opinion that DSFA officers view themselves as being superior to welfare recipients. This sense of superiority was held to be communicated through the demeanour (embodied cultural capital) of the welfare officer in question, resulting in some of the participants saying that they were made to feel like second-class citizens. This is very much in keeping with the idea that
“order givers” (DSFA officers) often view their organisation through rose-tinted glasses and exalts it as part of their self-presentation, while order takers (welfare recipients) must conform to the “requests of the order giver” while present “on stage” in the interaction. “If we assume that being in control is intrinsically rewarding and being subject to control is punishing, the empirically observed pattern logically follows, order givers identify with their official roles and ideals, whilst order takers resist them by withdrawing into an informal sphere” (Kemper and Collins 1990, p.54; see also Ridgeway 2001, p.328). I have presented the experiences of three individuals here by way of an illustration of this process.

“One person I dealt with on hatch 18 was ok but any one else I dealt with had that superior attitude, looking down on you more or less, what the hell are you doing here, why don’t you go out and get a job for yourself, that kind of attitude” (Mark).

“My local welfare office their demeanour was ‘fuck you’… They assume that everyone they come across is uneducated, stupid, and vulnerable and they can be manipulated and intimidated. They think of you as just a herd that will do what they are told to do” (Adam).

“I remember the first time I enquired about the allowance... it was a woman I was dealing with and apart from not physically looking at me and looking sideways, ‘oh you want to go out there do you? You want to go out to the University?’ She had a kind of what I thought was a smirk” (Denis).

I argue that such demeanour may be reflective of the era of the post-welfare state, a view shared by Denis.

“I have met the individual decent social welfare officers but on balance most of the interaction is [long pause] not adversarial but... you are here looking for something off us and my job is to make sure that you don’t get it, or to make it as hard as possible for you to get it”.

Finally a majority of participants felt those working for the DSFA largely ignored them when they looked for assistance. Claire explained that civil servants would “hang up, they wouldn’t help you, they were rude, and they seemed to think… I am God here, when we feel like paying you we will”. This created a huge sense of frustration among the participants with Maxine stating “the civil servants of this country… some them should just be taken out and shot”.

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Thus it is argued that interaction rituals vary significantly in how open they are to those individuals wanting to take equal part in the interaction. Those who control the “spatial and material background conditions” are in a dominant position when it comes to exercising control over the interaction. The actor that controls a highly ritualised interaction (like the DSFA officer in an interaction with a welfare applicant / recipient in a DSFA office) has the possibility of gaining a certain power in defining the situation and the other actors’ reputation (Rossel and Collins 2001, p.518). Therefore in day to day interactions the ability to impose authority relies on effective presentation by ‘superiors’ and their capability to generate “a suitable definition of the situation in interaction rituals based on their superior level of cultural capital and emotional energy” (Rossel and Collins 2001, p.518). It was apparent from the data that most participants believed that DSFA welfare officers control the interaction that welfare recipients have with them.

The participants cited three strategies by which they perceived DSFA officers to assert their authority over interactions. Research has shown that facial expressions, bodily posture, and certain types of behaviour serve as powerful representations of an individual’s social position and these representations are in turn recognised by the other actors in the interaction as signs of power, authority, and superiority (Rossel and Collins 2001, p.522). The participants evidence the manner in which such symbols can be utilised by DSFA officers to ensure that they continue to control most situations. The first strategy utilises props, body posture and facial expressions to invoke a sense of relative powerlessness in the welfare recipient.

“If you go into an interview with somebody who wants to see why you have been out of work for 6 months and haven’t found work, normally they have a seat that they can raise up. One of the guys I was dealing with did raise up his seat the moment I came in, maybe it was because I was taller than him but I don’t think so. There is also the fact that they are behind the desk, they have all of the files, a computer, and all of the information, so you are on the periphery looking in while they have access to everything, and at that stage they have the knowledge, they have all of the power and you are powerless”. (Mary)

“I remember [name of social welfare officer removed] walking in the door and looking around actually physically looking down his nose. I had a new baby at the time and he looked down his nose because the kitchen was a mess...In his stance definitely, his physical stance I found him to be a very imposing character and knowing that if I said the wrong thing that it could go
against me in his decision as to whether I get the money or not... because they are clued in on everything that you are saying and you are nervous because you are looking on this as a kind of a life line.” (Fiona)

The second strategy involves strict adherence to the rules with little or no deviation from those rules. I argue that this strategy is much more about adopting a bureaucratic stance than the application of rules.

“You go into the office and straight away the person starts asking questions. You might try to ask questions on something that you feel is relevant and you will be very quickly told no what I am focussing on is this, what you are saying there is to do with someone else, or someone else’s responsibility, I’m not concerned with that, I am only concerned with this. It’s all business and intimidating without a doubt and deliberately so”. (Adam)

“I felt confident but the attitude they had was assertive and they felt and acted superior when I went in there. They were the boss, they were on one side of the counter in behind a glass cage and you were the other side. They were laying down the rules and you either follow their guidelines or you forget about it. What they say goes more or less”. (Mark)

This is highly significant given that the BTEA is an administrative scheme. As we saw in chapter six, the justification provided for not placing the BTEA on a legislative footing was that leaving the decisions around eligibility up to the discretion of individual officers would advantage the client. Although those at senior levels believe this has a positive impact on the numbers availing of the scheme, the participants in this study suggest that opposite is true. Discretion is not always employed, even where it might operate in the participants’ favour. Mark for example was originally turned down, as he was seven days short of the requirement for the qualifying duration. The individual welfare officer decided not to use their discretion and instead stuck rigidly to the rules. Where discretion was employed it was experienced by the majority of participants as resulting too frequently in decisions, which did not optimally benefit and in some cases actively disadvantaged, those eligible for and receiving the BTEA. One informant for example lost out on her cost of education allowance for two and a half years because she was kept on a lone parents payment and not transferred to the BTEA, despite being a full time student. This cost the individual €1000 to which she was entitled.
The final strategy involves the DSFA officer speaking loudly enough so that others in the office can hear. This tactic is experienced as being very effective in bringing people into line.

“They would shout you down, especially at a public hatch. This is another one of their party pieces where you are trying to speak in confidence and they start speaking out very, very loudly and discussing your business out loud so every one can hear it. That’s another favourite tactic and this country must be a terrible place for the vulnerable, the grilling that they must receive not only at the hands of the civil service and public bodies but also big groups like Eircom and what not”. (Adam)

These three strategies are used to increase the dominant actors’ (DSFA officer) power, indicating to the subservient actor (welfare recipient) that the dominant actor is in possession of the tools which enable them to enforce their will over the subservient actors’ opposition. This further increases the probability that the dominated actor will not be able to emerge victorious in any future interaction, and as a result tends to destroy the confidence that is so vital in securing a ‘win’ in the ongoing microinteractions that determine the welfare recipients’ reputation and place (Kemper and Collins 1990, p.56). Accordingly the use of such strategies of engagement may reinforce the welfare recipient’s own low self esteem, which can have negative implications for them in any future contact (Ridgeway 2001, p.328).

Denis spoke candidly of his experiences saying

“One predominant thing I remember all of the time is that they wouldn’t look at you. That was one thing I did have issue with at the time, someone is talking to you and they do not listen to you or look at you... I’ll tell you one thing it does is that it reinforces any low self esteem that you had in the first place. When you walk in there and you walk out and you say right these people think that my status is worth nothing”.

The acquisition of resources by social actors (in this case welfare recipients) when they enter this series of interactions is determined by their access to certain types of ‘rituals’ and their specific power and status position. Those who usually dominate in these interaction rituals (the DSFA officer) are able to amass high levels of “emotional energy” and they can enter new interaction rituals with high motivation and self confidence (Rossel and Collins 2001, p.519). However even where a welfare recipient does manage to achieve a successful outcome in the interaction ritual they may still be unsure as to the result of any future interactions, as they may not face the same officer again. In keeping with this theme, the majority of participants believe
that DSFA officers are thus more assertive in these interactions than welfare recipients. As a result of almost always setting the agenda in these interactions, DSFA officers have the ability to restrict access to certain things, be that information or benefits, giving them even more power in that particular, and any subsequent interactions with the same individual. The following passage where Adam spoke of being called into a meeting with a welfare inspector makes interesting reading in this context.

Adam “He had a big smile on him and said hello and stuff but once we got out of the waiting room and into the corridor he was cold. It was a power play because he probably thought oh I have another fucking idiot here and I’ll intimidate him, this is not going to be an hour long thing, he will do what I tell him and he will give me the answers I want and then I’ll move on to the next one…. He was actually covering for another person in the office who I had met a number of years before when I first applied for disability benefit to be told ‘sure you won’t get disability benefit; sure you are not entitled to that at all’. I said well according to all of the investigations that I have done and all of the documentation says I am entitled to it. ‘You won’t get that!’ I said I’ll tell you what now I will fucking get it. I said I have a wife and 4 children, I have no job, I have ill health and you are telling me I am not going to get it? ‘You won’t get that, blah, blah, blah’.

Martin: So basically she was telling you not to even bother applying?

Adam “Yes. Like intimidating me and haranguing me and harassing me. Jesus Christ like her job was to assess my entitlement, her job wasn’t to make a decision at all, she wasn’t a deciding officer, and if she was a deciding officer she was obliged to make a decision and furnish it in writing and advise me of the methods by which I could appeal her decision. So this was typical social welfare bullying again. Am I coming across as a right fucking bollocks? You know what I mean one of these contrary fucking bollixes who has a chip on his shoulder and decides he will take on the whole system. Maybe that’s how I am coming across but that is not actually what I am. I apply for what I believe I am entitled to and I treat everybody with the height of courtesy and respect but when they start doing a number on me I don’t see any reason why I shouldn’t stand up to that nonsense….You see they put you in a situation whereby if they give you anything at all you are genuflecting to them with gratitude. There are people living in fear of their lives of being called by social welfare officers and it shouldn’t be that way”.

Consequently from the above passage it would appear that the DSFA officer is withholding status from the welfare recipient and trying to prevent him access to a
particular resource. Yet if a social actor withholds status from another who they know deserves it, they are likely to feel guilt because they will feel as if they have wronged someone (Kemper and Collins 1990, p.58). However the general acceptance of the hegemonic discourse of undeserving welfare recipients and the resultant ‘blame the victim’ understanding of social exclusion will ensure that such feelings will be short lived. The key point here is that those with lower levels of cultural capital will be least able to receive status or to assert themselves in these interactions and consequently will be least likely to access the BTEA and their full entitlements. As such these micro-interactions are another obstacle to the effectiveness of the BTEA in addressing social exclusion.

Some of my participants made reference to a belief that people from traditional working class groups use aggression as a way of exercising assertiveness. This aggression most often manifests when the individual knows (or thinks) they are entitled to certain benefits. If in these circumstances the applicant encounters resistance to their requests and are unable to argue their point succinctly and calmly, aggression may be the outcome. When an interaction leads to a decrease of status for the welfare recipient, the reaction (emotional outcome) depends on who is seen as being responsible for that loss. If the actor (welfare recipient) judges that it was their fault, the principal emotion is likely to be shame or embarrassment, as we saw above when Denis referred to the loss of self-esteem. Conversely if the DSFA officer is judged to be the agent of the welfare recipient’s status loss, then anger and dislike are more likely to be the reaction (Pepitone 1971; Baron 1974; Spielberger et al. 1983; Roseman 1984; cited in Kemper and Collins 1990, p.57). This may make the welfare recipient a more aggressive opponent in the next interaction (Spielberger et al. 1985, cited in Kemper and Collins 1990, p.57). That interaction is more likely to turn into a power struggle, where the loser in the previous interaction not only seeks to retrieve the lost status but also to punish the other actor and warn them against similar actions in the future. This process results in mutual distrust and often in mutual status withdrawal, where actors no longer interact, “except on ritual occasions and even then with manifest distaste” (Kemper and Collins 1990, p.57). Therefore aggression on the part of the welfare recipient is in reality, misplaced assertiveness as a result of the applicant believing that the DSFA officer is refusing them that to which they think they are entitled. However exercising assertiveness in this way is counter productive
in any interaction and almost always ensures that the aggressive person comes off second best, as it hands even more power to the welfare officer to impose negative sanctions against the person in question.

“I have a colleague here in her 30s but everything is a problem to her. Now she does come from very much a working class background. She is a very, very bright girl but she is doing herself no favours with the way she goes on because everything is a problem to her. She is always using this Limerick expression ‘I am going to say it to her!’ I keep saying to her don’t say it to her, sure that is not going to get you anything. But it is all this misplaced aggression and assertiveness” (John).

“Well I see with my friend here who didn’t get BTEA because she was given misinformation as well, but she was given misinformation because she admitted that she became quite snotty with the girl that she was dealing with. Some of that may have an effect on the outcome…. I think that you do if you come from a working class background. It’s ingrained in you. You have to have that kind of a mentality. You have to work hard. [Stressed] Maybe because they have to fight for everything, it spills over into everything, and not being able to articulate it properly is not conducive to a positive outcome when it comes to something like this” (Mary).

In contrast, your ability to make a reasoned argument rather than just being argumentative, i.e. being able to reason with the person and express yourself and be assertive in the interaction makes a critical difference to the outcome of that interaction. I argue that the ability to make such a reasoned argument is a product of cultural capital and / or the confidence that higher levels of cultural capital can bring. Consequently it is strongly believed that your cultural capital levels ultimately determine how well you do in these interactions in terms of achieving the outcome that you desire. The higher the level of cultural capital that the individual has, the greater the chance that individual has of achieving a positive outcome.

Three distinct strategies whereby participants can use their cultural capital to impact positively on an interaction with a DSFA officer were identified in the data. The first strategy, which I term ‘playing the game submissively’, is illustrated by Mary.

“There is a time to go for the jugular but there is also a time to take a step back and go I am listening. I think that will have something to do with it and I think the working class will have less cultural capital generally than someone from a middle class background…. I let them have the dominant position to begin with and I didn’t become adversarial and I wasn’t belligerent. I let them say their piece and listened. I think that took the sting
out of whatever they were going to do in the first place because lets face it they do deal with a lot of people who are quite angry with society in general and for them its probably just the daily dredge of having to go into the Social Welfare office and deal with people who are so angry with the world in general that they go in there and just take it out on them. So from their position they are making assumptions that you and I are exactly the same. Now when you are not it is a pleasant surprise and it will allow them to go I will help this one! If they are in a dominant position of power then I think that you have to use the psychology on them. Let them have the position of power but let them use it to help you. So I think that you need to play the games with them but I also think that you to need to be able to understand how the games are played in the first place”.

In order to understand the ‘game’ that is being played you require a certain level of cultural capital. Consequently if you have higher levels of cultural capital then the outcome of such an interaction will probably be a positive one for you, where-as if you are somebody who has low levels of cultural capital you will have a completely different outlook based on the fact that you don’t know how to ‘play the game’.

“Any of the dealings that you have with somebody from social welfare... when you sit down you are sitting on a chair that is lower than the other person. So already you have this unequal status straight away. If you recognise that there is a reason for that and learn to play the game then fine, the outcome I think will be a positive one. If you don’t and you become aggressive straight away then the outcome is not going to be positive. If you are signing on you are getting a hand out from the state so go in there with a different mindset. If you understand how to play them and how to massage their egos then you can get what you need” (Mary).

The second strategy that I identified from the data was where the informant accumulates knowledge, documents, etc. in relation to whatever it is that they are enquiring about, prior to the interaction with the DSFA officer. I termed this ‘prior accumulation of knowledge’. The accumulation of this knowledge shifts the power differential, which normally favours the DSFA officer, back towards the welfare recipient / applicant. However a certain level of cultural capital is needed in order to acquire such knowledge. One informant was informed by an officer that he must sign off for one day in order to be entitled to the BTEA. This would have meant the informant would break their period of unemployment and no longer qualify for the BTEA. He explained, “I said to her well I know what the regulations are, she kept telling me ‘you do not’. I am the officer in charge I know what they are, you haven’t a clue” (Seán). Luckily for the informant, his cultural capital was of a sufficient level to
enable him to refuse to comply with this order and he was duly successful in obtaining the BTEA. The following two extracts further illustrate how the prior accumulation of knowledge increased the level of power that the informant had in an interaction with a civil servant, making it more likely that they would get the outcome that they desired and felt they were entitled to.

“I have been given wrong information several times, several times. One fella in the city hall told me that the Equal Status Act didn’t apply to me and it was obvious that he never read the Act. “That doesn’t apply to you”. Now if I had walked out the door, he would have said he mustn’t know it applies to him. So yes this fella wasn’t going to tell me that yes the Act does apply to you and actually if you did take us to a hearing we probably would have to house you. He wasn’t going to tell me that. If I had taken him at face value and walked out the door that was a victory there for him. I got rid of him now by telling him the Act doesn’t apply to him so he isn’t going to read that Act, he probably doesn’t know anything about it and he is going to believe what I am saying. But the very minute that you mention I actually know a bit about that. I am out in UL. It’s Oh” (Denis).

At that stage I decided to let him ask the questions, there is no point in me volunteering anything. He then asked do you have a pension. Yes I said, here you are, because it said bring all relevant documentation, here you are, there is a document that proves that I have a pension and he followed up this by asking were the Department of Social Welfare aware of this? I said they must be because I have written them a letter and made 2 phone calls and I can produce evidence of the phone calls from my itemised phone bills plus here is a photocopy of the original letter I wrote to the Department. Can I have that? No I said this is my record. ‘But can I have it to take a copy of it? Yes on the grounds that you return it to me, and I can trust you to return it to me I said. He said yes but then I said no as a matter of fact that is the only copy of that I have so I’ll tell you what I will take this home and I’ll take a copy of it and send it back into you, because that way then it is never lost. This is my proof that I abided by the terms and conditions and that I advised the Department of the change of circumstances” (Adam).

However the success of this second strategy depends on having confidence in the knowledge that you have accumulated, and the cultural or social capital to acquire that knowledge from other sources. Given that the DSFA officer begins all of these interactions in the dominant position the welfare recipient may come under pressure as to the validity of their information and consequent argument.

“Well not immediately does the attitude change, first of all they will try and brave it out but I’ll say excuse me the legislation entitles me to this decision in writing and you are also obliged to sign your name to it and further more you are obliged to inform
me of all avenues and routes open to me to appeal your decision. Once you do that, Jesus Christ they take a step backwards, often enough its hold on now and I'll take a step backwards and its hold on and I'll just go check that with my boss and then all of a sudden you get this that and the other and the co-operation is unbelievable” (Adam).

Therefore the confidence that is required in order to stand your ground is impacted upon by the levels of resources (cultural capital and emotional energy) accumulated through a series of interaction rituals that the individual enjoys (Ridgeway 2001, p.332). “Cultural capital and emotional energy determine which kind of interaction rituals a person seeks… and above all which definitions of situation and courses of actions can be negotiated in future interaction rituals” (Rossel and Collins 2001, p.515). Consequently the higher the level of capital, the more confident the individual will usually be, often ensuring a positive result for the applicant even under the most trying of circumstances. John further encapsulates this idea when he argued that any individual that has to deal with social welfare has to have

“the confidence of your knowledge because somebody else might know it but immediately somebody slightly superior comes along and says that is rubbish, they will immediately collapse like a deck of cards even though they are right, they can be browbeaten whereas I don’t really think that anybody in social welfare has more knowledge than I have therefore I am not going to be brow beaten. They don’t like, it’s a fact, I am not being arrogant.”

The final strategy was where participants would ask for any decisions to be in writing and to ask the DSFA officer to sign that written document. This approach proved very successful for each and every one that used it, as highlighted by Peter’s experience when he was told a document he wished to use to support his application for a particular benefit was not sufficient. “I said go get your boss and write down your name there for me while you are waiting. Next thing they were back, oh that’s lovely, thank you”. The vast majority of the sample believed that the personal development that BTEA students achieve as a result of participation in college is hugely beneficial and gives them the tools necessary for empowerment, thus increasing both their emotional energy and levels of cultural capital.

The above passages indicate the disadvantage experienced by many of the participants in this study in their interactions with DSFA officers. However, the majority were able to draw upon the cultural capital held by their social network to make up for any
shortfall in their own levels of cultural capital, and aid them in their quest to access the BTEA. The value of possessing such cultural and social capital to accessing the BTEA is highlighted in the following passage.

“Martin: So they weren’t going to let you do it and give you the BTEA?

Mark: No they were not. So I got on to my TD and within the space of a week he had it sorted out for me and he phoned me and said it was sorted and if I had any other problems with it to let him know and he would sort it for me.”

An individual’s position in particular social networks thus determines the resources they can muster and the amount and types of cultural capital they can use (Collins, 1998a, pp.416-418 cited in Rossel and Collins 2001, p.524) to achieve success in future interactions. Many of our future interaction partners also will have been people we have interacted with in the past (Rossel and Collins 2001, p.524). Consequently if we believe that those welfare recipients who are most excluded have access to lower levels of cultural capital, both personally and among their social networks, then their ability to achieve success in these power rituals will always remain limited. Conversely by attending 3rd level, the actor in question increases their own levels of cultural capital, but also gains more social ties with individuals who have high levels of cultural and social capital. Meeting the requirements for 3rd level qualifications produces “homogeneity of cultural capital among the members of a specific occupation” (or in this case, course of study) and increases their prospects of victory in status rituals (Collins 1979, cited in Rossel and Collins 2001, p.522). This is because the accumulation of knowledge and capital required makes the individual more assertive. In fact a 3rd level qualification was viewed by Fiona as a means of protection against ever again being demeaned by social welfare officers.

7.64 A misrepresentation of circumstances:

Twelve\(^{55}\) of my participants admitted that they had manipulated the qualifying period requirements to ensure that they would qualify for the BTEA. Seven participants extended their period of unemployment in order to qualify.

“I made sure that I was 6 months on the system before I actually went back. I was bang on the week to 6 months unemployed when I left my job” (Fiona).

\(^{55}\) Three BTEA students with a disability, one lone parent and eight BTEA participants who had previously been unemployed.
Seán, Mark and Dave manipulated the qualifying period requirements in another way. Instead of simply prolonging their period on the live register these three participants decided to do a course, which would count towards the qualifying period for the BTEA. This was an interesting choice as they were utilising a less risky method of ensuring their qualification. While they were participating on one of these schemes they could not be taken off the live register for the purposes of qualification for the BTEA. In contrast those that chose the option of prolonging their unemployment ran the risk of being cut off the live register if they could not prove that they were available for and actively seeking employment. Seán captured this process of manipulation when he stated

“*When I took the retirement from the post office I had a small post office pension but because my wife was working part-time I was entitled to a social welfare payment and I was aware of the fact that I had to be a certain period of time on social welfare in order to get the BTEA and I knew that come that September the likelihood was that my wife would go into full time employment and I would lose my social welfare payment. So I made sure that I got on a FÁS course that was not going to finish before the college year started, so I could directly transfer off it.*”

Denis highlighted that he manipulated his address so that he would improve his chances of obtaining a place in education and consequently of accessing the BTEA.

“*When I applied for VETOS I gave my fathers address and the one thing I was asked was where that was. I said it’s not far from the Railway station, it’s near the park. Oh! It’s was near the park so it was the better end. It was near the park but not where they thought. That was a subtle change; it was a tactic I used. As you kind of manipulated your address I found that the structure became a little bit more accommodating*."

That this individual felt the need to undertake such a strategy raises serious concerns about applicants’ readings of the culture of the DSFA, in particular in relation to a perceived acceptance of the ideology of the undeserving poor. Of the twelve individuals who admitted to ‘playing the system’ in order to qualify for the BTEA, ten\textsuperscript{56} said they felt they were left with little or no alternative if they wanted to go to college.

“\textit{I had to come around that myself probably through illegal means but I felt I was faced with no option. The choice was stay on disability, not return to education and therefore prolong the}

\textsuperscript{56}Two BTEA students with a disability, one lone parent, and seven who had been unemployed prior to starting the BTEA scheme.
period of being out of work by a further twelve months or take the chance that you wouldn’t get caught” (Frank)

As a consequence of this ‘dishonesty’ Frank expressed the view that he felt criminalized as a result of accepting the BTEA as he had to do so under false pretences. On the other hand Mary felt that playing the system was justified as

“There is definitely a need for people to take up lifelong learning. However the government in this country make it quite difficult for people to actually do that and what it takes is for people to manipulate and use the system”.

Maxine, who misrepresented her circumstances to qualify for maximum benefits, admitted “it does make you do dishonest things and I am not a dishonest person but yet I have my brother living in the house”, which technically violated the grounds she had for claiming lone parents allowance, and consequently her eligibility for the BTEA. However in keeping with the other participants, she was adamant that she had no alternative because she could not remain in college otherwise.

It is my belief that the social class imbalance in the make up of the BTEA student population, combined with the number of participants stating that they were left with no alternative but to qualify for the BTEA (even if it meant ‘manipulating’ the system) in order to attend college, illustrates the ongoing impact of class background on participation in 3rd level education in Ireland even now.

7.65 Maintaining entitlements:

Participants hold that the administration of the BTEA places the onus on the individual to prove that they have continuing eligibility for their entitlements. While this might seem to be a legitimate and indeed moral obligation on the part of the recipient, participants held that that this requirement was actually having a detrimental impact on their college careers. Participants spoke of having to miss individual lectures or days in college in order to enquire as to the whereabouts of their book allowance, or obtain multiple copies of the same letter proving registration or attendance at college for civil servants in different branches of the DSFA, or in other government departments. Maxine believed that

“between the grant... the county council and the social welfare officer there is no communication what so ever. Last year I had to get a form from the social welfare crowd in Sligo to be assessed for the grant, stating how much social welfare I had
actually gotten the previous year so there is no communication between the various bodies.”

Peter and Claire aptly spoke of the confusion that occurs as a result of this apparent lack of joined up government.

“They say to you right go back and get an education and everything is going to be cool. The minute you are there then you are running around like a headless chicken. You will be like that for weeks, up and down, up and down, a big train wreck going around the place. The only problem with it is that when something does go wrong it is usually at their instigation and you are obliged, you are duty bound as they say, to run up and down the road for three weeks” (Peter).

“It impacts on your day because it’s hassle. You can’t just concentrate on your work because you have to think god what time is it, I have a lecture now but I have got to get to admissions and get this letter. If I am at college I don’t like to leave here during the day I like to stay here but there have been times when I have had to go home to ring Monaghan and then come back because you can’t get them after 5:00 in the evening”. (Claire)

Finally it was most worrying to see Frank note that

“their management is possibly worse than their customer service in that if you try to escalate a problem, it’s like trying to get through the Sahara without any water, it’s just tormenting. That’s all I can say about it, it is just tormenting”.

Against this backdrop three participants made particular reference to their belief that a social welfare system should primarily be oriented to helping people. However the dominant view held by the majority of my sample was that this is not the ethos of the DSFA. Instead at all stages of their participation in the BTEA scheme the participants have encountered obstacles. These obstacles are proving to be such a distraction that it moved Mathew to ask, “You know they either want people to go back to college or they don’t”?

7.7 Outcomes for those BTEA participants who have graduated during the study:
This final section focuses on the end result for those BTEA students in my sample who had completed their undergraduate degree. I document the onward progression of those individuals who have finished their course and whether participation on the BTEA impacted upon their levels of cultural capital. Furthermore I examine whether

57 Three BTEA students with a disability, two lone parents and seven BTEA participants who were unemployed previously
the BTEA impacted their class position in terms of their occupation.

All of the participants increased their institutionalised cultural capital on receipt of their educational qualification. Of the twelve participants graduating during this research, three entered employment and eight continued on to do postgraduate courses. Mathew, Luke and Fiona went into employment directly on completing their undergraduate degree. It was interesting that these students had undertaken business and engineering courses so there was a more direct link between their degree and the labour market. This ensured that it was easier to enter the labour market and source the required standard of employment with their undergraduate qualification.

When we examine whether the BTEA impacted the participants’ class position in terms of their occupation, we find that in three cases it had a positive impact. Prior to accessing the BTEA these participants were situated in the unskilled manual worker, intermediate non-manual worker and salaried employee socio-economic categories respectively. Having completed their courses and entered employment they experienced upward social mobility in terms of their class location. Consequently I argue that the cultural capital obtained through participation on the BTEA scheme when converted to economic capital allowed these participants to move up the social ladder.

All of those undertaking postgraduate study had humanities / arts degrees. This decision saw these participants seek to gain even higher levels of institutionalised cultural capital, which they would convert to economic capital at a later stage. Seán was awarded his degree and continued on to do a H-Dip. and so continued to receive the BTEA. Frank and Peter both completed their undergraduate degrees and began Masters degrees in community development. Additionally Claire, Maxine, Brendan, and Mark began Masters programmes. These experiences all support the opinion offered by the participants that postgraduate qualifications are becoming a prerequisite (in particular for certain disciplines; see chapter 6) to achieving more secure sustainable employment in modern labour markets.

Several of those commencing postgraduate courses had previously stated that they would not be able to undertake such courses in the absence of the BTEA. However, for almost all of these, a change in their circumstances meant that they had more
economic capital available to them than on commencing their degree programme. Thus the decision to continue can be seen as an investment of that economic capital towards gaining further qualifications (institutionalised cultural capital) and a bigger economic reward in the future. Seán wanted to undertake a Masters course but did not have the required economic capital. Instead he began a higher diploma, which still allowed him to receive his BTEA. On completion, he believed that the H-Dip qualification would allow him to teach part time while he undertook a Masters in an area unrelated to the H-Dip. Thus Seán was gaining additional institutionalised cultural capital in the shape of the H-Dip, which he would convert into economic capital, which subsequently would allow him to gain even more institutionalised cultural capital in the shape of his preferred Masters degree. On completion of the Masters degree Seán would have the level of cultural capital with which to enter the labour market at the level he desired and in his field of choice.

Gus completed his degree and had the qualifications to do a Masters but health problems brought on by the stress he experienced in his final year meant he did not continue in education. He was unable to source employment with only his undergraduate degree so he is currently back on welfare. Denis graduated with a 2:1 degree and started a Masters programme but had to leave as a result of monetary difficulties and has since returned to welfare also.

Finally, in all cases those BTEA participants graduating had accumulated valued embodied cultural capital. Participants spoke of greater confidence levels, status, active citizenship, assertiveness, and empowerment (which are manifestations of symbolic capital and emotional energy) on finishing their degree. Denis very vividly illustrated the tangible benefit of this accumulation of cultural capital when he described his time at university as having made him

“more assertive and more active. ‘I recently took a case against the city council for discriminating against me on gender grounds in terms of housing, and I know for a fact if I had not been coming here I would not have been able to go into the tribunal and mention the Act of or under the terms of the legislation, now I didn’t have to say too much about it but the fact is when you are dealing with local authorities or you are dealing with whoever, its what are you doing and you say at the moment I am a student in UL. ‘Oh!!’ there seems to be 2 ways of operating, even going into the social welfare office to get a form stamped, ‘where are you?’ ‘I am out in UL. ‘Oh’. They lighten up and their
attitude changes dramatically. It was the same with the city council when I mentioned that I was going to take a case against them under the legislation. There was a whole new relationship even in terms of the way that they would address me. Denis! Whereas here to fore it would have been “well that’s the situation, you know, there is nothing we can do about that”... “Well that’s the situation”. I never accept that now, when I am dealing with welfare or local authorities or whoever. I never accept “that’s the situation” anymore because I think right it’s not, I will find out myself what the situation is. Ten years ago if someone with a biro or a tie was talking to me, then I assumed that he or she was superior to me education wise. If I went into somebody in an office it wouldn’t matter what they were doing. I assumed that they were highly educated, by virtue of them just wearing a tie, or if it was a woman, wearing smart clothes and a biro. So if they told me Black was white, well then black must be white because they wouldn’t say that to me otherwise. Whereas now I don’t accept anything that they will tell me first hand. I will find out for myself.”

Conclusions:
Throughout this chapter I have argued and endeavored to evidence that approaches taken to facilitate access to 3rd level education for welfare recipients (on a macro level) are restricted in scope and substantially modified in practice (on a micro level) in the ongoing interactions between welfare recipients and DSFA officers. Lack of transparency and access to information are the major obstacles to accessing 3rd level places, the BTEA scheme and related entitlements. Despite the fact that my participants have been successful in accessing the BTEA, the majority had to overcome obstacles in these areas. My participants succeeded in doing so because they possessed reasonable levels of cultural and / or social capital, which aided their engagement with the DSFA and allowed them to obtain the requisite information even when it was not forthcoming from DSFA officers. However, in light of this, I argue that those who are most distant from the labour market are not likely to have equivalent levels of capital and so are considerably less likely to be able to obtain the information they require. If access to such information is being restricted at the micro level then it follows that this negates even the limited positive offerings from the state at a macro level.

At the micro level, obstacles are significantly related to the power differentials that exist between welfare recipients and DSFA officers. This is particularly the case because of the discretionary nature of the BTEA. As such the ability of the welfare recipient to access a scheme like the BTEA can be influenced tremendously (either
positively or negatively) by the approach taken by an individual DSFA officer. Again, cultural capital plays a significant role in determining the outcome of these micro level interactions meaning that those who do not possess this capital are again likely to experience greatest difficulty in accessing 3rd level through this scheme.

Finally, the chapter has shown that participation on the BTEA impacted positively upon participants’ class situation, economic capital and or levels of cultural capital. It is apparent that through participation in the BTEA welfare recipients acquire valuable cultural capital, which they can use to acquire more sustainable and secure employment, accordingly impacting their class position in terms of their occupation, subsequently offering them the tools to combat their own social exclusion and potentially that of their children.
CHAPTER EIGHT
CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction:
In this final chapter the results of my analysis are employed for the purpose of adding to the existing body of theoretical and empirical knowledge regarding the dynamics and impact of welfare to education programmes (in this case the BTEA) on class-based exclusion. The chapter begins by reflecting on findings, which support the ongoing significance of class to access to 3rd level education, social mobility and exclusion. I then demonstrate how my macro-micro level analysis contributes to existing theoretical and empirical understandings of welfare to education programmes in the current Neoliberal era. The chapter reiterates that the effectiveness of the BTEA in addressing more than individual exclusion is (and will remain) limited, in the absence of wider educational reform and the provision of additional 3rd level places in particular. This finding informs an evaluation of the state response to the BTEA as minimalist; with the evident lack of will to maximize the BTEA’s potential being reinforced by dominant Neoliberal ideologies. Additionally the chapter emphasizes that the potential for individual agency in accessing the BTEA is constrained by the requirement to have certain levels of social and cultural capital. Such capital is necessary to negate obstacles resulting from micro level interactions between DSFA officers and welfare recipients, interactions which assume great significance given the administrative nature of the BTEA scheme. Accordingly the chapter concludes by formulating recommendations for the purpose of aiding policy makers in maximising the potential of the BTEA to address social exclusion.

8.1 The ongoing significance of Class:
In this section I reiterate that my thesis is contributing to our knowledge of the significance of class to accessing 3rd level education and the resulting impact on the social exclusion of welfare recipients. This thesis elaborates a critical theoretical exposition of the dynamics and impact of the BTEA on class-based exclusion. It rejects arguments that class-based social exclusion can be addressed by policies, which adopt a weak ‘cultural’ position (Morris 1994, p.80). As such this thesis has
significant implications for our understanding of the contemporary significance of class, its impact on the everyday lived experience of BTEA students and on the reproduction of inequality and social exclusion. This thesis represents a timely and new contribution to a developed body of empirical (Action Group on Access 2001; Clancy 2001; Clancy 1995; Clancy 1998; Clancy and Wall 2000; Fitzpatrick Associates and O’Connell 2005; O’Connell, Clancy, and McCoy 2006) and theoretical (Murphy 2008; O’Brien and Ó’Fathaigh 2007; Grummell 2007; Lynch 1999, Lynch 1998; Drudy and Lynch 1993; Power 2006; Milbourne 2002; Reay et al. 2001) literature on the extensiveness and dynamics of inequality in access to 3rd level education. This thesis extends this body of work (to include the BTEA) providing new case-specific facts resulting from the analysis of my qualitative data and the secondary analysis of existing quantitative data (though to a lesser extent). In summary I believe this thesis demonstrates how class is lived and experienced by those who seek to, or are availing of the BTEA scheme.

This thesis has presented (empirically grounded) evidence documenting three distinct motivations (economic motivation, status-related motivation, and motivation to achieve intergenerational benefits) that led welfare recipients to attend 3rd level education. Economic motivations are the priority for the vast majority. This finding mimics existing literature in this regard (see Ryan and Sweeney 2004; Lynch 1997; Devereux 2006). The analysis of my qualitative data has demonstrated that the majority of BTEA participants return to education in order to convert their cultural and social capital into higher levels of institutionalised cultural capital (particularly in its institutionalised form) through the acquisition of valuable educational credentials, which are in turn to be converted into economic capital in the labour market, thus ensuring upward social mobility, and combating social exclusion. This analysis is congruent with existing research (Drudy and Lynch 1993, Warmington 2003).

My analysis supports the value of welfare to education programmes in addressing intergenerational exclusion (see Adair, H. 2003; Pandey et al. 2000; London 2006; Deprez and Butler 2001) by illustrating that the acquisition of economic capital in conjunction with higher levels of embodied (some of which the individuals already posses) and institutionalised cultural capital is perceived by welfare recipients as key to advantaging their children in acquiring educational credentials and so addressing
intergenerational class-based exclusion. This thesis demonstrates that limiting access to higher education has a major role to play in limiting the cultural capital of my chosen population, which in turn has a detrimental effect on both their economic and embodied cultural capital and accordingly contributes to the maintenance of class-based inequality and exclusion.

The thesis has shown that although a large body of empirical literature has documented the role of unequal access to education in the reproduction of inequalities in Ireland, evaluations of the role of the BTEA in addressing these issues were lacking. My macro level conflict analysis parallels existing literature (Tormey 2007, Drudy and Grummell 2007; Healy 1997) by highlighting that the Irish education system remains functionalist in nature, providing only for equality of opportunity in both mainstream access to 3rd level and ‘second chance’ routes funded by programmes such as the BTEA. The findings of my research support existing arguments that the education system as it presently stands serves as a means to reproduce society’s inequalities with class as the key form of stratification (Apple 2006; Tormey 2007; Lynch 2006; Lynch 1999; Burke 2002; Lynch and O’ Riordan 1998; Lynch and O’ Riordan 1996; Bourdieu 1990). Policies promoting equality of opportunity in accessing 3rd level through both traditional and second chance routes are found to serve the interests of the advantaged sections of society and ensure the preservation of their material welfare because they minimise the impact of schemes such as the BTEA. The lynchpin here is the relationship between equality of opportunity policies and the limitations on the number of available 3rd level places. Thus the BTEA only has an opportunity to work for a limited number of people rather than being granted the possibility of significantly impacting on educational inequality.

It has been demonstrated empirically that BTEA participants required more than financial support to successfully access 3rd level education and the BTEA, reflecting the findings of Healy (1997). I argue that the utilisation of Bourdieu’s forms of capital to understand class relations in this context offers new and invaluable theoretical and empirical insight into recipients’ lived experience of the administration of the BTEA, and the effects of the scheme on both access to and participation in 3rd level education for qualifying individuals. BTEA participants need certain levels of cultural and / or social capital in order to overcome obstacles created by the DSFA and accordingly
those who are most distant from the labour market, and who possess less of the required capital, are considerably less likely to be able to access the BTEA. This finding mirrors that of Andruske (1999a) though in an original context.

This thesis provides important empirical evidence that some working class participants in this study encountered a lack of social support for their participation in education both from their class group and from the 3rd level institutions, which they attended. These participants were found to have had low levels of cultural capital and expressed doubts over the appropriateness of their involvement in higher education. These findings are again supportive of existing literature (see Archer and Yamashita 2003), documenting the effects of class on participation in higher education.

Finally, this thesis replicates the findings of previous research (Healy 1997; Action Group on Access 2001), which has demonstrated that even with the aid of the BTEA programme, participants experience financial difficulties, which adversely affect their studies and are not always aware of the existence of additional funding sources. Nonetheless, all bar one of my participants felt that they would not have been able to attend college without the financial assistance of the BTEA, which further illustrates the inherent effect of class background on participation in 3rd level education in Ireland.

8.2 Welfare to Education:

In this section I document the contribution that this thesis makes to our understanding of welfare to education programmes. To date, research conducted on welfare to education programmes has focused on either a macro or a micro level (see section 1.5 for an example). This thesis connects macro level and micro level understandings using the concept of cultural capital and therefore provides a unique theoretical insight into the potential of a scheme like the BTEA to impact upon the cultural, social, and thus the economic capital of my chosen population. I believe that this thesis also makes a significant empirical contribution to our understanding of welfare to education programmes.

My macro level critical analysis supports existing knowledge of the role of ideologies, cultural beliefs and status beliefs constructed by a power elite (Wallace and Wolf 1998, p.108) in underpinning the ‘New Right’ ideology of personal responsibility
(George and Wilding 1985) which has been used to justify a minimalist or reformist approach to welfare to education programmes (Adair 2008; Alfred and Martin 2007; Welsh and parsons 2006; Theodore and peck 2000). Utilising Mutch's adaptation of Bourdieu's field theory I developed a theoretical model to explain both the changes made to the BTEA in 2003 / 2004 and subsequent decisions taken on the future of the scheme. My analysis serves to illuminate why there is minimal support for the provision of welfare to education programmes despite the evidence that such ventures ensure a greater return to the state than welfare to work or ‘workfare’ schemes. This thesis has found that senior civil servants from the Department of Finance ultimately dictate welfare policy and as welfare recipients are an unpopular group not known for high voter turnout (Abramovitz 2006, p.351), welfare programmes are seen as legitimate targets for spending cuts. My analysis has shown how decisions taken were influenced by short term concerns about saving the state money, and illustrates a Neoliberal functionalist logic, tolerant of a certain amount of inequality as long as the system remains functional overall. This aspect of my qualitative data analysis advances existing knowledge by presenting field theory as a viable method for examining the process of welfare reform.

Information regarding the adequacy of the BTEA payment, the significance of eligibility criteria, and the relative impact of financial versus other types of support on the capacity of the target groups to participate in the scheme, have until now only parsimoniously been available (Healy 1997; Power 2006; Power 2008). As such this research adds to our existing empirical data on the BTEA. This thesis (informed by my qualitative data and my analysis of existing quantitative data) addresses previous data shortages as well as addressing the almost complete lack of independent empirical research against which to judge the impact of alterations to the BTEA.

This research provides empirical evidence that the BTEA has aided social inclusion to a certain extent by moving sections of the population off welfare, into sustainable employment and to a position of higher status. Consequently the BTEA is shown to impact on the ability of welfare recipients to move into the labour market, to attain a

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58 This finding is given greater even validity by the recent revelations of De Bréadún (2008), which document that a letter from the Department of Finance to secretaries-general of all departments set out how and where departments were to make savings in implementing the recent Government decision to cut back on public expenditure.
sustainable income and to achieve social mobility. In summary it is shown to be a mechanism for social inclusion. These findings reinforce those of Healy (1997) and the DSFA (2005). However my qualitative data analysis has demonstrated that in spite of this finding, welfare to education programmes continue to occupy a subservient position in the DSFAs’ strategy of ‘activating’ welfare recipients, with only two of my participants receiving assistance in relation to applying for a qualifying 3rd level course.

Additionally I have provided significant original data on the detrimental impact that the changes to the scheme introduced in 2003 / 2004 have had on both existing BTEA participants and potential applicants. In particular my qualitative analysis has demonstrated that these alterations have disrupted the ability of BTEA students to concentrate on their education and created major economic hardship for some participants on the scheme. These findings make a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge given that there has been no prior independent evaluation of the effects of the changes to the BTEA scheme introduced in 2003 / 2004. This thesis has supported existing research which has documented that BTEA students are significantly over represented in humanities / arts programmes (Healy 1997). It further supports existing empirical data (DSFA 2005, p.38), which shows that the numbers of BTEA students progressing to postgraduate study is declining. This finding is of major significance given the restrictions imposed on access to the BTEA for the purpose of postgraduate education. This research further provides very significant empirical data, which shows that some BTEA participants have internalised discourses reflecting a ‘cultural’ understanding of social exclusion, demonstrating how ingrained into popular culture this dominant discourse has become. As such I would argue that it supports the work of Lens (2000) and Edelman (1998).

This thesis makes an original theoretical contribution to established ways of understanding welfare to education. Although the existing micro level literature is rich in descriptions of specific outcomes for welfare recipients participating in welfare to education programmes, this thesis is distinctive in its systematic inspection of the micro level dynamics of such programmes. The internalisation of a discourse of ‘undeserving’ welfare recipients by welfare officers, has resulted in positive
initiatives, introduced to facilitate access to 3rd level education through the BTEA, being constrained in their scope and significantly modified in practice as a consequence of ‘power ritual’ interactions (Kemper and Collins 1990) that occur between welfare recipients and DSFA officers, (the participants phenomenological experiences). These interactions assume great importance as a result of the administrative nature of the BTEA. Access to information was found to be the prize in an ideological conflict between potential applicants and DSFA officers, which reflects differing constructions of entitlement and responsibility. The resulting lack of transparency and access to information are major obstacles to accessing 3rd level places, the BTEA scheme and related entitlements for welfare recipients.

These interactions are deemed to be a manifestation of “vertical division” exercised by the welfare officers, in relation to control of the accumulation of cultural and economic capital (Wacquant 1998). The analysis of my qualitative data demonstrates that DSFA officers have the most power in these interactions. It is theorised, and grounded in the data, that the level and use of ‘valued’ cultural and / or social capital by the welfare recipient ultimately determines whether they receive a favourable outcome from their interaction with DSFA officers. Welfare recipients possessing such capital successfully negotiate administrative obstacles while those with least capital are least likely to gain access to 3rd level, a key means of enhancing capital. My thesis provides empirical support for this theorisation by showing that welfare to education programme participants have high levels of prior educational attainment, while those who are unemployed for more than two years are considerably less likely to avail of these schemes. Accordingly the analysis of my qualitative data replicates the findings of existing large-scale quantitative research (Healy 1997; DSFA 2005).

This thesis presents empirical support for my theoretical argument that the BTEA is being restricted on the micro level by individual civil servants. Data regarding micro level interactions between DSFA officers and welfare recipients, evidences that some DSFA officers are experienced as acting upon signifiers such as an individuals dress, accent, or address, which potentially mark out ‘undeserving’ welfare recipients. I acknowledge that my theorisation is based solely on what my participants experience and not on data from DSFA officers, but these findings mimic those of Adair (2001b and 2003b) and are very significant in terms of who gets access to the BTEA. As such
the dynamics of these micro-interactions are deemed to be a major obstacle to the effectiveness of the BTEA in addressing social exclusion.

This thesis identifies three original distinct strategies, ‘playing the game submissively’, ‘prior accumulation of knowledge’, and ‘decisions in writing’, whereby BTEA participants used their cultural and social capital to their advantage in an interaction with DSFA officers. These strategies were related to particular contextual markers (Morrow and Smith 1995, cited in Creswell 1998, p.307). They were developed in response to participants’ experiences, as a result of tactics, which they perceived DSFA officers used to assert their authority over interactions (see section 7.63). The discovery of these strategies is a key theoretical contribution of this thesis to the existing body of knowledge; adding significantly to the work of Andruske (1999a).

Finally, the macro level understanding of the BTEA generated by this thesis supports the strong ‘structural’ position, which sees the source of social exclusion as lying in the structured inequality of the labour market and the state (Morris 1994, p.80). This thesis has illustrated a functionalist approach to both the design and implementation of the BTEA scheme. In particular the data demonstrates that the restriction of the postgraduate option of the BTEA reflects the Neoliberal ideology of personal responsibility where individuals are responsible for and invest in their own economic welfare through continuous education. Postgraduate study remains open to BTEA students who meet the qualifying criteria but if they wish to undertake these programmes then it is their own ‘personal responsibility’ to do so (and no longer with the assistance of the state). Accordingly I believe that this thesis provides sufficient theoretical and empirical evidence to support the existing body of knowledge which shows that welfare to education programmes are incompatible with the dominant Neoliberal ideology that holds a hegemonic position at present both in Ireland and indeed globally.

8.3 Policy recommendations regarding the BTEA:

Having completed this research project and presented my findings I make the following policy recommendations, which are deemed to be of fundamental significance to addressing the social exclusion of welfare recipients in Ireland through
The recommendations are based on the thorough and systematic analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of participation in the BTEA scheme. Accordingly my recommendations provide an informed basis for the future development of the scheme. The implementation of these recommendations will optimise the contribution of the BTEA to inclusion and bring about greater benefits for both participants and the state.

1) **The BTEA should assume greater importance within the DSFA.**

I recommend that the BTEA can no longer assume a subservient role to welfare to work programmes within the DSFA. The promotion of such welfare to work programmes has been shown to have had little impact on upward social mobility or social exclusion (see Halpin and Hill 2006; Culleton et al. 2005; Murphy 2007). The peripheral role of the BTEA in the DSFA strategy is evidenced in the fact that the scheme (2nd and 3rd level options combined) currently receives has a budget of €71 million (DSFA 2008a) from a total DSFA budget of €17 billion (Hanafin 2008). This thesis has shown the vital necessity of a policy, which facilitates vastly improved access to 3rd level education, enabling welfare recipients to move away from welfare on a more permanent basis and thus combating their social exclusion. Such a policy has been implemented (sparsely) in the shape of the BTEA, however its impact is not being maximised (see section 6.12).

2) **The BTEA should be made more accessible to potential applicants.**

This thesis has illustrated the continuing impact of class-based inequality on access to 3rd level education in Ireland. I have argued that equality of opportunity policies have left existing societal inequalities largely unaltered (Grummell 2007; Tormey 2007; Burke 2002) and accordingly can not impact upon the ‘structural’ understanding of social exclusion in anything more than a minimal manner (Tormey 2007; Lynch 1999; Smyth and Hannan 2000). I have argued that in order to begin to offset such inequalities, we must assist welfare recipients in gaining valued educational qualifications (Drudy and Lynch 1993, p.267) and the BTEA is the best route available at present to do that. Therefore I recommend that the BTEA should be made considerably more accessible to all potential applicants. Subsequent
recommendations detail how we can make the scheme more accessible for all qualifying individuals.

3) **Improve the provision of information in order to make the BTEA more accessible to potential applicants.**

In chapter seven, issues were raised about the availability of information to potential BTEA applicants. Participants did not experience the BTEA as a transparent system and information was not particularly forthcoming from the DSFA. This issue had been raised by participants in Healy’s (1997) study but has not been acted upon. While there have been improvements in the way information is disseminated; participants still express valid concerns in this area. It is extremely worrying that individuals have to rely on informal networks for information that should be obtainable through the apparatus of the state. This situation needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. I therefore recommend that steps be taken forthwith to ensure an improvement in access to information on the BTEA and in the uniformity and quality of the information that is provided to potential applicants.

The DSFA booklet SW70 provides detailed information on the scheme (and includes an application form). I recommend that a proactive system be put in place within the DSFA, which would see a copy of this booklet being sent to individuals (immediately) once they fulfil the qualifying criteria. Responsibility for information provision and its dissemination must lie with the DSFA, as the BTEA scheme falls primarily into this Department’s brief. Additionally I recommend that 3rd level institutions (who are seeking an increase in numbers through more mature students; see Action Group on Access 2001; Department of Education and Science 2003) should be more proactive in providing information on the BTEA and in advertising to welfare recipients. The Downtown Centre in Limerick would be a good model for them to adopt in this regard.

59 See [http://www.downtowncentre.ie/](http://www.downtowncentre.ie/) for a description of this organisation and the services and programmes that it offers.
4) Introduce a programme, which proactively recruits all qualifying individuals for the BTEA.

Throughout this section I use the term ‘targeting’. This term is grounded in the data and was used by both the BTEA participants and my key informants. I wish to make it clear that my use of this term implies the proactive recruitment of all individuals qualifying for the BTEA scheme, as opposed to the DSFA understanding of the term, which implies the selective recruitment of subsections of the entire qualifying population.

Targeting (proactive recruitment) is essential if the state is serious about moving people off welfare via the BTEA. This thesis identified that 3rd level education is considered by many potential applicants to be beyond their capabilities, as a result of low confidence levels from their time spent on welfare. The BTEA was suggested to only two of my participants by an officer from the DSFA. Thus there is a need for a strategy which proactively targets those who are most distant from the labour market (in particular), as such individuals tend to have lower levels of the required cultural and / or social capital, and accordingly are unlikely to benefit from the current self selecting nature of the BTEA scheme (DSFA 2005).

While the DSFA recently announced that they were going to begin targeting welfare recipients for the BTEA, I have identified a major shortfall in their approach. The DSFA states that they will only target those between the ages of eighteen and twenty five, yet I argue that this is merely a sub-group of the entire welfare population, and there are many more people on the live register who are equally entitled to be targeted for this scheme. DSFA “officials across the country will spend the summer months identifying young people in their regions who would be eligible to go into an appropriate education or training schemes in the Autumn” (DSFA 2008a). Again I foresee difficulties, as there are very few 3rd level options available at this time of the year. Almost all 3rd level courses with reserved places for mature students will have filled those places by the end of June. I fail to see how this DSFA initiative to target people for the BTEA will move people off the live register and into 3rd level courses by September 2008, unless the individuals concerned have already applied to colleges directly or through the CAO, and did so months ago. I believe the ‘targeting programme’ introduced by the DSFA is little more than a political sound bite. Instead
I recommend that a proactive recruitment programme is implemented between January and March each year when applications for 3rd level courses are being encouraged and accepted by the colleges and not over the summer months as at present. I recommend the inclusion of all qualifying individuals, and for the programme to be implemented at a time when it will have an optimum effect.

5) Provide direct assistance for welfare recipients seeking to obtain a place in 3rd level.

At present the BTEA does not offer applicants any assistance in relation to obtaining a place in 3rd level, with the applicant essentially left to their own devices. This is an area where the potential of the BTEA to increase access can be maximised, yet to date it is has been given almost no consideration by those designing the scheme. I recommend providing potential applicants with direct assistance, which can enable them in accessing a college course (see Action Group on Access 2001; Lynch 1997; Osborne and Leith 2000). All DSFA offices should have a designated person to help those welfare recipients thinking of applying to 3rd level. While there are facilitators in the DSFA (who incidentally should be providing this assistance), none of my participants received any assistance from such officers. I recommend that a dedicated DSFA officer should help qualifying individuals with completing forms, writing letters of applications, and provide the applicant with the requisite information.

While services such as those recommended above are provided by VTOS I argue that the local DSFA office has always been and will remain the first point of contact for welfare recipients thinking of returning to education, and this is where interest should be built upon. It would be beneficial to have a monthly clinic (conducted by the individuals providing this service for VTOS) in local DSFA offices and additionally the assistance provided by organisations such as the Downtown Centre in this regard is extremely significant. However even this service is offered on a self-selecting basis. In order for such services to have the maximum effect on potential BTEA applicants the DSFA needs to adopt a more proactive position where it targets and directly assists all qualifying individuals or refers them to organisations such as VTOS or the Downtown Centre. This recommendation should be implemented immediately in conjunction with recommendations 3 and 4.
6) **The optimal qualifying period for the BTEA.**

I have shown that the continual changes to the qualifying duration for the BTEA have had a detrimental impact on potential applicants. However, it is significant that welfare recipients who are most distant from the labour market are less likely to have the levels of capital required to access the BTEA when faced with competition from those who have been unemployed in the previous six months (see DSFA 2005; Healy 1997). These ‘newly unemployed’ will tend to have greater levels of the required cultural and social capital and so are more likely to access the scheme. Therefore I recommend a twelve-month qualifying duration as the optimum waiting period in terms of enabling individuals that are most distant from the labour market to access the BTEA.

7) **Summer Payment.**

Based on evidence presented in this thesis (see section 6.42) there is a clear requirement to rescind the changes that were introduced in 2003 in relation to the summer payment of the BTEA. This alteration has impacted detrimentally on those participating on the scheme and potential applicants. The DSFA (2005, p.54) has acknowledged that since this change was introduced a very high number of BTEA participants re-apply for their unemployment payment during the summer months so the miniscule monetary saving as a result of this change can not (and indeed never should) justify the added stress and financial hardship that has been placed on BTEA participants as a result of this alteration to the scheme.

8) **Remove the restrictions imposed on the postgraduate option of the BTEA.**

The working group on the review of the BTEA (DSFA 2005, p.53) decided that the current postgraduate provisions of the scheme did not merit adjustment. However I have shown that BTEA students are significantly over represented in humanities / arts programmes, where postgraduate qualifications are experienced as increasingly requisite in such areas (HEA 2007b, pp.20-33; Healy 1997). Therefore the decision to restrict access to postgraduate study (by refusing financial support to BTEA participants) contributes to existing class inequality in educational attainment, with the numbers from welfare backgrounds obtaining postgraduate qualifications being seriously impacted upon by this restriction (DSFA 2005, p.38). As a result of these
findings I recommend that the restrictions imposed on the postgraduate option of the BTEA be rescinded immediately.

9) **Greater account must be taken of the recommendations of BTEA participants concerning the scheme.**

More account needs to be taken of the needs of those participating on the BTEA and measures need to be introduced which foster an ongoing dialogue between the DSFA and BTEA participants. Those participating on the scheme are the experts when it comes to assessing how participation is working for them and accordingly their voice should be recognised when developing policy in this area. Despite the working group on the review of the BTEA (2005, p.51) stating that such input from BTEA participants was crucial to the ongoing effectiveness of the scheme, their contributions have largely been ignored to date, evidenced in the fact that most of the recommendations made by participants in Clancy’s (1997) study have still not been implemented. Accordingly I recommend that it is time to move beyond the rhetoric and begin to treat the recommendations of BTEA participants with the importance that they merit.

10) **Address the shortcomings of the TLA Recording System:**

In section 6.54, issues were raised about the effectiveness of the TLA Recording System. This system was developed to support the administration of the Back to Education Allowance scheme, to register applications for BTEA and to record the decisions made on these applications. However this system only records details of applications from persons previously on an unemployment payment (DSFA 2005, p.34). It does not record the details of applicants previously on a lone parent’s payment or a disability payment. In such circumstances we cannot say that policy decisions made on the basis of data from this source have been taken on an informed basis. This shortcoming must be addressed. Data on all applicants for the BTEA must be recorded so that the needs of the many diverse groups eligible for this scheme are taken into account.

11) **The BTEA needs to become a statutory scheme.**

The Back to Education Allowance scheme needs to be placed on a statutory footing. My research findings place a major question mark over whether policy changes can
result in more positive outcomes for BTEA participants and potential applicants, given evidence of a culture in the civil service, which has internalised an understanding of ‘undeserving’ welfare recipients (see Breen and Devereux 2003). I have provided evidence that as a result of the administrative nature of the scheme, decisions taken on a micro level by individual civil servants can have a negative bearing on access to education for welfare recipients (see Andruske 1999a for the US context), irrespective of the decisions taken at the more macro government level. While those designing the scheme feel that its administrative nature allows a flexibility that benefits the potential applicant, the reality on the ground suggests otherwise, as the criteria concerning entitlements are not being applied consistently. In such a context it is worth noting that altering the discretionary nature of the scheme and placing it on a statutory footing could at least ameliorate the impact of this dominant ethos.

The argument that the system self corrects by means of a review of negative decisions, with the high numbers of successful reviews illustrating that the system works, is perverse. Rather, such data indicate that large numbers of eligible individuals have wrongly being denied access to the BTEA, while the ongoing information shortage (evidenced in chapter seven) ensures that it is only those applicants who have appropriate levels of cultural and or social capital who are likely to look for a review in such instances. The implementation of qualifying criteria needs to be uniform and consistent throughout the country and placing the BTEA on a statutory basis would place more responsibility on civil servants to do just that.

12) **Challenge the dominant ideology of the undeserving poor.**

I am very mindful that the biggest challenge to the adoption (and significantly the implementation) of these recommendations may lie in causing people to focus on the systemic rather than the individual causes of social exclusion. “All civil servants have a responsibility to create a working environment in which differences are respected and in which all people - staff, clients and customers - are valued as individuals” (Government of Ireland, 2002b). However this thesis has demonstrated that this is not always the reality in DSFA offices. I recommend that all front line DSFA staff dealing with welfare recipients be made aware of the structural constraints, which maintain welfare dependency, through the provision of training courses. There are
international precedents in this area, with class, and cultural sensitivity training having been implemented for example in the US education system, civil service and military (see Atkinson 1999), while such training has also proved to be beneficial in improving the treatment of asylum seekers in Scotland (see Barclay et al. 2003). In Ireland there is currently a training programme for access officers in public service organisations. The objectives of this programme are “to increase awareness of disability in the context of providing quality customer service, to identify barriers and the processes for effecting change within an organisation, and to develop guidelines for ‘practicable and appropriate’ assistance” (Institute of Public Administration 2008). A similar programme for DSFA officers (to increase awareness of the structural constraints which maintain welfare dependency) would significantly impact on a culture, which has internalised an individualistic understanding of social exclusion.

13) Wholesale changes must be made to the education system.
The implementation of these recommendations will impact positively on the ability of the BTEA to address social exclusion. However this thesis has illustrated that the BTEA (as it is presently delivered) can only address individual exclusion. Extending the eligibility criteria for the scheme (even in conjunction with my recommendations) will thus only have a limited effect, as there are still a limited number of 3rd level places for which all of these potential BTEA applicants are competing (see Action Group on Access 2001; Grummell 2007; Devereux 2006). Addressing the exclusion of welfare recipients via 3rd level education therefore also requires wholesale changes to the education system as it stands in its current ideological position (Lynch 1999; Tormey 2007).

I recommend the implementation of policies which seek to achieve equality of outcomes in place of the current preoccupation with equality of opportunity, which has done little to reduce relative class inequality in education (see O’Connell, Clancy and McCoy 2006) and in fact contributes to its maintainence (Lynch 1999; Grummell; Tormey 2007). There is a need for a considerably greater number of reserved 3rd level places in particular (Action Group on Access 2001). Additionally I recommend the extension of the BTEA in conjuction with the waiving of tuition fees and entitlement to grants for part time courses (Action Group on Access 2001), where places may prove to be more readily available. Finally, serious consideration needs to be given to
the reintroduction of college tuition fees for those earning above a certain income threshold, with the monies raised being ringfenced to provide access to 3rd level for those who have been disadvantaged by the current education system (Department of Education and Science 2003, pp24-31). While the Minister for Education recently announced that the reintroduction of fees is back on the agenda, his logic for such a move is to fund a shortfall in the budgets of universities (Collins 2008). In essence such a move, in this context, has major Neoliberal overtones and the reintroduction of fees in such a manner would have no effect on the participation of disadvantaged sectors of Irish society. Fees should only be reintroduced for those that can afford to pay them and the monies raised should be used to fund access for underrepresented groups at all levels of the education system.

It is vital that we recognise the importance of eventually removing the need for alternative routes into 3rd level education by addressing the inequities that exist from preschool through to the senior cycle of 2nd level education (Tormey 2007; Lynch 1999). Until such a transformation occurs, we must rely on programmes such as the BTEA. Accordingly we must do everything possible to ensure that the potential of such schemes is maximised, something which unfortunately is not occuring at present (Power 2008; Power 2006).

8.4 Final Comments:
The aim of this thesis was to investigate the dynamics of persistent class inequality in the Irish welfare to education programme, the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA), and the impact of this scheme on class-based exclusion. In doing so an original macro – micro conflict theory approach was chosen for its comprehensiveness and flexibility. I strongly believe that the value of employing this theoretical perspective and its explanatory capabilities are evidenced in the resulting comprehensive account of the experiences of BTEA participants, the benefits they receive from participating on the scheme, and the obstacles that they have to overcome in order to participate. My analysis of the BTEA scheme using this approach supports a re-evaluation of the value and significance of welfare to education programmes, and it has allowed me to develop a number of policy recommendations to improve both the take up and effectiveness of the BTEA scheme. These policy recommendations are particularly relevant in the Irish case given the dearth of independent research that has been
carried out on the BTEA to date. I hold that the qualitative nature of my research enabled me to move beyond the existing boundaries of my chosen theoretical framework, incorporating factors, which were brought to light by the participants. This thesis offers a significant contribution to policymakers as a consequence of its novelty in the national context and to theorists working in this area. This thesis has added to our understanding of the dynamics of welfare to education programmes in the era of the post-welfare state. I offer a number of theoretically transferable and original conclusions, such as the vital role of cultural and social capital in accessing information and / or entitlements, the existence and impact of power ritual interactions, and the strategies that have been devised by welfare recipients to counteract the dominant position of welfare officers in these interactions.


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Department of Social and Family Affairs. (2008 b) *Weekly collection of payments will ensure that those who are entitled to benefits get them – Hanafin Over €500million is targeted in welfare savings this year through fraud and control measures* [Press release], 21 July, available: [http://www.welfare.ie/press/pr08/pr130708.html](http://www.welfare.ie/press/pr08/pr130708.html) [accessed 22 July 2008].


Kearney, M. (2006) RE: Request for Interview for PhD Research, email to Martin Power (martin.j.power@ul.ie), 22 March [accessed 22 March 2006].


Lahiffe, F. (2006 b) *RE: Request for Interview for PhD Research*, email to Martin Power (martin.j.power@ul.ie), 03 April [accessed 03 April 2006].


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Power, M. J. (2006 c) *RE: BTEA Dept SFA*, email to Olga Murphy (olga@lmr.ie), 19 October 2006 [accessed 19 October 2006].


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APPENDIX I
INFORMATION LETTERS, INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENTS, NON DISCLOSURE OF CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION DOCUMENT, & RECRUITMENT POSTER

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

KEY INFORMANTS INFORMATION LETTER

Researcher: Martin Power
Department of Sociology
University of Limerick
Limerick

Contacts: Phone: 086-316---
Email: martin.j.power@ul.ie

Please read the following information sheet in order that you will have an informed insight into the nature of the study that you are being asked to participate in, the purpose and aims of my research, the procedures of the interviewing process and your rights as a participant. If there is something that I have not addressed and you would like further clarification feel free to get in touch with me at the above contacts.

Title of Study:
“The Back To Education Allowance: Implications For Social Inclusion.”

- I am undertaking this project with the aim of examining the impact of the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) on access to third level education and, thus, on the social inclusion of people with disabilities, single parents and the long term unemployed. The impetus for this proposed study lies in the need for an informed basis to changes in the Back to Education Allowance. There is no independent empirical research against which to judge the impact of any future alterations. There is a dearth of information regarding the adequacy of the payment itself, the significance of aspects such as the retention of other non-pay benefits and payments; and the influence of eligibility criteria.

- The research process relies on individuals volunteering to participate in an interviewing process carried out by myself. The interviews, conducted in a one-to-one basis are not structured around a formal questionnaire but will involve the discussion of certain topics. The interview process will be recorded and transcribed. With your permission, I will reproduce quotes from the transcriptions in the course of writing up my research. The material, tapes and transcriptions will be held confidentially and destroyed by 2011.
I will request participants to volunteer for one on one interviews. The interview will take place in a quiet and suitable environment where the confidentiality and privacy of the participant can be upheld. The process will consist of an interview lasting up to 1 hour. In this interview I will seek to explore the effectiveness of the BTEA in aiding the entry of its target groups to third level education. We will speak about several topics including

- your assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the scheme with regard to supporting the educational careers of its recipients.
- Whether and how the November 2003 changes to the BTEA affected students who were already in the system as well as those wishing to avail of the scheme.
- The relative significance of financial versus other types of support (e.g. transport, crèches, accessibility) on the capacity of the target groups to participate in the scheme.
- The value of welfare to education programmes.
- The increasing need for 3rd level qualifications to compete in the modern labour market

There is no obligation for you to participate in the study. If you do decide to participate you have the freedom to leave at any time and end your participation. There is no obligation on you to complete the research.

As a researcher I will be working under the supervision of a supervisor and they will have access to written reports throughout the research process. I may have another person transcribe the tapes but you will be notified if this occurs and that person will also be bound by this agreement.

The results of this research will form the basis of my research thesis and will be used in academic publications.

You are free to contact me at any time to discuss the research and your participation. If you would like to participate in the study please feel free to contact me at any of the following:

Phone: 086-316----
Email: martin.j.power@ul.ie

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact

The Chairman of the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee
c/o Vice President Academic and Registrar’s Office
University of Limerick
Limerick
Tel: (061) 202022
BTEA PARTICIPANTS INFORMATION LETTER:

Researcher:       Contacts:
Martin Power       Phone: 086-316----
Department of Sociology       Email: martin.j.power@ul.ie
University of Limerick
Limerick

Please read the following information sheet in order that you will have an informed insight into the nature of the study that you are being asked to participate in, the purpose and aims of my research, the procedures of the interviewing process and your rights as a participant. If there is something that I have not addressed and you would like further clarification feel free to get in touch with me at the above contacts.

Title of Study:
“The Back To Education Allowance: Implications For Social Inclusion.”

- I am undertaking this project with the aim of examining the impact of the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) on access to third level education and, thus, on the social inclusion of people with disabilities, single parents and the long term unemployed. The impetus for this proposed study lies in the need for an informed basis to changes in the Back to Education Allowance. There is no independent empirical research against which to judge the impact of any future alterations. There is a dearth of information regarding the adequacy of the payment itself, the significance of aspects such as the retention of other non-pay benefits and payments; and the influence of eligibility criteria. I aim to address this by exploring the issue with members of the three groups mentioned above.

- The research process relies on individuals volunteering to participate in an interviewing process carried out by myself. The interviews, conducted in a group situation and on a one-to-one basis are not structured around a formal questionnaire but will involve the discussion of certain topics. The interview process will be recorded and transcribed. With your permission, I will reproduce anonymous quotes from the transcriptions in the course of writing up my research. At all times my aim is to protect your anonymity. All participants will be given pseudonyms to be used in the writing up process. At no time will your identity or any identifying details, for example, your name or address, be visible within any written reports. The material, tapes and transcriptions will be held confidentially and destroyed by 2011.
• The group interview will involve about 8 to 10 people, who like yourself have applied for (and received / not received) the BTEA. It will involve discussing topics such as:
  o the effectiveness of the BTEA in aiding the entry of its target groups to third level education.
  o an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the scheme with regard to supporting the educational careers of its recipients.
  o the role of unequal access to education in the reproduction of inequalities in Ireland.
  o Whether and how the November 2003 changes to the BTEA affected students who were already in the system as well as those wishing to avail of the scheme.
  o Whether and how the redressing of the November 2003 changes to the BTEA in the most recent budget have affected students who were already in the system as well as those wishing to avail of the scheme.
  o The relative significance of financial versus other types of support (e.g. transport, crèches, accessibility) on the capacity of the target groups to participate in the scheme.

• The group interview will take place in a quiet environment where the confidentiality and privacy of the participants can be upheld. The focus group will last up to 1 ½ hours.

• Following the focus group, I may request participants to volunteer for one on one interviews. The interview will take place in a quiet and suitable environment where the confidentiality and privacy of the participant can be upheld. The process will consist of an initial interview lasting up to 1 ½ hours with the possibility of a second follow up interview of 1-2 hours to take place a number of months after the initial interview is finished. In these interviews I will seek to explore your individual experience of the Back to Education Allowance.

• There is no obligation for you to participate in the study. If after our initial meeting you do not wish to participate you are free to withdraw. If you do decide to participate you have the freedom to leave at any time and end your participation. There is no obligation on you to complete the research.

• As a researcher I will be working under the supervision of a supervisor and they will have access to written reports throughout the research process. I guarantee that should you agree to be interviewed, your name or any other identifying sections of the interview will be changed to protect your personal identity. I may have another person transcribe the tapes but you will be notified if this occurs and that person will also be bound by this agreement.
• The results of this research will form the basis of my research thesis and will be used in academic publications.

• You are free to contact me at any time to discuss the research and your participation. Obviously there is no pressure to be involved in this project, although any help or assistance you could provide would be very much appreciated. If you would like to participate in the study please feel free to contact me at any of the following:

  **Phone:** 086-316----
  **Email:** martin.j.power@ul.ie

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact

_The Chairman of the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee_

c/o Vice President Academic and Registrar’s Office

_University of Limerick_

_Limerick_

_Tel: (061) 202022_
Informed consent form for participation in focus group

Researcher:

Name: Martin Power
Department of Sociology
University of Limerick
Limerick

Email Address: martin.j.power@ul.ie
Phone contact: 086-3169292

Title of research study

“The Back To Education Allowance: Implications For Social Inclusion.”

The purpose of this project is:

• to examine the impact of the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) on access to third level education and, thus, on the social inclusion of people with disabilities, single parents and the long term unemployed.
• To generate grounded recommendations to optimise the positive impact of the scheme upon social inclusion.

Before signing this sheet, you will have been provided with a written description of my research project. The purpose of this form is gain your consent to use information gathered from you; to acknowledge that you have been informed of the purpose and aims of the research; that you understand the interviewing procedures involved; and that you are aware of your rights as a research participant as outlined in the participant information sheet. Please take at least 48 hours to read and consider the consent form, before signing this consent form and informing me of your decision.

Giving your consent by signing this form confirms that you have read the information sheet but does not, in any way, mean that you are bound to participate indefinitely. You may decline to take part or withdraw at any time. I guarantee that, should you agree to be interviewed, your name and any other identifying data will be excluded from any publications to protect your personal identity. Furthermore, should you give your permission to allow a person other than the researcher to transcribe the tapes of your interview, they will be required to sign a non-disclosure agreement. However, if you so wish, I will transcribe your interview personally.
• I agree to and understand the terms of participation within the study
  Respondent ___________________________ Date ________________

• I agree to and understand the terms of participation within the study
  Researcher ___________________________ Date ________________

• I give permission for a person, other than the researcher, to transcribe the tapes of my interview
  Respondent ___________________________ Date ________________
Informed consent form for participation in one-to-one interview
(BTEA Participants)

Researcher:

Name: Martin Power
Department of Sociology
University of Limerick
Limerick

Email Address: martin.j.power@ul.ie
Phone contact: 086-3169292

Title of research study

“The Back To Education Allowance: Implications For Social Inclusion.”

The purpose of this project is:

- to examine the impact of the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) on access to third level education and, thus, on the social inclusion of people with disabilities, single parents and the long term unemployed.
- To generate grounded recommendations to optimise the positive impact of the scheme upon social inclusion.

Before signing this sheet, you will have been provided with a written description of my research project. The purpose of this form is gain your consent to use information gathered from you; to acknowledge that you have been informed of the purpose and aims of the research; that you understand the interviewing procedures involved; and that you are aware of your rights as a research participant as outlined in the participant information sheet. Please take at least 48 hours to read and consider the consent form, before signing this consent form and informing me of your decision.

Giving your consent by signing this form confirms that you have read the information sheet but does not, in any way, mean that you are bound to participate indefinitely. You may decline to take part or withdraw at any time. I guarantee that, should you agree to be interviewed, you may choose how you wish to be referred to. Furthermore, should you give your permission to allow a person other than the researcher to transcribe the tapes of your interview; they will be required to sign a non-disclosure agreement. However, if you so wish, I will transcribe your interview personally.
• I agree to and understand the terms of participation within the study
  Respondent ___________________________ Date _____________

• I agree to and understand the terms of participation within the study
  Researcher ___________________________ Date _____________

• I give permission for a person, other than the researcher, to transcribe the tapes of my interview
  Respondent ___________________________ Date _____________
Informed consent form for participation in one-to-one interview  
(Key Informants)

Researcher:  
Name: Martin Power  
Department of Sociology  
University of Limerick  
Limerick  
Email Address: martin.j.power@ul.ie  
Phone contact: 086-3169292

Title of research study  
“The Back To Education Allowance: Implications For Social Inclusion.”

The purpose of this project is:

- to examine the impact of the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) on access to third level education and, thus, on the social inclusion of people with disabilities, single parents and the long term unemployed.
- To generate grounded recommendations to optimise the positive impact of the scheme upon social inclusion.

Before signing this sheet, you will have been provided with a written description of my research project. The purpose of this form is gain your consent to use information gathered from you; to acknowledge that you have been informed of the purpose and aims of the research; that you understand the interviewing procedures involved; and that you are aware of your rights as a research participant as outlined in the participant information sheet. Please take at least 48 hours to read and consider the consent form, before signing this consent form and informing me of your decision.

Giving your consent by signing this form confirms that you have read the information sheet but does not, in any way, mean that you are bound to participate indefinitely. You may decline to take part or withdraw at any time. I guarantee that, should you agree to be interviewed, your name and any other identifying data will be excluded from any publications to protect your personal identity. Furthermore, should you give your permission to allow a person other than the researcher to transcribe the tapes of your interview, they will be required to sign a non-disclosure agreement. However, if you so wish, I will transcribe your interview personally.
• I agree to and understand the terms of participation within the study
  Respondent ___________________________ Date _____________

• I agree to and understand the terms of participation within the study
  Researcher ___________________________ Date _____________

• I give permission for a person, other than the researcher, to transcribe the tapes of my interview
  Respondent ___________________________ Date _____________
Non-disclosure of confidential information agreement

I, ____________________, undertake to receive audio taped interviews with participants in the study "The Back To Education Allowance: Implications For Social Inclusion" for the sole purpose of transcribing these tapes to text for return to Martin Power, the researcher.

In doing so, I, ____________________, shall not publish any information gained as a result of listening to and transcribing the taped interviews. Additionally, I ____________________ will not disclose to anyone else any information gained as a result of listening to and transcribing the taped interviews entrusted to me for the duration of the transcription. This restriction shall continue to apply after the termination of this agreement without limit in point of time.

Signed ____________________

Date__________________

Witness (Researcher): ____________________

Date: ______________
“The Back to Education Allowance: Implications For Social Inclusion.”

Are you

- An undergraduate in receipt of the Back to Education Allowance?
- A final year undergraduate in receipt of the Back to Education Allowance?
- A postgraduate who had been in receipt of the Back to Education Allowance as an undergraduate?
- A successful applicant for the Back to Education Allowance who was unable to take up the scheme?
- An unsuccessful applicant for the Back to Education Allowance?

I am examining the impact of the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) on access to third level education and, thus, on the social inclusion of people with disabilities, single parents and the long term unemployed. As such I require individuals fitting the above criteria to volunteer to participate in an interviewing process carried out by myself. If you are interested in taking part in this study please contact me for further details at the number or e-mail below. All replies will remain confidential.

Researcher:       Contacts:       
Martin Power     Phone: 086-316----
Department of Sociology     Email: martin.j.power@ul.ie
University of Limerick       
Limerick
Interview Guide Civil Servant

Clarify that you only want to discuss the BTEA in relation to third level education, including both ITs and Universities.

(In each case, seek reasons drawn from his experience of working with the scheme not personal opinion).

1. Can you tell me about how your own job relates to the BTEA?

2. What, in your understanding, is the primary objective of the BTEA?

3. Overall, how effective do you think that the BTEA has been in achieving its objectives? (Remind him of the objectives he mentioned and other stated objectives if necessary)

4. Do higher levels of education make it easier to find and sustain employment?
   a. If yes: is this reflected in his experience of working on the BTEA, would he be aware of the impact of the scheme on the employment rates of applicants once they have finished their third level education?
   b. On page 5 of the report the working group say “there will continue to be significant growth for most occupations in all regions of the country. In particular, occupations which would require higher levels of education and training in the future. What levels of education are we talking about?

5. Given your experience with the scheme, what do you think are the strengths of the BTEA?

6. And its weaknesses …?

7. How effective do you think the levels of financial support given to BTEA students are? (Seek reasons drawn from his experience of working with the scheme not personal opinion)

8. The administration costs for 2003 were €372,000 with programme costs amounting to €38.3 million in 2003. However a significant element of the programme costs would have occurred from the claimants entitlement to their primary social welfare payment. Am I correct in thinking so that the scheme is not
costing that much more than if the individuals were just in receipt of their normal payment?

9. What about the retention of secondary benefits?
   a. Why?/Why not? (Seek reasons drawn from his experience of working with the scheme not personal opinion)

10. Do you think the availability of payments over the summer months impacts on the effectiveness of the scheme in achieving its objectives?
    a. If yes, how? Seek evidence related to changes in numbers of applicants, rate of third level drop out of BTEA students etc.

11. Do you think that incorporating other, non-financial, forms of assistance into the BTEA would impact on its effectiveness in achieving its objectives?
    a. If yes: What? Why? And how is the absence of same currently limiting the effective of the scheme?
    b. If no: Why not? Are non-financial forms of assistance not required? Not the state’s job to provide? Or should be provided by some other part of the state?

12. On page 10 of the report the Group’s view is that public monies should continue to be spent on the provision of educational and income supports for those who are welfare dependent and most distant from the labour market. It also recognises the need for a system of support to address any gaps in existing service provision, would that include helping people to obtain places?

13. Do you think that providing successful applicants to the scheme with assistance to obtain a place in third level education would impact on its effectiveness?

14. It was the view of the group that there should be the development of educational support? What did you mean by this?

15. The BTEA is currently open to the unemployed, people with disabilities and single parents. Would you extend eligibility to any other groups?
    a. If yes, to whom and why?

16. Would you limit eligibility further?
    a. If yes, who would you exclude and why?

17. Do you think that altering the waiting period required for eligibility would impact on the effectiveness of the scheme?
    a. Why?/Why not?

18. What about altering the age requirement?
    a. Why?/Why not?

19. You are unable to talk about the changes made to the scheme in 2003 and 2004. Is that correct?
20. Do you think these changes impacted on the capacity of the scheme to meet its objectives?

21. How would you evaluate the sufficiency of data on BTEA at present?

22. Are there further data that you think might usefully be collected to help strategic or operational decision making with regard to the BTEA?
   a. If yes: can you think of any reason why this data isn’t already available?
   b. If no: What about data that might assist you in your own work regarding the BTEA?

23. I take it then that you don’t wish to talk about any aspect of the recent high court case?

24. Can I just ask you a few quick questions specifically about the report of the working group?

24. On page 9 the report talks of where claims were refused and a figure of over 60% of appeals were successful in 2003/2004. IS that figure high? Why would somebody succeed on appeal? One of the grounds mentioned in the report was Applicants had not been informed of the 2003 change with regard to the postgraduate option.

25. The least popular course pursued at third level is at Higher Diploma level. P.39 Why then was that the postgraduate option that remains?

26. Can you tell me a little bit about the option that the working group decided on as being the way forward for the BTEA scheme?

25. Overall, how important do you think that the BTEA scheme is to addressing social exclusion in this country?

26. Is there anything else you would like to add?
**Interview Guide: Minister O’ Dea**

1. To begin with, can I just talk to you for a few minutes about education generally? What do you see as the major role of education in today’s society?

2. Does increased investment in education bring automatic economic benefits for society as a whole or just the individuals concerned?

3. Given that the IDA said that over 50% of new jobs created here last year required 3rd level qualifications, is it fair to say that those without 3rd level qualifications run a greater risk of experiencing social exclusion in the future?

4. What is your opinion on the view that people need to continuously update their educational qualifications so as to maintain employability for the duration of their working lives?

5. If we move on to talk specifically about the BTEA, what in your understanding, is the primary objective of the BTEA?

6. What do you think are the strengths of the BTEA?

7. And its weaknesses?

8. For a long period the actual qualifying criteria under successive governments was extended, extended, extended, so that more people could avail of it. One of the things that struck me when looking at it was that there was never an approach that gave any direct assistance to people towards applying. It was still left primarily up to the individual to find their own place and after that then the scheme kicks in.

9. Do you think the changes made in 2003 impacted positively or negatively on the capacity of the scheme to meet its objectives?

10. In December 2003 Michael Ring said you spoke at a committee and said that the changes the Minister was making are wrong and they will destroy the scheme. Was that an accurate reflection of your views?

11. Would you agree or disagree with the following assessment? On the one hand the government promotes the idea of life long learning, on the other it has (for example, through the removal of the postgraduate option of the BTEA) restricted the opportunity for lifelong learning for certain sections of the population?

12. How would you respond to those who argue that it makes far more financial sense for the government to fund those in receipt of the BTEA who wish to undertake postgraduate studies for at least one year, as it increases the economic return that it gets on its initial investment?

13. Could you ever see a situation where we would reintroduce tuition fees for those earning say in excess of €100,000, with the revenue created being funnelled to support the third level education of those from the lower socio-economic groups? Probe: Why or why not? Is there anything else you would like to add?
Interview Guide: Joan Burton

To begin with, thinking about education generally? What do you see as the major role of education in today’s society?

How do feel about the idea that education rather than promoting meritocracy / equality is actually responsible for the reproduction of inequality?

Does increased investment in education bring automatic economic benefits for society as a whole or just the individuals concerned?

Given that the IDA said that over 50% of new jobs created here last year required 3rd level qualifications, is it fair to say that those without 3rd level qualifications run a greater risk of experiencing social exclusion in the future?

What is your opinion on the view that people need to continuously update their educational qualifications so as to maintain employability for the duration of their working lives?

What in your understanding is the primary objective of the BTEA?

What do you think are the strengths of the BTEA?

And its weaknesses?

You were Minister of State for Social Welfare in the Labour – Fianna Fáil coalition government after the 1992 election. That government continued to extend the scheme to a broader base of social welfare recipient. What was the thinking behind that decision?

One of the things that struck me when looking at it was that there was never an approach that gave any direct assistance to people towards applying. It was still left primarily up to the individual to find their own place and after that then the scheme kicks in. Why was that never considered as a strategy?

Do you think the changes made in 2003 impacted positively or negatively on the capacity of the scheme to meet its objectives?

Would you agree or disagree with the following assessment? On the one hand the government promotes the idea of life long learning, on the other it has (for example, through the removal of the postgraduate option of the BTEA) restricted the opportunity for lifelong learning for certain sections of the population?

How would you respond to those who argue that it makes far more financial sense for the government to fund those in receipt of the BTEA who wish to undertake postgraduate studies for at least one year, as it increases the economic return that it gets on its initial investment?

It’s been said that some of the senior civil servants in the Department of Finance essentially only look forward 12 months, so short term ism is still too pronounced in
the Department of finance and this frustrates all spending ministers. Did you find this to be the case when you were in government?

Does the fact that the scheme sort of sits between two departments impact on it negatively? In that it is administered by Social Welfare but it is primarily an education scheme?

Could you ever see a situation where we would reintroduce tuition fees for those earning say in excess of €100,000, with the revenue created being funnelled to support the third level education of those from the lower socio-economic groups? Probe: Why or why not?

Is there anything else you would like to add?
Interview Guide Michael Ring:

To begin with, can I just talk to you about education generally? What do you see as the major role of education in today’s society?

Does increased investment in education bring automatic economic benefits for society as a whole or just the individuals concerned?

Given that the IDA said that over 50% of new jobs created here last year required 3rd level qualifications, is it fair to say that those without 3rd level qualifications run a greater risk of experiencing social exclusion in the future?

What is your opinion on the view that people need to continuously update their educational qualifications so as to maintain employability for the duration of their working lives?

What in your understanding is the primary objective of the BTEA?

What do you think are the strengths of the BTEA?

And its weaknesses?

One of the things that struck me when looking at it was that there was never an approach that gave any direct assistance to people towards applying. It was still left primarily up to the individual to find their own place and after that then the scheme kicks in. Would it benefit the scheme to consider such a strategy?

You were quite vocal in the Dáil about the changes made in 2003. Can you tell me why you believed so strongly that these changes impacted negatively on the capacity of the scheme to meet its objectives?

In May 2003 you said Mary Coughlin had let down the weak and poor in our society. She caved in to the Minister for Finance and the Progressive Democrats. What did you mean by that?

I also noted that you and Deputy McGrath asked for statistics on those participating in the scheme in November 2003. The answers you received didn’t give all of the information requested as that information was said to be unavailable. Given this are you confident that government has access to enough data on the scheme in order to make an informed decision on any changes it makes to the scheme subsequently?

Would you agree or disagree with the following assessment? On the one hand the government promotes the idea of life long learning, on the other it has (for example, through the removal of the postgraduate option of the BTEA) restricted the opportunity for lifelong learning for certain sections of the population?

From talking to others while doing this research, everybody, be it politicians, civil servants or people on the scheme, all think how useful the scheme is and they all seem to think that it gives a really good return on the investment that the government is making in those participating in the scheme. Thinking in terms of the post-grad
option, the fact that 3rd level is going to become a necessity in the near future, so would it make more financial sense in terms of return on the investment for the government to fund those in receipt of the BTEA who wish to undertake postgraduate studies for at least one year, as it increases the economic return that it gets on its initial investment?

It’s been said that some of the senior civil servants in the Department of Finance essentially only look forward 12 months, so short termism is still too pronounced in the Department of finance and this frustrates all spending ministers. Do you think this is in fact the case?

Would you think that the Minister runs a Department or does the civil service effectively bend the ear of the Minister enough so that they have their way?

Something else then that I was just thinking of… does the fact that the scheme sort of sits between two departments impact on it negatively? In that it is administered by Social Welfare but it is primarily an education scheme? When looking at the Dáil debates when people have asked questions about the scheme sometimes the answers were like ‘Well that’s not for me that’s for the Minister of Education’ or ‘That’s not for me that’s for the Minister of Social Welfare’, so does the fact that the scheme sits between those two departments impact in any way?

Could you ever see a situation where we would reintroduce tuition fees for those earning say in excess of €100,000, with the revenue created being funnelled to support the third level education of those from the lower socio-economic groups?

Probe: Why or why not?

Is there anything else you would like to add?
Final Unemployed Focus Group Interview Guide:

What were you doing before you came to college?
Probe: Can you tell me how long you were unemployed prior to coming to college?

How did you find out about the BTEA?
Probe: Who did you go to for information?
Probe: Did you find it easy or difficult to get the information you needed?
Probe: Did you find it easy or difficult to understand the information provided?
Probe: For any misinformation or points which lack clarity of which you are aware.

Tell me about the process involved in getting on the scheme.

Why did you decide to go to 3rd level rather than go on a back to work programme?
Probe: Had you always planned on going to third level?
Probe: Would you have been able to go to third level without the BTEA?
Probe: Do you think higher levels of education make it easier to find and sustain employment?
Probe: What is your opinion on the view that people need to continuously update their educational qualifications so as to maintain employability for the duration of their working lives?
Probe: Do you think that some people purposefully become unemployed or sustain their period of unemployment for longer than necessary in order to access the BTEA?
Probe: Did any of you use this strategy?

Did any of enter 3rd level via an Access course? Where did you get the information for that?

How did you decide on your course of study?
Probe: What factors were important in choosing your course of study?

What has been your experience of the BTEA?
Probe: what do you think are the strengths of the BTEA?
Probe: And its weaknesses …?
Probe: Have you experienced any interruptions to the BTEA?
Probe: Have you experienced any delays in payment?
Probe: Have you experienced any other difficulties?

Is it a fair assessment to say that in order to access this or to get a benefit from the actual scheme you have to have adequate and accurate information?

Some of those in the other groups said they found that there is an attitude they are faced with when they go into the social welfare office which sees people on social welfare, especially since the onset of the Celtic Tiger, as being at fault for their own situation. Have any of you experienced such an attitude?

Does the fact that the eligibility criteria for the scheme can be changed from year to year impact on your participation at 3rd level?
Probe: Have changes to eligibility criteria impacted you at all in the past?
How effective do you think the levels of financial support given to BTEA students are?

What about the retention of secondary benefits?
Why? Why not?
Probe: How important was the retention of secondary benefits to your decision to go to Third Level?

Do you think that incorporating other, non-financial, forms of assistance into the BTEA would impact on its effectiveness?

Do you think that providing successful applicants to the scheme with assistance to obtain a place in third level education would impact on its effectiveness?

How did the changes made to the scheme in 2003 and 2004 impact on your participation at 3rd level?

Do you think the availability of payments over the summer month’s impacts on the effectiveness of the scheme?

Have any of you had to sign on again during the summer?

How did you find this experience?

How did the changes made to the scheme in 2003 and 2004 impact on your future career plans?

Would you like to continue on to postgraduate study?
Probe: Why/why not?

Do you still plan to go on to postgraduate study?
Probe: Why/why not?

How do you feel that your employment prospects have been impacted by this decision?

Would you agree that the government promotes the idea of life long learning equally for all sections of our population?

Something that was said to me in one of the interviews in Galway was that by removing the post-grad option it was a win-win situation for the state. The state has looked at this and said … you really want to do a post-grad now and because you might have the means you may well do it off your own back. So the state is saying that if you don’t go on to 4th level then grand because he is going to start contributing to the coffers now and if he does decide to go on to 4th level we don’t have to fund it and we will still get the benefit when he finishes and starts contributing at a higher level later. So it’s a win-win situation by taking away that option. What are your opinions on this?
Are you aware of the verdict in the recent high court case taken by Michael Power?

What do you think will be the impact of that decision on the scheme? 
Probe: Does the verdict in the recent high court case taken by Michael Power places pressure on the Government to provide restitution to the other 6,500 mature students in the same position?

The primary objective of the Third Level Allowance was the removal of the barrier to participation in third level education faced by the long-term unemployed. Do you think it has achieved this objective?

Overall, how important do you think that the BTEA scheme is to addressing social exclusion in this country?

Is there anything else you would like to add?
**Final Lone Parents Focus Group Interview Guide:**

What was your last job?
Do any of you have a partner or someone else helping to support you?
What is that persons occupation?
Are any of you living in households that are entirely dependent on welfare?
What were you doing before you came to college?

Were you unemployed prior to coming to college?

How did you find out about the BTEA?
Probe: Who did you go to for information?
Probe: Did you find it easy or difficult to get the information you needed?
Probe: Did you find it easy or difficult to understand the information provided?
Probe: For any misinformation or points which lack clarity of which you are aware.

Tell me about the process involved in getting on the scheme.

Why did you decide to go to 3rd level rather than go on a back to work programme?
Probe: Had you always planned on going to third level?
Probe: Would you have been able to go to third level without the BTEA?
Probe: Do you think higher levels of education make it easier to find and sustain employment?

Probe: What is your opinion on the view that people need to continuously update their educational qualifications so as to maintain employability for the duration of their working lives?

How did you decide on your course of study?
Probe: What factors were important in choosing your course of study?

Would you have chosen an evening degree (and worked as well) if this was subject to the same financial support as day time courses?

Are people being forced into full-time day-time education because of the exclusion of evening courses from the supports?

What has been your experience of the BTEA?
Probe: what do you think are the strengths of the BTEA?
Probe: And its weaknesses … ?
Probe: Have you experienced any interruptions to the BTEA?
Probe: Have you experienced any delays in payment?
Probe: Have you experienced any other difficulties?

Something that came out of some of the other groups… do you think that people in government departments speak to you or treat you completely differently if you go in knowing exactly what your rights and entitlements are as opposed to going in and asking what they might be?
Does the fact that the eligibility criteria for the scheme can be changed from year to year impact on your participation at 3rd level?
Probe: Have changes to eligibility criteria impacted you at all in the past?

How effective do you think the levels of financial support given to BTEA students are?

What about the retention of secondary benefits?
    Why?/Why not?
Probe: How important was the retention of secondary benefits to your decision to go to Third Level?

Do you think that incorporating other, non-financial, forms of assistance into the BTEA would impact on its effectiveness?

Do you think that providing successful applicants to the scheme with assistance to obtain a place in third level education would impact on its effectiveness?

For a lot of potential mature students do you think there is this idea ‘oh 3rd level that is something that is something that is way above me’ but then once you actually get hear you realise that it is not that hard at all, but should there be something done to address that sort of concern among potential mature students, that they wouldn’t be able for it?

How did the changes made to the scheme in 2003 and 2004 impact on your participation at 3rd level?

How did the changes made to the scheme in 2003 and 2004 impact on your future career plans?

Would you like to continue on to postgraduate study?
Probe: Why/why not?

Do you think that because of the courses that you are doing you need to specialise after your primary degree, by doing a post-grad course?

Do you still plan to go on to postgraduate study?
Probe: Why/why not?

How do you feel that your employment prospects have been impacted by this decision?

Would you agree that the government promotes the idea of life long learning equally for all sections of our population?

Overall, how important do you think that the BTEA scheme is to addressing social exclusion in this country?

Is there anything else you would like to add?
Final Disability Focus Group Interview Guide:

What were you doing before you came to college?
What was your last job?
Do any of you have a partner or someone else helping to support you?
What is that persons occupation?
Are any of you living in households that are entirely dependent on welfare?

How did you find out about the BTEA?
Probe: Who did you go to for information?
Probe: Did you find it easy or difficult to get the information you needed?
Probe: Did you find it easy or difficult to understand the information provided?
Probe: For any misinformation or points which lack clarity of which you are aware.

Tell me about the process involved in getting on the scheme.

Why did you decide to go to 3rd level rather than go on a back to work programme?
Probe: Had you always planned on going to third level?
Probe: Would you have been able to go to third level without the BTEA?
Probe: Do you think higher levels of education make it easier to find and sustain employment?
Probe: What is your opinion on the view that people need to continuously update their educational qualifications so as to maintain employability for the duration of their working lives?

How did you decide on your course of study?
Probe: What factors were important in choosing your course of study?

Would you have chosen an evening degree (and worked as well) if this was subject to the same financial support as day time courses?

Are people being forced into full-time day-time education because of the exclusion of evening courses from the supports?

What has been your experience of the BTEA?
Probe: what do you think are the strengths of the BTEA?
Probe: And its weaknesses …?
Probe: Have you experienced any interruptions to the BTEA?
Probe: Have you experienced any delays in payment?
Probe: Have you experienced any other difficulties?

Does the fact that the eligibility criteria for the scheme can be changed from year to year impact on your participation at 3rd level?
Probe: Have changes to eligibility criteria impacted you at all in the past?

How effective do you think the levels of financial support given to BTEA students are?
What about the retention of secondary benefits?
   Why?/Why not?

Probe: How important was the retention of secondary benefits to your decision to go to Third Level?

Do you think that providing successful applicants to the scheme with assistance to obtain a place in third level education would impact on its effectiveness?

How did the changes made to the scheme in 2003 and 2004 impact on your participation at 3rd level?

Did the changes made to the scheme in 2003 and 2004 impact on your future career plans?

Would you like to continue on to postgraduate study?
   Probe: Why/why not?

Do you still plan to go on to postgraduate study?
   Probe: Why/why not?

How do you feel that your employment prospects have been impacted by this decision?

Would you agree that the government promotes the idea of life long learning equally for all sections of our population?

Overall, how important do you think that the BTEA scheme is to addressing social exclusion in this country?

Is there anything else you would like to add?
Initial interview guide for follow up one-to-one interviews with BTEA participants:

1. Can you tell me a bit about your family background before you came to college?

   Probe: What socio-economic group would you have been in?
   How important was education in your household?
   Did your parents have educational qualifications?
   Did your siblings have educational qualifications?

   What forms of capital did they seek: Economic, Cultural or both?

2. What did you seek to gain from going to 3rd level?

   Probe: Was the decision based on gaining a qualification, which would improve your status in society?
   Was the decision based on gaining a qualification, which would give you an economic return and improve your employability?
   Was the decision based on gaining a qualification, which would improve both of these things?

3. Can you just tell me again about the process that led you onto the scheme?

4. Can I just ask you a minute about the informed networks that you used to access the scheme, such as word of mouth from friends etc.

5. Do you think that beginning 3rd level coming from your background limits your ability to do as well at 3rd level as ‘traditional students’?

   Probe: Ask about how other students interacted with them
   Ask about how they interacted with lecturers
   Ask about whether they ever felt that their accent or mastery of academic language was ‘letting them down’

   What forms of capital did they gain?

6. What do you feel that you have gained from your time at college thus far?

   Probe: Has your status in society been affected, has your income changed, are you more confident, more of an active citizen, more assertive etc.

7. Can we just move on now to talk specifically about your interaction with social welfare officers? Would you agree that social welfare officers effectively control the course of interactions with welfare recipients?

   Probe: ask them to describe the actual interaction process

8. Facial expressions, bodily posture, and certain behaviour are seen as a powerful signifier of an individual’s social position that is recognised by other interaction participants as signs of power and authority. Would you agree with this assessment in relation to social welfare officers that you have dealt with?
Probe: Can you give examples of this from your interactions with social welfare officers

9. Does what and or who you know (cultural capital) ultimately determine whether you get access to a particular resource (info etc) in your interaction with the civil service?

10. It has been argued that people on top of an organisational structure try to arrange their subordinates so as to control their behaviour and obtain an optimal output. Is this an accurate assessment of the Department of Social Welfare?

Probe: Is there variation in the way Social Welfare Officers interact with you or is predominantly standardised? (Give example of ‘You must be new here’).

11. How does this sit with the fact that the BTEA is administrative and decisions on the qualification criteria etc are supposedly flexible and sometimes left up to the individual deciding officer?

12. One of the things that struck me from the first series of interviews was that quite a number of my respondents saw themselves in terms of class identity as belonging to a much lower socio-economic group than they actually do? Have you any opinions on why this might be?

13. Status beliefs are widely shared cultural beliefs that people in one social group are more esteemed and competent than people in another social group. Do you think this contributes to the under representation of people from socio-economic backgrounds in 3rd level?

14. What are your opinions on the belief that social welfare officers tend to assert themselves more confidently in your interactions with them whereas welfare recipients are less confident, giving even more power and influence to the welfare officer in the interaction?

15. Once welfare recipients have been constructed as the ‘Undeserving Poor’ do you think that they need to constantly show that they are worthy of societies help?

16. Do you think that people internalise this belief and see themselves as undeserving of assistance?
FOR THOSE IN FINAL FEW WEEKS, ARE THEY CONSIDERING POST
GRAD OPTIONS NOW

1) Do you plan to go on to postgraduate study now?
Probe: Why/why not? What area?

FOR THOSE WHO HAD TO SIGN ON LAST SUMMER:

1. Did you have to sign on again during the summer or were you able to source
work?
Probe: If you had to sign on how did you find this experience?

2. Were those in Social Welfare any more accommodating to you seeing as you
had just come off the BTEA?

3. Was there any delay in getting paid when you signed on again?
Probe: If there was how did this impact on you?

4. If you signed on for the summer did you work on College work for next year
by reading ahead or anything like that?

5. If you did manage to source work for the summer months do you think this
has had any impact on your college work this year, either positively or
negatively?

6. Were there any delays with your payment in September when you returned to
college?

7. Is there anything that you would like to add before we finish up?
APPENDIX III
STATISTICAL INFORMATION REQUESTED FROM DSFA

- Numbers of undergraduates in receipt of the BTEA since its inception.
- Numbers of undergraduates in each year of study in receipt of the BTEA since its inception.
- Numbers of undergraduates in receipt of the BTEA graduating each year since its inception.
- Numbers of graduates who were in receipt of the BTEA continuing onto postgraduate courses each year since its inception until that option was removed.
- Numbers of students in each year of postgraduate study in receipt of the BTEA since its inception until that option was removed.
- Numbers of students in receipt of the BTEA graduating with postgraduate qualifications since its inception until that option was removed.
- A breakdown of numbers entering which colleges as undergraduates since the inception of the BTEA and if possible what programmes those in receipt of the BTEA were pursuing (BA, BSC, MA, PHD etc) for each year of the scheme.

I was informed on April 26th 2005 by an officer from the DSFA that these statistics were unavailable.

On September 16th 2005, I requested the following information having examined the BTEA application form and seen that it requested this information.

- Numbers entering as undergraduates in receipt of the BTEA since its inception.
- A breakdown on which social welfare payment those entering as undergraduates in receipt of the BTEA had been in receipt of prior to entry for the relevant years.
- Length of time these individuals were in receipt of this payment for prior to availing of the BTEA.
• Numbers of undergraduates in each year of and in receipt of the BTEA since its inception.

• Numbers of undergraduates in receipt of the BTEA graduating each year since its inception.

• Numbers of graduates who were in receipt of the BTEA continuing onto post graduate courses each year since its inception until that option was removed.

• Numbers of students in each year of post graduate study in receipt of the BTEA since its inception until that option was removed.

• Numbers of students in receipt of the BTEA graduating with post graduate qualifications since its inception until that option was removed.

• A breakdown of numbers of BTEA recipients entering 3rd level by college since the inception of the BTEA.

• Programmes pursued by those in receipt of the BTEA (BA, BSC, MA, PHD etc) for each year of the scheme.

• Numbers of those in receipt of BTEA, signing on again after they had graduated.

I received the following e-mail on November 2nd 2005 in response to this request. The name of the individual DSFA officer has been removed to protect their identity.

----- Original Message -----  
From: "" @welfare.ie  
To:"martin j.power" <martin.j.power@ul.ie>  
Cc: "" <@welfare.ie>  
Sent: Wednesday, November 02, 2005 4:28 PM  
Subject: BTEA information  

Dear Mr. Power,

In relation to previous requests for information in relation to the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) Scheme, we have endeavoured to supply the information requested and have provided substantial data on two previous occasions. In your most recent e-mails requesting further information in relation to this scheme, you have requested the following information:
1. Numbers entering as undergraduates in receipt of the BTEA since its inception.
2. Break down of what social welfare payment those entering as undergraduates in receipt of the BTEA had been in receipt of prior to entry for the relevant years.
3. How long they were in receipt of this payment prior to availing of the BTEA.
4. Numbers in each year of study as undergraduates and in receipt of the BTEA since its inception.
5. Numbers of undergraduates in receipt of the BTEA graduating each year since its inception.
6. Numbers of graduates who were in receipt of the BTEA continuing onto postgraduate courses each year since its inception until that option was removed.
7. Numbers of students in each year of postgraduate study in receipt of the BTEA since its inception until that option was removed.
8. Numbers of students in receipt of the BTEA graduating with postgraduate qualifications since its inception until that option was removed.
9. Breakdown of numbers entering which colleges as undergraduates since the inception of the BTEA.
10. What programmes those in receipt of the BTEA were pursuing (BA, B.SC., MA, PH etc.) for each year of the scheme.
11. Numbers of those in receipt of BTEA that were signing on again after they had graduated.

Statistics relating to numbers 3, 5, 6, 8, and 11 above are not recorded by the Department and, therefore, are not available.

In 1997, AONTAS were commissioned by the Department of Social and Family Affairs to carry out a study of the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) Scheme (formerly known as the Third Level Allowance Scheme). At that time, the Department supplied, to AONTAS, details of names and addresses of participants on the scheme. AONTAS designed and issued to scheme participants a survey questionnaire and the results of this are contained in the report "Everything to Gain". Apart from names and addresses, no other information on participants were released to AONTAS.

In your e-mail you state that an extensive amount of information is requested in the application form for participation in the Back to Education Allowance Scheme and therefore should be available. The information requested at the application stage is to facilitate an informed decision by an official of the Department in determining whether the allowance is payable or not. Only selected information is recorded and maintained on a computer database. The information you have requested at 3, 5, 6, 8, and 11 above is not recorded by the Department and, therefore, cannot be readily extracted. In order to facilitate your request, it would be necessary to examine all application forms submitted by applicants to compile the relevant information sought. Such a huge volume of work would cause an unreasonable interference with the work of Employment Support Services Section.
With regard to information already supplied, we have endeavoured to supply, where available, all the information you requested i.e. history and changes to the scheme since inception, level of participation since inception and types of academic qualifications being pursued since 1997.

In relation to the other statistics requested, I regret to inform you that it is not possible at this time to provide the volume of information requested due to limited resources within the Employment Support Services. Again, this information is not readily available and to compile same would cause substantial disruption to the general working of the area.

You may choose to request this information through the Freedom of Information (FOI) process in which case a formal decision will be given to you outlining the information that is available and that can be released to you. Such a request for non-personal records under the Freedom of Information Acts incurs a fee of EUR15.00 before it can be processed. A reduced fee applies where the requester is the holder of a medical card.

Also, I would like to advise that, under the Freedom of Information Acts, where the request necessitates a substantial retrieval of records, fees may also apply in respect of the time spent searching and retrieving records that are released to you on foot of your request and in respect of the copying of any records released. If this is the case, you will be notified of the cost of same prior to the processing of your request. The rates of these fees are as follows:

* EUR20.95 per hour of search and retrieval

* EUR00.04 per sheet for a photocopy

If you wish to pursue under the Freedom of Information Acts, your request should be forwarded to the Department of Social & Family Affairs, Freedom of Information Unit, Oisin House, Pearse St., Dublin 2. The upfront fee of EUR15.00 must be enclosed before the request can be processed (EUR10.00 for medical card holders).

Yours sincerely

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This email and any files transmitted with it are confidential and intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom they are addressed. If you have received this email in error please notify the system manager.

DSFA- Virus Scanned
APPENDIX IV
BTEA APPLICATION FORM (BTE1)

Application form for
Back to Education Programme:
Back to Education Allowance Scheme (Second Level and Third Level Option), Education, Training and Development Option and Part-time Education Option.

* Please read Information Booklet - SW 70 before filling in this form.
* Please answer **all** questions and place a tick (✓) in the appropriate boxes.
* Please use BLOCK LETTERS.

Only fill in this form if you are getting Unemployment Assistance, Unemployment Benefit, Farm Assist, One-Parent Family Payment, Deserted Wife’s Allowance, Deserted Wife’s Benefit, Widow’s or Widower’s Non-Contributory Pension, Widow’s or Widower’s Contributory Pension, Prisoner’s Wife’s Allowance, Disability Benefit, Disability Allowance, Blind Pension, Invalidity Pension, Unemployability Supplement or Carer’s Allowance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part 1</th>
<th>Your own details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please state:</td>
<td>Please specify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What is your full name?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Where do you live?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. What is your telephone number (if any)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. What is your Personal Public Service Number (PPS No.) (same as RSI or Tax Number)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. What is your date of birth?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Please give details of all second level and third level courses you have completed and year(s) you got each qualification (If you have no qualifications write none)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What work experience do you have? (please give details of previous employment, if any)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
You can get Back to Education Allowance at a chosen post office or by direct payment to your bank or building society account*.

*This account must be an **active current or deposit savings** account (not a mortgage account).

Direct payment has a number of advantages:

- your allowance is lodged directly to your account on the day of payment,
- your allowance is available at a time and place that suits you, and
- you are less likely to deal with delays and queuing.

**Dealings between you and your financial institution remain confidential. The Department does not have access to your bank or building society account.**

### Direct to a bank account or building society account

If you want to get your allowance by direct payment, please give details of your bank or building society:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
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</thead>
</table>

**Name on the Account:**

The account must be in your name or jointly held by you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Account</th>
<th>Deposit Account</th>
<th>Current Account</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Account Number**

**Sort Code**

If you do not have a bank or building society account, please contact one of the main financial institutions before completing this form.

### Post office payment

If you would like to be paid by EIT using your social services card at a post office please state:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Name of post office**

**Address of post office**

**Unemployability Supplement is paid by cheque**
Please give details of course you would like to do:

9. Name and address of school or college

   College name

   College address

10. Is the course.....?

   □ 2nd Level □ 3rd Level Foundation or Access
   □ 3rd Level Undergraduate □ Approved postgraduate
   (see SW 70 for details)

11. Is the course...?

   □ FULL-TIME □ PART-TIME

12. State

   Title of course

   Type of qualification

   Awarding Body e.g. HETAC, FETAC, BTEC or College

   How long is the course? year(s)

Specify current year of course: □ 1st □ 2nd □ 3rd □ 4th

What is the start date of course?

   □ Day □ Month □ Year

What is the end date of course?

   □ Day □ Month □ Year

Note

You must give confirmation that you have registered as a full-time day student for the course above as soon as you have registered. You will only get the Back to Education Allowance or the Cost of Education Allowance when you have given this information. Please see Part 7 for address.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. What Social Welfare payment are you getting?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>14. How long have you been getting this Social Welfare payment?</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. If you are getting Unemployment Benefit, Unemployment Assistance or Farm Assist, please state name and address of the social welfare office that pays this payment</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. If you are getting a qualifying payment other than those at Q.13, please state your Claim Number</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Have you taken part in any of the following? (tick across)</td>
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<tr>
<td>If 'Yes' please state period spent on Scheme or Course</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Are you getting any of the following secondary benefits?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Are you signing or have you signed for 'credits'?</td>
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</table>
Part 5  Additional information

Please write here any additional information you may wish to give about your application.


Part 6  Declaration must be completed by you

I wish to take part in the Back to Education Programme for the duration of the course of education as outlined at Part 3 of this form. I will tell the Department of Social and Family Affairs if I do not start or finish this course as indicated.

I declare that all the details I have given are true and complete and I will tell the Department of Social and Family Affairs if my circumstances change.

Your signature  Date

(not block letters)

If you cannot sign, your mark should be made and have it witnessed. The witness should sign below:

Your signature  Date

(not block letters)

Address of witness


WARNING: Penalty for false statements or withholding information: Fine or Imprisonment or both.

If you have any difficulty filling in this form, please call into your local Social Welfare Office.
Part 7

Where to send your application

- If you are getting Unemployment Benefit, Unemployment Assistance or Farm Assist return your completed application form to your Social Welfare Local Office.

- If you are getting Disability Benefit return your application form (for BTEA only) together with the details of college registration to:

  **Back to Education Schemes**
  Gandon House
  Dublin 1

- If you are getting One-Parent Family Payment, Deserted Wife’s Allowance, Deserted Wife’s Benefit, Widows or Widowers (Non-Contributory Pension), Widow or Widowers (Contributory) Pension, Prisoners Wife’s Allowance or Blind Pension, return your completed application form, together with details of college registration to:

  **Pension Services Office**
  College Road
  Sligo

- If you are getting Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension, Unemployability Supplement or Carer’s Allowance return your completed application form together with details of college registration to:

  **Social Welfare Services Office**
  Government Buildings
  Ballinalee Road
  Longford
To be completed by your local Social Welfare Office

Social Welfare Local Office code number

Application for (please tick):  
- [ ] Second Level Option  
- [ ] Third Level Option  
- [ ] Part-time Education  
- [ ] Education, Training & Development

*Only* applications for third level option should be sent to Back to Education Schemes

Please state payment type  
- [ ] UA  
- [ ] UB  
- [ ] Credits

Please state periods of Unemployment and Cumulative Total:  

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Please give details of periods spent on FÁS, Community Employment, VTOS, BTEA, BTWA, Job Initiative, Job Assist.

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Signature of Local Officer  
(NOT block letters)  

Date
Lone-parent families ‘encouraged’ by State financial incentives

The State provides “very real financial incentives” that “may actively encourage the formation of lone-parent families”, according to the Professor Emeritus of the University of Limerick, Dr Edward Walsh.

Dr Walsh said the number of female lone-parents getting Lone-Parents’ Allowance Family Benefit “has grown from less than 3,000 in 1975 to some 80,000 now”. A single mother with two children could get as much as €25,000 from “a wide range of social and financial supports”.

In a script due to be delivered next Wednesday, but released in draft form last night, Dr Walsh said: “Clearly in ways we do much better in 2005 in looking after young lone females who become pregnant and have children than we did previously. Yet the support the State provides may have moved further than it should: very real financial incentives are now in place that may actively encourage the formation of lone-parent families.”

It had been widely suggested in research literature “that many of the social ills we face in Ireland can be traced to the growth of lone-parent families, and especially to families where the father is absent”, he said.

In the US “much research has been conducted on the cause of social breakdown, and while it may be politically incorrect to highlight it, many studies associate high levels of substance abuse, rape, child abuse and other unpleasant social phenomena with the growth of lone-parent families.”

The speech will be delivered at University College Cork as part of The Last Lecture Series being run as part of the Capital of Culture 2005 celebrations.
Remarks by ex-UL head deemed ‘hurtful’

Lone-parent organisations reject Walsh’s assertions

Kitty Holland

Lone-parent organisations have reacted with “alarm” and “anger” to a suggestion that welfare payments encouraged women to become single mothers. They also described the assertion by the president emeritus of the University of Limerick, Dr Edward Walsh, that “social breakdown” was associated with an increase in lone parenthood as “hurtful.”

In a speech to be delivered next week, Dr Walsh says the State provides “very real financial incentives” that “may actively encourage the formation of lone-parent families.” He points to the increase in the number of lone-parent families from fewer than 3,000 in 1975 to about 80,000 now.

The State is far better at looking after lone parents than it was 30 years ago, he says. However, “the support the State provides may have moved further than it should: very real financial incentives are now in place that may actively encourage the formation of lone-parent families.”

His comments were described as “offensive” by Ms Anne Bowen, policy officer with the One Family organisation. “The lone-parent payment is £148.80 a week, plus £9.30 per child. That amount of money is not going to make anyone rich. “It is a hard life, and anyone who would choose to live on that would have a very low sense of self-esteem.”

She said it was extremely hurtful to suggest that women would choose single parenthood for financial gain, “or that they would put themselves before their children”.

Even putting this aside, she said the figures did not back up this argument.

The cost of childcare combined with the loss of payments if a lone parent took up employment meant that many lone parents found themselves “trapped” in their situation.

Reacting to Dr Walsh’s assertion that lone parents could be in receipt of up to £20,000 a year in benefits, she said this was less than half the average income.

She added that lone-parent families identified by the CSO this week as the ones at greatest risk of both relative and consistent poverty.

Ms Frances Byrne, director of the One Parent Exchange Network (OPEN), called on Mr Walsh to withdraw his comments. “It is highly worrying that someone of Dr Walsh’s prominence should be raising questions about Irish society based on uninform­ed and inaccurate myths about one-parent families.”

Dr Walsh says in his speech: “Much research has been conducted on the causes of social breakdown and, while it may be politically incorrect to highlight it, many studies associate high levels of substance abuse, rape, child abuse and other unpleasant social phenomena with the growth of lone-parent families.”

Ms Bowen said it was intellectually lazy to infer a relationship between more lone parenthood and wider social changes.
An Irishman’s Diary

How did Edward Walsh feel as he found himself sitting outside the warm tepid of political correctness, and in the howling blizzard of reality, after his remarks about unmarried mothers? Not very comfortable, probably. Never mind, Ed, I'm used to the vitriolic epistolary hiss in the column inches that besiege me in my little corner here. We can sit together here in the snow and perish together — or maybe think the unthinkable.

Such as that our system of benefits to unmarried mothers is creating a long-term time-bomb. Even as things stand, we are bribing the unmotivated, the confused, the backward, the lazy into making the worst career decision of their young lives, and becoming professional unmarried mothers, living off the State until the grave takes over. Our welfare system is creating benefits-addicted, fatherless families who will be raised in a culture of personal and economic apathy — and from such warped timber, true masts are seldom hewn.

The response of Anne Bowen, policy officer of the One Parent organisation was — naturally — that Ed’s remarks were “offensive” and “hurtful.” God knows why she didn’t say “unhelpful”, “unsavoury” or “distasteful”, which form part of the usual verbal repertoire of the politically correct. This assesses any political observation not on its factual merits but on the lacrhomystical of the audience.

So she naturally declared that it would be extremely “hurtful” to suggest that women would choose single parenthood for financial gains, or that “they would be put themselves before their children”. No doubt it is hurtful. But is it true? And how many girls — and we’re largely talking about teenagers here — consciously embark upon a career of mothering bastards because it seems a good way of getting money and accommodation from the State? Ah! You didn’t like the term bastard? No, I didn’t think you would. In the welfare-land of Euphemonia, what is the correct term for the offspring of unmarried mothers? One-parent offspring? But when we use that deceptivell term, one-parent, we actually mean fatherless, in the social meaning of the word, though not of course in the genetic sense. The lads who (in Sinead O’Connor’s immortal word) are the donors are probably off elsewhere,

benefits. Through her gushing tears, Anne insensibly declared that a lone parent (i.e., a MoB) gets only €148.80 a week, plus €9.30 per child. And indeed, this would be impossible to live on if it were all that the State forked out; but it is not. In addition, the State pays for the MoBs’ rented accommodation — worth over €3,000 or more a year. So the MoB’s real income could come to nearly €23,000. If you’re working, you have to have pre-tax earnings in the region of €38,000 to match that income.

All of which is a long-winded way of describing insanity — because we all agree it is mad to bribe impressionable young women into a life of MoBbery, which is crucially limiting, with little sense of achievement or personal ambition, and no career to speak of, other — that is — from cash-crop whelping.

And how do MoBs cope when their male bastards (in a literal sense) become metaphorical bastards in adolescence? How does a woman assert her will over a son, aggressive, uncommunicative teenage boy? Well, she usually doesn’t — as a study of the parental backgrounds of gang members in London and New York — where they are ahead of us in such matters — will tell you.

Republicanism has been denounced by Ed. Mob members usually have stressed-out MoBs for mothers, and absent Fobs for dads. The central heresy underlying welshanism is that benefits don’t influence general conduct and that all the State is doing is helping parasitic individuals. Social groups — the argument goes — do not emerge in direct response to welfare payments. That’s what liberals in the US said, so they formulated policies that were kind and good, and certainly not ones that were designed to corrupt and deprave. But corrupt and deprave they did. Welfare lines and teenage moms by the hundred thousand emerged as a direct result of the apparently but illusorily attractive State incentive not to work.

Well, even that compulsive sharer of pain, Bill Clinton, knew something tough had to be done: at the instigation of a Republican-dominated Congress, he began a concerted drive against the MoBbery, cutting welfare and introducing strong tax incentives for working MoBs. The results were amazing. After 30 years of unbroken increase, the rise in MoBbery was swiftly halted. Welfare handouts plummeted; and 10 years on, two out of three MoBs are now in work.

We just know it’s not going to happen in Ireland while debate remains mired in the schoolgirl swamp of what is “hurtful” and “offensive”; why, thith how wid talk makes one want to cry. Even our super-sized MEP, Big Mac, tearfully denounced Ed for his heartless remarks. Well, naturally. After all, Sinn Féin/IRA have strong proprietary feelings about single-parent families, having made hundreds and hundreds of them off out of what had originally been two-parent families: why, God love them, they’ve even dabbled in making a good few no-parent families.

They have 80,000 MoBs, and the numbers are rising; time to ring the alarm bells. But of course, in Dáil Éireann, we’ll get the usual sanctimonious blather over what is “offensive”, while the rest reach for the ear-plugs.
Row over lone parent comments

CARL O'BRIEN,
SOCIAL AFFAIRS
CORRESPONDENT

TDs and child support groups yester-
day criticised comments by Mr. Tim
columnist, Kevin
Myers, that the welfare system
was encouraging unmarried
mothers to live off State
benefits.
Mr. Myers wrote in his Irish-
man's Diary yesterday that the
system was creating "benefits
addicted and fatherless families.
At yesterday's Oireachtas Joint
Committee on Social and Family
Affairs, sections of the article
were read out in which Mr. Myers
questioned how many teenage
mothers embarked upon a
"career of mothering bastards"
because of the State benefits and
accommodation availability.
Committee chairman, Mr
Willie Penrose TD (Labour), said
Mr. Myers' comments did not
reflect reality.
"But if there is a tremendous
burden on lone parents," he
said. "The people who write
these articles should take the
opportunity to find out what is
happening on the ground," he
said.
Senator Sheila Terry of Fine
Gael said she "condemned" Mr.
Myers' comments, as well as
those of Dr. Edward Walsh, presi-
dent emeritus of the University
of Limerick, who delivered a
speech last week criticising the
welfare regime for parents.
"Comments like these do
nothing to help children or par-
ents who are trying to make ends
meet. Women are always the butt
of these comments, but for every
woman, there is a father as well,"
she said.
Speaking at the Oireachtas
committee, Ms. Naomi Faeley,
research and information officer
with OPEN (One Parent
Exchange and Network), said
figures showed teenagers
accounted for 2.3 per cent of one-
parent families.
"It's important that people's
opinions on this subject are based
on fact. If 90 per cent of lone par-
ents were teens, you would have
a point," she said. She added that
it was important to realise that 15
per cent of one-parent families
were fathers.
Dr. Dáithí Ó hAirdigh, policy ana-
lyst with Focus Ireland, also said
the comments stigmatised lone
parents.
An alliance of support groups
for children, The End Child Pov-
erty coalition, also set out a seven-
point strategy to tackle child pov-
erty. It called for increases in
child benefit, a new second tier of
child income support for families
living in poverty and increases in
medical card eligibility levels. It
also said sufficient funding was
needed for social and affordable
housing; tackling educational dis-
advantage; and "lone mother" accom-
modation for homeless children
and families.

O'Toole criticises columnist’s views

Seánad report

JIMMY WALSH

The views expressed by Irish
timelist Kevin Myers on
unmarried mothers crossed the
line of incitement to hatred and
should be investigated, Mr. Joe
O'Toole (Ind) said. Mr. Myers'
judgment had been flawed so
many times that thinking people
would not take him seriously.
But, unfortunately, his views
were very often communicated
to a much wider group than
that comprised of those who would
analyse them. The sort of
fascistic rantings he had gone on
with in yesterday's edition of The
Irish Times certainly crossed the
line of incitement to hatred. He
had had it at a vulnerable and
dependent group, which he was
entitled to do. But, he was also
required to keep within the
bounds of civilised discussion
and the laws of the land.

This kind of thing had hap-
pened in societies down through
the ages and it was worrying
because it could grow legs very,
very quickly. Using terms such
as "bastards", which had a dic-
tionary definition and a legal
interpretation, was no excuse for
the fact that it was also very offens-
ive language in certain places at
certain times.

"I do believe that the idea of
presenting a harmless and
dependent group within society
and in a sense exposining them to
all sorts of mad people in society
and giving oxygen to fanatics and
people who will take it as an
opportunity to further victimise
these people, is something which
is utterly unacceptable to society.
I do believe that it should be
reported and investigated. This
we do not need in our society."
Mr. Myers was entitled to his
views. He could vote, he could be
elected and he could argue
against the social supports to var-
ious people in society. But, that's
about it.

Mr. O'Toole said that this criti-
cism of Mr. Myers was not part of
a so-called liberal or "leftie"
issue.
The leader of the House, Mrs
Mary O'Rourke, said she did not
think that she had ever read any-
thing so contemptible. "But, you
know what will happen to you
and I?" she told Mr. O'Toole. "He
will bide his time and then there
will be called whingeing this and
whingeing that."
The Irish Times columnist had
repeatedly referred to unmarried
mothers as "mothers of bastards".
She thought that was contemptu-
able.
"He is an excellent writer when
he puts his mind to it. But
there is no doubt that you and
I will be bedevilled and castigated
in another type of article by him.
But I don't think we should allow
an article like that go by without
commenting on it."

Allowances for single mothers

MADAM, - Kevin Myers' Irish-
man's Diary of February 8th
about unmarried motherhood
should be part of a serious
debate about the long-term con-
sequences of this phenomenon.
Mr. Myers is entitled to his
opinions but instead clouds the
issue with his continuous and
gratuitous use of the term "bastard."
I have known a number of chil-
dren born out of wedlock and
they are all good kids. None of
them deserves the plain nasty,
attention-seeking name-calling to
which Mr. Myers has subjected
them.

This isn't about political cor-
rectness gone mad - just a basic
level of civility in public life and
debate. - Yours, etc.

DARA BOGAN
Dublin 8.

MADAM, - The socio-political
analysis of the average cab driver
delivered with a teenager's hyste-
rical desire to offend -- for sheer
entertainment you just can't beat
Kevin Myers.
His rant on single mothers
was possibly his finest hour. Please
tell him to keep up the good
work. We all need a laugh. - Yours,
etc.

LENNY ABRAHAMSON
Leinster Road West,
Dublin 6.

MADAM, - Dr. Edward Walsh's
views on lone mothers have
received wide coverage. He is
undoubtedly an exceptional man,
whose vision in creating the Uni-
versity of Limerick was extraor-
dinary, and who made a remarka-
ble contribution during his presi-
dency. He is, of course, entitled to
his views on any topic. However,
the issue of lone motherhood is
widely seen as far more complex
than his comments suggest - not
least by those currently re-
searching and teaching on the
topic in the University of Lim-
erick. - Yours, etc.,

PAT O'CONNOR
Professor of Sociology
and Social Policy, and Dean,
University of Limerick.

MADAM, - Kevin Myers, in his
latest attempt to reduce his taxes
and wage war on political correct-
ness, has turned on single
mothers and their offspring (or...
"bastards", as he heroically calls
them), so that our society might
be saved from "the unmoivated,
the confused, the backward, the
lazy."

According to the Oxford
Dictionary the noun "bastard" means
either "person born of an unmarried
mother" or "unpleasant or despica-
able person."

In light of this defination (and
Mr. Myers's article), it would
appear that one can be the latter
without necessarily having to be
the former. - Yours, etc.

ENDA KILROY
Whitestall
Dublin 9.

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Walsh distances himself from comments made by Myers

CARL O'BRIEN
SOCIAL AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT

Dr Edward Walsh, president emeritus of the University of Limerick, has distanced himself from comments by an Irish Times columnist, Kevin Myers, regarding lone parents.

Dr Walsh sparked debate on the issue in a lecture last week when he said the welfare system may be actively encouraging the formation of lone-parent families.

Yesterday, Dr Walsh said Myers's choice of words had disrupted a mature and civilised discussion on the issue.

"The language was mischievous and most unhelpful and introduced all sorts of emotion into an area where prudent people would speak sensitively and carefully," Dr Walsh said.

Myers, in his Irishman's Diary in Tuesday's Irish Times, referred to unmarried women with children as "mothers of bastards" and said State benefits were creating "benefits-addicted, fatherless families".

A number of lone-parent groups, political parties and trade unions reacted angrily to Myers's comments and called for a public apology.

One Family, a single-parents group, called for the immediate withdrawal of "derogatory language and factual inaccuracies" in the article.

"This debate has today reached an all-time low with the use of language which we had hoped was gone from reasonable dialogue in Irish society," said the organisation's director, Ms Karen Klernan.

"It is tragic that certain children are picked on and singled out for attack on this occasion," she added.

The remarks were also criticised by Mr John Molloy, director of care with Home Again, a charity caring for troubled boys who cannot live at home. He said the labelling of the children as "bastards" was offensive and outrageous.

The Archbishop of Dublin, Dr Diarmuid Martin, said the use of "hate words" was damaging to an often vulnerable group of parents. "Hate words can be the most damaging to people... It's use of language which doesn't respect the dignity of everybody or anybody," he told RTE's The Big Bite.

"Lone parents are a very significant group. They go through a huge amount of suffering by wanting to be genuinely good parents and give their children as much as any other child can get and even better if they could," Mr David Begg, general secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and a trustee of the Irish Times Trust, said the matter would be raised at the next meeting of the trust.

"It was a legitimate social policy issue to discuss, but there has to be some constraint on language used. If Mr Myers had used that language in relation to an ethnic group, it might be illegal," Mr Begg said.

Mr Séamus Dooley, the Irish secretary of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), said the comments were inappropriate and called for an apology from The Irish Times and Myers.

However, he said it would be wrong to judge the record of the newspaper on the basis of a single "editorial mistake". By his extreme reaction, Kevin Myers has probably stifled debate, because by his use of intemperate and inappropriate language he has turned this into a debate about Kevin Myers, rather than the issue itself," Mr Dooley said.

The editorial committee of The Irish Times, a group elected by journalistic staff in the newspaper, passed a resolution reminding staff of the NUJ's code of conduct. "The editorial committee is committed to freedom of speech, and to the promotion of robust debate and the expression of diversity of opinion in..."
An Irishman's Diary

Kevin Myers

Here follows an unconditional apology for my remarks the other day on the issue of unmarried mothers. So many readers have been made extremely angry by what I said: that it is clearly not merely an issue of political correctness or social conformism. Their feelings are real, passionate and heartfelt, and I bitterly regret clouding an issue of major importance in Irish life by using provocative, ill-thought-out and confrontational language.

I was trying to inundate nobody, but to discuss the subject of the rising tide of unmarried mothers, with the result: an increase in fatherless families, in an astringent and irrelevant way. To take an issue of such sensitivity and present it in challenging language is risky; and in taking such risks, I failed lamentably. Indeed, by unintentionally insulting so many people, I lost both my audience and the argument - leaving me with much to regret and even more to apologise for.

I intended to hurt no one, but to cause people to discuss the subject first raised by Ed Walsh, last week. It is not just the US, where radical reforms in welfare have been made in order to curb the increase in mother-unmarried families. In tackling this subject, I deliberately used the word "bastard" because I genuinely feel that the word has no stigma attached to it; and because I feel this with such a passion, I did not allow for other people's sensitivities over it.

Here I was wrong, very wrong. A journalist who wishes to make a controversial case, and who knows he is straying into difficult areas of sensitivity, must be careful of people's feelings. I did not take the necessary care, and the outpourings of emotion and anger which have occurred are clear proof of this.

These words are not written at the request of the editor or anyone else, but entirely at my own initiative. This newspaper allows me great latitude to express my opinions, which are often at variance with those of my colleagues, and sometimes with our overall editorial stance.

This is one of the strengths of The Irish Times. We stand not merely for freedom of thought, fatherless to become disruptive. But societies were more stable then, and usually other male figures - uncles, grandfathers, brothers - were there to assert themselves as centres of authority.

We live in different days, when society is more fluid, more dynamic and, for all the wealth that we now enjoy, more uncertain. I believe that families are better off with two parents; and though of course, many single mothers are splendid and responsible parents, as a social construct we cannot do better than the two-parent family.

And this is not just for the good of the children, but for the good of the mother too: the burden of child-rearing is best shared, and not borne on the shoulders of a young woman who drifted into motherhood as a teenager because, for the moment, it seemed an attractive option.

For all the State benefits that a young single mother gets, the penalties are huge, and the price paid is enormous - not least the loss of personal freedom through her twenties, when she might be stranded in a flat, with young children to mind, and no outside support, day in and day out, for year after dreary year.

I wrote my column because of my concern for those who have already been lured into this trap, or are about to be drawn into the career of benefit-dependent single-motherhood. I feel passionately about the predicament that a dysfunctional welfare system is creating, usually for the most vulnerable, unwary and the most helpless in our society. Middle-class girls are seldom so misled.

In my desire to make my point powerfully, I used stupid, offensive language, and I deeply apologise for that. To Irish Times readers who were so offended and appalled at my words, from the bottom of a full and contrite heart, I am very, very sorry.
Regret for the offence caused

Irish society has changed hugely in recent decades and at a pace that has been breathtaking. Much of this change is for the good and has been led by The Irish Times. Stigmatising social differences is no longer as acceptable as it once was and rightly so. We have become less willing to tolerate the passing of casual, cruel judgment on the lives of others, less willing to ignore the pain thoughtless slights and name-calling inflict on the vulnerable. That is social progress.

But with these changes come challenges: Irish society, no less than some others, is being confronted increasing with the consequences of dramatic social change changing precepts about the family, about marriage and partnership, about children and their welfare, about rights and responsibilities, collectively and individually.

There are many important issues that merit debate and The Irish Times will, as it has in the past, stimulate, facilitate and report this discussion. There is no doubt that remarks made by Kevin Myers in An Irishman’s Diary last Tuesday have caused great offence and grave hurt to many of our readers. A sample of the complaints is reflected on this page today. Readers are angered and appalled, not just by the nature of the views expressed by Kevin Myers about unmarried mothers and their innocent children but by the manner in which they were expressed.

Kevin Myers returns to the subject today with a rather different message of “unconditional apology”. He accepts that the reaction to what he wrote was not merely driven by political correctness or social conformism. He deliberately used the word “bastard”, he claims, believing that there was no stigma attached to it. In this, he was wrong.

The views he expressed were not, and are not, those of The Irish Times. The Irish Times defines itself in part by providing a platform for divergent views. The opinions of one columnist will differ from another; they may at times conflict with the editorial policy of the newspaper, as in this case. However, it should be pointed out to readers that the whole editorial process tries to avoid undue interference in the opinions of columnists, except on factual and legal grounds. And when it does occur, the newspaper, more than any other, is criticised for censorship.

Journalists in The Irish Times are committed to free speech and the promotion of robust debate even if, at times, odious things are said which are offensive to some readers. There is a fine line between strong views stimulating necessary debate and odious opinions causing hurt and distracting from real issues. Exposing a mindset which could stigmatise innocent children forms part of the debate. The Irish Times regrets the offence caused.
CLAUSE 7: TENURE OF GRANTS

7.1 A grant awarded under this Scheme shall be provisional for the 2008/09 academic year and shall not be continued in any subsequent academic year, unless the Local Authority is satisfied that the provisions of this Scheme continue to be complied with fully.

7.2 A grant is tenable for the normal duration of the approved course and is renewable annually subject to satisfactory attainment and the approval of the Local Authority, subject to the terms of Clause 7.6. Grants may not be paid in respect of a repeat year of study on the same course. A Local Authority shall have discretion to waive this provision in exceptional circumstances, such as certified serious illness.

7.3 Where grant-holders, as part of their approved course, are required to attend foreign university courses for a period of up to one year, a maintenance grant may continue to be paid where the period abroad does not affect the normal duration of the approved course.

7.4 Grants awarded under this Scheme shall be tenable only in respect of attendance at approved courses.

7.5 A grant under this Scheme shall not be tenable in respect of a course, or part of a course, to which the Third Level Maintenance Grants Scheme for Trainees, 2008 applies.

7.6 Apart from the special provisions for second chance students in Clause 3.3, candidates who have previously pursued an undergraduate course approved for the purposes of the Higher Education Grants Scheme, the Vocational Education Committees’ Scholarship Scheme or the Third Level Maintenance Grants Scheme for Trainees (formerly ESF Scheme) shall not receive a grant under this Scheme until they have completed an equivalent period of study at undergraduate level, irrespective of whether or not a grant was paid previously. A Local Authority shall have discretion to waive this provision in exceptional circumstances, such as certified serious illness. Grants shall not be paid to candidates who already hold a Level 8 (Honours Bachelor Degree qualification or equivalent qualification) and are pursuing a second such qualification. However, notwithstanding this condition the following candidates may be deemed eligible for grant aid:
(i) Candidates who already hold a Level 6 qualification (Higher Certificate or National Certificate) or Level 7 (Ordinary Bachelor Degree or National Diploma) and are progressing to a Level 8 (Honours Bachelor Degree) course, without necessarily having received an exemption from the normal duration of the course;

(ii) Candidates who have satisfactorily completed two years of a Level 7 (Ordinary Bachelor Degree or National Diploma) course, and gain admission through exemption, to year two of a Level 8 (Honours Bachelor Degree) course.

7.7 Candidates who have previously pursued a postgraduate course approved for the purposes of the Higher Education Grants Scheme or the Vocational Education Committees’ Scholarship Scheme shall not receive a grant under this Scheme until they have completed an equivalent period of study at postgraduate level irrespective of whether or not a grant was paid previously. A Local Authority shall have discretion to waive this provision in exceptional circumstances, such as certified serious illness. Grants shall not be paid to candidates who already hold a postgraduate qualification and are pursuing a second postgraduate qualification. However, notwithstanding this condition candidates who:

(iv) on completion of a one year post-graduate course which has not led to the conferral of a qualification, gain admittance to the second year of a post-graduate course;

OR

(ii) already hold a postgraduate qualification and are progressing to a further postgraduate course which represents progression may be deemed eligible for grant aid.

For the purposes of this clause postgraduate qualifications at Level 8 are deemed to be progression.

Grant aid for postgraduate students shall be limited to a maximum of four years.
The author of this thesis circled these advertisements and added the highlighting to the text in order to illustrate the important aspects of the advertisements.
II