

Methodology: UCD New ERA School Profile Questionnaire 2008

A postal survey was conducted of the 310 schools linked to the HEAR Scheme. The aim of the questionnaire was to collect information from schools on factors that influence progression rates to third level, Leaving Certificate results and subject choices. A total of 158 schools responded which gave a response rate of 51 percent. 24 (45%) linked to New ERA responded, 34 (69%) from Schools linked to Maynooth and 100 (48%) from schools linked to the four other universities participating on the HEAR Scheme. An effective response rate of 40% was calculated based on the number of students sent to UCD by each of the schools that participated in the survey. Ethics approval for the extension was sought and granted on the 25/02/08 by the UCD ethics committee.

The Questionnaire was piloted on the 13th and 14th of March 2008. The draft questionnaire was sent in advance of the pilot to the Principals of St. Dominic's Secondary School Ballyfermot Dublin 10, Caritas College, Drumfinn Rd. Ballyfermot and Colinstown Park Community College, Rowlagh, Clondalkin, Dublin 22.

A topic guide was used to interview the Principals on their reaction to the draft questionnaire. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and the questionnaire modified according to the suggestions made by the interviewees.

Each questionnaire was given an interview code in order to facilitate identification of schools that completed the survey. A package was assembled including; a covering letter explaining the survey, a document on data protection policy, a letter of support from New ERA and MAP, and a stamped addressed envelope.

Three different versions of the survey were administered. The basic survey was sent to schools linked to HEAR but not linked to UCD or Maynooth. As well as this basic survey, an additional section focusing on UCD New Era services was sent to schools linked to UCD and an additional section focusing on MAP services was sent to schools linked to Maynooth.

The questionnaire was addressed to the school Principal and the Career Guidance Counsellor. The survey was posted on the 31st of March 2008. The initial return date for the questionnaire was the 16th of April 2008. After the deadline passed schools were then contacted to establish if they were participating. 210 schools were contacted and 49 electronic versions of the questionnaire were sent by e-mail to

schools that wished to participate. 9 questionnaires returned via e-mail and several more by post. A framework for data entry was built using S.P.S.S and data entered using the school code to identify the School.

The response rate for schools linked to the New ERA programme was particularly low. While questions on the timing of the project were addressed in the pilot the questionnaire ended up coinciding with the Whole School Evaluations conducted by the Department of Education and with exams. It is recommended that the survey become a regular part of the New Era programme, taking place every two years.