23 August 2017

Dear President/Provost

I attach a call for proposals to the higher education clusters in respect of a targeted funding scheme established by the Department of Education and Skills to support implementation of the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019. The Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) fund is a competitive fund, managed by the HEA on behalf of the Department.

Each of the five regional clusters of higher education institutions (HEIs) are now invited to submit proposals under the following funding streams:

- **PATH 2** – 1916 Bursary Fund
- **PATH 3** – Higher Education Access Fund

All proposals must demonstrate additionality to any activities that are already taking place or that have already been committed to in performance compacts with the HEA.

The closing date for receipt of submissions and template for submissions are set out in the call.

Yours sincerely,


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Dr Graham Love
Chief Executive

# Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) Fund
# Call for Proposals
# Strand 2 – 1916 Bursary Fund
# Strand 3 – Higher Education Access Fund

## 1.    Background

The *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019* ('National Access Plan') was published in December 2015.  The overall vision informing the goals, objectives and actions of the Plan is to ensure that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population.

The *National Access Plan* contains a number of targets to increase participation by specific categories of students. Target groups include entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups and communities; entrants with disabilities; mature entrants; members of the Irish Traveller community; students entering on the basis of a further education award; and part-time flexible learners.

The implementation of the *National Access Plan* is an integral part of the overall reform and landscape changes being progressed as part of the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030.

Subsequent to the launch of the National Access Plan, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) established the *Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) Fund*.  This Fund comprises dedicated funding to support access to higher education,

which is allocated on a competitive basis to higher education institutions to support particular priority areas as determined by the DES.

Funding of €2.4m was made available in April 2017 for widening access to initial teacher education under PATH 1. This current call for proposals relates to the following:

- PATH 2: 1916 Bursary Fund.
- PATH 3: Higher Education Access Fund

Higher Education clusters are invited to submit proposals for either PATH 2 or PATH 3, or under both strands.

## 2. PATH 2 - 1916 Bursary Fund

The Minister for Education and Skills announced €1 million in Budget 2017 for a new Bursary Fund to commemorate the centenary of 1916 as part of an overall package of access measures to promote participation by under-represented groups in higher education. This funding is being provided under Strand 2 of PATH to underline the Government's commitment to the type of equality of opportunity envisaged by the 1916 signatories.

Consistent with the vision, goals and target groups in the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (NAP) 2015-19, the 1916 Bursary Fund will provide financial support to students identified by regional clusters of higher education institutions as being most economically disadvantaged from specified target groups, and it will complement existing student supports and access initiatives.

The 1916 Bursary Fund will provide financial support through bursaries awarded to students who have been identified by their HEI as meeting the following eligibility criteria:

- Student must be from one of the following target groups

- *S*ocio economic groups that have low participation in higher education
- First time, mature student entrants
- Students with a disability – particularly students with a physical/mobility impairment, students are who deaf/hard of hearing and students who are blind or have a visual impairment
- Irish Travellers
- Further education award holders
- Lone parents in receipt of a means tested social welfare payment (at least 20% of the bursaries must be targeted at lone parents)
- Ethnic minorities (including programme refugees)

- All recipients will have to be socio-economically disadvantaged regardless of the target group.
- Bursaries may be provided to full- or part-time students. It is expected that a number of the bursaries will be provided to students studying on a part-time basis.
- Bursaries will be available to undergraduates who are progressing to higher education for the first time and to undergraduate students who are currently in the system.
- Students must be attending a full-time or part-time course that meets the guidelines of the fund. Courses attended must be an undergraduate course in a publicly funded institution that: (a) takes not less than two years to complete, and (b) on the successful completion of which a student is awarded a major higher education and training award at level 6 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications.

The following conditions will also apply:
- Each bursary will be in the amount of €5,000 per annum. This applies to both full and part-time students.
- Bursaries may be approved for study across all disciplines. There will be no restriction on programme of study.
- Students are not entitled to receive the 1916 Bursary in conjunction with any other bursary or scholarship.

- Students will be entitled to hold the 1916 Bursary and the student grant simultaneously, where they meet the eligibility conditions of the student grant scheme. The 1916 Bursary will be an income disregard for the purposes of 'reckonable income' in the student grant scheme.
- It will be a condition of funding that necessary data sharing arrangements are in place, subject to data protection considerations.
- A bursary will be awarded for the normal duration of an undergraduate programme, subject to continued compliance with the bursary guidelines.

Funding will be initially provided for the award of 200 bursaries in each of the next 3 academic years, commencing in 2017/18. Continuation of the scheme, for new bursary awards, will be subject to review in Year 3. Existing bursary holders will continue to be eligible to receive their bursary for the duration of their undergraduate programme, subject to their continued compliance with the bursary guidelines.

Funding for the bursaries will be distributed through HEI Regional Clusters on the basis of a competitive call for proposals (PATH 2).

Successful HEIs will be responsible for selecting the students to be awarded bursaries and will be responsible for the implementation of the Bursary Fund according to the guidelines set out by the Department of Education and Skills/HEA. HEIs will be required to ensure that students selected by them for an award of a bursary meet the eligibility criteria outlined above.

It is proposed that HEIs will award the bursaries and be the paying authority for the bursaries awarded. The 1916 Bursary will be paid to students by their institutions in monthly instalments subject to continuing attendance on their approved course.

Successful HEIs will be required to meet HEA reporting requirements. In line with normal governance of State funding the HEA reserves the right to carry out transaction testing.

## 3.    PATH 2 Call for Proposals

Regional clusters of HEIs [1] are invited to submit proposals under PATH 2 detailing the number of bursaries they wish to receive funding for (on the basis of €5,000 per bursary per annum).

The HEA will establish an assessment panel to assess the call for proposals against the evaluation criteria detailed below.

Successful Clusters will be approved for funding, under PATH 2, to award a specific number of '1916 Bursaries' to eligible students. The specific amount of funding for each HEI within the Cluster will be identified.

Proposals should be no more than 3,000 words.

Only one proposal from each cluster of higher education institutions will be accepted. Proposals from individual HEIs will not be eligible for funding. A proposal must be signed by all HEIs in the cluster and the lead HEI (for HEA funding allocation purposes) should be specified. A designated contact person for each cluster should also be identified.

Clusters are asked to address the following issues in their proposals:

- Details of how the proposed bursaries are consistent with the Cluster's access policy.
- The proposed number of new bursaries by cluster, broken down by HEI, and further broken down by target group, and by part-time/full-time status, for each of the next 3 academic years. At least 20% of bursaries must be targeted at lone parents.
- Details of how the eligible students will be targeted and the proposed selection process.  Proposals should be explicit about the exact nature of the selection process, including the indicators to be used for identifying the students from the

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[1] The regional clusters are specified Appendix 1.

target groups and identifying the most socio-economic disadvantaged students from these groups and the methods that will be employed to distinguish between eligible students.

- The local and regional partners that will be involved in the targeting of the bursaries and the nature of engagement with these partners.

- Details of the institutional supports that will be provided to incoming students to support student completion.

- Details of how the 1916 Bursary scheme will be monitored and evaluated. While the scheme is primarily a student funding scheme, it is expected that Clusters will derive long term learning and relationships from the scheme that can be applied to their access infrastructure. Proposals should address the expected long term impact on the access infrastructure in the regional cluster area.

The specific criteria that proposals will be assessed against are as follows:

a) **Strategic Approach (20 marks)**
- Extent to which the proposals are part of a cluster's strategic approach to promoting equity of access.

b) **Quality of proposal (30 marks)**
- Including the extent of cooperation between cluster partners, engagement with local communities and stakeholders, approach to targeting students, post entry supports

c) **Innovation (30 marks)**
- Level of innovation associated with targeting students

d) **Project evaluation and Sustainability (20 marks)**
- Robustness of evaluation strategy and long term sustainability of project

**4.    PATH 3: Higher Education Access Fund**

Strand 3 of PATH is intended to provide funding to support the objectives associated with Goal 5 in the National Access Plan, namely to develop regional and community partnership strategies for increasing access to higher education by specified groups.

The funding is intended to facilitate the attraction and retention of an additional 2,000 new undergraduate students from the target groups identified in the National Access Plan over the next 3 years:

- Entrants from socio-economic groups that have low participation in higher education.
- First time, mature student entrants
- Students with disabilities.
- Part-time/flexible learners.
- Further education award holders.
- Irish Travellers

Proposals will also be expected to target the sub groups mentioned in the National Access Plan: namely, lone parents and ethnic minorities (including recently arrived programme refugees). At least 10% of all places should be targeted at lone parents.

Funding of €2.5 million per annum is available for PATH Strand 3 for the next three years. This amounts to funding of €7.5 million over the three-year period. This funding will be allocated on a competitive basis to regional clusters to attract 2,000 new students (full-time or part-time) into higher education by the end of Year 3, and to ensure that those students are supported to complete their programme of study.

It is intended that HEIs will form effective partnerships within their clusters, and also show evidence of how they will engage with local DEIS schools, Further Education providers, community and voluntary groups, existing local initiatives to tackle educational disadvantage, Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs), and other relevant stakeholders.

Clusters should seek to identify the geographic areas in their regions with the lowest levels of higher education participation and to work with the affected communities to identify the most appropriate initiatives that best suit the needs of those communities.

While data is available on participation by county and by postal area in Dublin, clusters are expected to have alternative means of identifying the most disadvantaged areas with the lowest participation rates in third level – for example the use of geocoding; links with HP deprivation index; and regional & local knowledge. Clusters of institutions are also expected to draw on the Socio-Economic Plans that have been developed by each Local Community Development Committees (LCDC) in identifying the communities that they are targeting in respect of this call, and linking with the LCDC in the relevant area.

It is envisaged that successful projects will be approved for 3 years. There will be an expectation that the successful HE clusters will provide evidence of how they will sustain the projects after Year 3.

Funding will be provided to regional clusters who demonstrate most clearly their capacity to be innovative in working with local and community stakeholders to attract and retain new access students from communities with the lowest rates of higher education participation, and whose projects can demonstrate the greatest sustainability and overall impact on access for target groups.

Activities proposed must be additional activities, i.e. they must not be activities that are already funded from existing resources or that have already been agreed in performance compacts with the HEA.

Clusters will be expected to report to the HEA on the outcomes from the funding provided.

## 5. PATH 3 Call for proposals

Regional clusters of HEIs are invited to make proposals for funding under PATH 3.

PATH 3 funding will run for 3 years from 2017 to 2019. The total funding available over 3 years will be €7.5 million, with up to €2.5 million each year. The clusters are entitled to complement PATH 3 funding with funding from other sources.

Proposals will be evaluated in accordance with the criteria and processes outlined in this document.

Only one proposal from each cluster of higher education institutions will be accepted. A proposal may however consist of a number of projects. However, there must be a clear coherence between the projects. Proposals from individual HEIs will not be eligible for funding.

A proposal must be signed by all HEIs in the cluster and the lead HEI (for funding allocation purposes) should be specified. **A designated contact person for each cluster should also be identified.**

Proposals should not exceed 3,000 words.

Clusters are asked to use the following headings in submitting proposals

**Introduction**

- Provide a title and summary description of the proposal including each individual project proposed and the lead institution.
- Set out the context, rationale and strategy for the project(s) proposed, including how it will support the delivery of Goal 5 in the National Access Plan.
- Describe how the project supports the objectives of the cluster's equity of access strategy, and performance compacts with the HEA.

**Partnership Approach**

- Outline the strategy for stimulating interaction and buy-in from communities and identified partners

- Demonstrate the co-operation of HEIs within the cluster and clear evidence of the capacity to deliver innovative ways of engaging local communities and other relevant groups within the cluster,
- Articulate the range of partners engaged in the development of the project and the scope of partners committed to participate in the project and the nature of engagement with these partners. This includes partners within the cluster and other partners such as DEIS schools, further education providers, community/voluntary organisations, existing initiatives, local authorities (LCDCs) and enterprise and industry partners.

**Details of the proposal**

- The approach to and rationale for identifying the target groups.
- The additionality of the project to existing actions and to actions agreed in performance compacts must be demonstrated.
- The project supports that will be put in place to support student completion, including a focus on mentoring.
- The overall quality of project implementation plan including the roles and responsibilities of each of the cluster partners and any other partners involved in project delivery.

**Impact and Evaluation**

- The number of new undergraduate students to be targeted over the 3 year period, broken down by year, part-time/full-time status, and target group. At least 10% of the new places should be reserved for students that are lone parents. Each proposal must also include some provision of part-time places.
- A clear statement on the long-term impact on access by the target groups in the regional cluster area and the communities it serves.
- A well developed and robust project evaluation plan. The proposal must address evaluation strategy and process including performance indicators – how will the cluster monitor progress including qualitative and quantitative indicators. Baseline data should be provided against which outcomes can be clearly evaluated.

**Funding and sustainability**

- The amount of funding being sought per annum. Projects may be for one year only or may be multi-annual, subject to a maximum of three years. Funding breakdowns should demonstrate how funding will be allocated in each year of the project.
- The extent to which other funding will be used to support the targeted students
- A breakdown of how funding will be allocated across the cluster and/or other partners.
- How value for money can be achieved
- Long term plans for the sustainability of the project (post 3 year funding).

**Evaluation of proposals**

The specific criteria that proposals will be assessed against are as follows:

a) **Partnership Approach**                                  **(20 marks)**

The extent of cooperation between the HEIs in the Cluster and the level of engagement with local communities and other relevant stakeholders

b) **Quality of Proposal**                                   **(40 marks)**

Approach to targeting of groups, level of innovation, and the overall quality of project implementation plan

c) **Impact and Evaluation**                                **(25 marks)**

Additional numbers from target groups, and robustness of evaluation strategy

d) **Funding and Sustainability**                          **(15 marks)**

Long term sustainability, leverage of new funds and value for money

## 6.     Assessment Process for PATH 2 and PATH 3

The HEA will establish an independent, external panel to evaluate proposals under PATH 2 and PATH 3 and make funding recommendations. Clusters may be invited to present their proposal to the panel.

Successful proposals will be required to report to the HEA on progress implementation. Details of HEA project monitoring and evaluation processes will be communicated to the clusters on the award of funding. Multi-annual projects will only be allocated funding in years 2 and 3 subject to satisfactory reporting to the HEA and the delivery of project outcomes.

## 7.    Governance

A lead institution will be accountable to the HEA for the funding allocated. In the event of multi-annual allocation for bursaries under PATH 2, or for projects under PATH 3 funding will be released for the second and third year of the successful years provided that the HEA is satisfied that sufficient progress is being made.

The lead institution will also be expected to report on progress to the Steering Group for the National Access Plan.

There will be an evaluation of the final outcome of each project and the results will be submitted to the DES.

## 8.    Submission of Proposals

Proposals should be received by the HEA in electronic and hard copy format before **12.30pm, 27th October, 2017.** Five signed hard copies should be submitted. Proposals should be addressed to:

>Emer Musonda
>Access Policy
>Higher Education Authority,
>3 Shelbourne Buildings,
>Crampton Avenue,
>Shelbourne Road,
>Ballsbridge,
>Dublin.
>D04 C2Y6

The words "PATH 2 & 3 Fund", and name and address of the applicant should be clearly legible on the front of the envelope, which should be sealed.

One electronic copy of the document should be e-mailed to emusonda@hea.ie.

Any questions regarding the call for proposals should be submitted in writing via e-mail to Emer Musonda (emusonda@hea.ie)  by no later than 5pm on **20 September 2017**. The answers to all questions received will be posted on the HEA website by **27 September 2017**.  **Telephone queries cannot be accommodated.**

**APPENDIX 1**

**Regional Cluster Member Institutions**

**South**

University College Cork,
Cork IT,
IT Tralee,
Waterford IT
IT Carlow

**Mid-West**

University of Limerick
Mary Immaculate College,
Limerick IT

**West**

Galway-Mayo IT
IT Sligo
Letterkenny IT
NUI Galway (incorporating St. Angela's College)

**Dublin / Leinster *Pillar I***

University College Dublin
Trinity College Dublin
National College of Art and Design
Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology

**Dublin / Leinster *Pillar II* ***

Dublin Institute of Technology
IT Tallaght
IT Blanchardstown
Dublin City University
Dundalk IT
Maynooth University
Athlone IT

*\* Institutions should note that the original establishment of the clusters, provided for DIT, ITB and IT Tallaght to operate as a sub-cluster of Dublin cluster II as they are engaged in a merger/designation as a technological university process. Accordingly proposals for PATH 2 and 3 will be accepted from this sub-cluster and from the MEND sub-cluster of DCU, DkIT, MU and AIT.*

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