



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

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AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS

Report on the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) Seminar

23rd November 2018

Tullamore Court Hotel, Co. Offaly

Introduction

This event was jointly organised by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the Higher Education Authority (HEA), to provide an opportunity to share the learning emerging so far from the implementation of the PATH schemes across Ireland.

The event was formally opened by Dalton Tattan (Assistant Secretary, DES) who highlighted the great progress that has been achieved by both higher education and community partners in widening participation in higher education in Ireland. However, it was stressed that there is still work to do and there are still important target groups in the National Access Plan that are underrepresented in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Mr. Tattan outlined the purpose of the three PATH strands in place in supporting equity of access to higher education and the importance of this event in ensuring learning from the PATH initiatives is captured and shared more widely. He added that this event was an opportunity to discover further roadways to help improve aspects of this important initiative that may need enhancements and take stock of all that has been achieved to date.

The event was facilitated by the Centre for Effective Services (CES). The presentations offered throughout the day were intended as snapshots to act as prompts for group discussion.

A total of 160 people attended and took part in the event. Participants were representative of PATH teams and their community partners, target group representatives, Community initiatives and community structures, the Chair and relevant officials from the HEA, officials from the Department of Education and other relevant State agencies.

Session One: Sharing Experience and Approaches to Evaluation

There were three presentations delivered in this session and the purpose of these was to share experience and approaches to evaluation from some of the PATH initiatives. The slides from speakers in this session has been circulated to those attending. A synopsis of the three presentations is provided below:

[PATH 1 Presentation – Karina Ryan and Professor Paul Conway \(National Institute for Studies in Education \(NISE\) – University of Limerick, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick Institute of Technology\)](#)

This presentation from a PATH 1 initiative stressed the importance of strategic relationships in the area of teacher education. A key question was how to make the teaching core more reflective of the students they work with in Ireland. Some areas covered in this presentation included:

- Challenges faced by the project, such as the necessarily long lead in time for new initiatives; the long-term nature of improving access to education; encouraging males from urban backgrounds to consider primary teaching as a career; and the need to take a Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) approach to the promoting teaching among students by working with both junior and senior cycle students- addressing

knowledge gaps and deepening the understanding the intrinsic nature of disadvantage.

- The importance of working together. Working between practice and academia has helped to address gaps in knowledge.
- The different dimensions of evaluation and the importance of self-evaluation and learning as you go. Evaluation should be ongoing, formative and focused on utilisation – not something that is done at the end point. The Shannon Consortium presents a useful model for collaboration.

PATH 2 Presentation – Dr. Anna Kelly, Leinster Pillar 1 (University College Dublin, Trinity College Dublin, the National College of Art and Design (NCAD), Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology) and Marino Institute of Education (MIE)

Dr. Anna Kelly (UCD) presented on the work being done by the partners involved in Leinster Pillar 1 which comprises of 5 educational institutions: University College Dublin (UCD), Trinity College Dublin (TCD), the National College for Art and Design (NCAD), Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology and Marino Institute of Education (MIE). UCD is the lead organisation overseeing PATH 2 and 3.

This presentation outlined both the learning on what worked well and what has been challenging. Some areas covered in this presentation included:

- Importance of investing appropriate time in the team and developing a set of guiding principles for the work. Several Steering Groups were established to support implementation. Commitment at the highest institution level through compacts.
- The foundations and shared experience of bursary practice worked well. There was significant engagement and outreach projects. The bursaries have been embedded in other strands of PATH work. Shared and robust assessment processes have also assisted delivery.
- Challenges presented by PATH 2 were outlined, for example, too few bursaries and some duplication of processes. The application process requires significant effort on the part of the students and requires them to repeat other similar processes. Sources of funding such as SUSI and welfare funds are fragmented and disjointed.
- Tight timeframes in PATH cycle 1 and operational challenges in cycle 2, with lots of other activities going on simultaneously.
- Evaluation of PATH is carried out through annual student feedback. Examples cited the positive impact on the lives of Bursary recipients.
- Going forward it was suggested that PATH could become a nationally managed scheme, a HEI administered scheme or a Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) scheme.

PATH 3 Presentation – Professor John O’Halloran, South Cluster (University College Cork, Cork Institute of Technology, Waterford Institute of Technology and Carlow Institute of Technology)

Professor John O’Halloran presented on the work being carried out by the South Cluster in PATH 3. This initiative sits across 4 counties and 5 institutions. Some areas covered in this presentation included:

- The key challenges and learning from the PATH initiative so far were centred on working toward having new partners come to the table; and the different levels of partnership required from the student to the community partners.
- Co-construction of methodologies was required.
- Timing was challenging, as was moving across 5 institutions in the application timeframe. It was suggested that it would be beneficial for future funding calls to have a longer lead-in period.
- The need to have everyone working together for a shared purpose with the student at the centre in a distributed leadership model.
- The size and scale of institutions presented a challenge. It was decided to have one voice/representation from each institution regardless of size.

Presentation from the All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO) – Justin Gleeson, Director of AIRO

Justin Gleeson delivered a presentation outlining the work of the All-Ireland Research Observatory (AIRO). AIRO is based in Maynooth University and works with various partners involved in improving access to education, including the Leinster Pillar 2 MEND (Midlands, East and North Dublin) PATH initiative.

- The data portal being developed on the AIRO website was presented and key data points from the MEND area were highlighted. MEND is a wide cluster which encompasses a very broad area.
- The overall model is AIRO working on a community needs analysis – developing a community profile and demand map to get a real understanding of conditions in the MEND target areas.
- The AIRO strategy of using data to inform the team decision making was outlined – demonstrating the existing education supply, potential access points etc. AIRO maps existing student cohorts across the participating HEIs.
- Attention was drawn to some of the challenges posed by General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and to the capacity for learning from this initiative as to how to share student data in the right way, when it is necessary to do so.
- A demonstration of the ESRI software tool ‘College Connect’ – An Evaluation and Research Framework was given, where data can be mapped across ‘demand areas.’ AIRO training workshops are taking place with networks across the country using

existing open sources of software while College Connect is currently under development.

Question and Answer - Session 1

Seminar participants were offered an opportunity to ask questions of the morning's speakers and offer observations and comments. Some of the areas covered and points raised in this session included:

- All the issues raised by the HEIs also applied to community organisations – especially the issue of funding.
- The importance of engaging with 'on the ground' expertise in a real way and directly involve the communities where people live and have experience. The role of communities is especially important in terms of adopting a prevention and early intervention approach.
- The issue of Traveller education and the need for more partnership with the Travelling community to support their access to higher education was raised.
- There is a challenge around changing culture and ways of operating.
- The need to support increasing numbers of Travellers, those with disabilities and other target groups to access higher education.
- Partnership should mean parity of esteem for all partners and this should be kept in mind to ensure the success of PATH collaborations.
- Currently, there is still some fragmentation and duplication of processes in the system. In order to develop working partnerships, a method of coordination to draw on community resources is required.



Group Work - Session 1

In this session, participants engaged in collaborative discussions at their tables addressing four key questions from their experience of the three PATH strands to date:

1. What have been the challenges to date?
2. How can these challenges be addressed?
3. What has been the learning to date?
4. What is the feedback to the DES and HEA?



The key themes emerging from the group discussions under these four questions are provided below:

What have been the challenges to date?

Operational Issues

- Expectations around unrealistic timeframes imposed on the programme. In particular, timeframes have been a problem with PATH 2.
- The lack of space to share models of good practice.
- Resources are necessary to ensure the programmes work effectively. No extra resources or staff were given to work on the programme or meet the administrative requirements.
- Geographical challenges and regional fragmentation.
- Unforeseeable logistical issues affecting budgets and possibilities
- Difficulties around the pre-entry conditional awards for the 1916 bursaries
- Institutional inflexibility regarding administration and finance
- The disconnect between SUSI and PATH funding

Need for Guidance from HEA/DES

- There was a need for guidance, including co-ordination and direction from the HEA.
- Guidance in the form of roadmaps/toolkits around national protocol, templates for good community engagement, and guidelines for effective involvement would be helpful.
- A lack of clarification around who the target groups are and need for a clear criterion for targeting prior to entry. For example, there was confusion around whether all mature students and students with disabilities were target groups, or subsets of these groups.

Communication and Collaboration

- Recognising and engaging with all relevant groups/common partners and ensuring that all voices are heard.
- There was some confusion about community partners.
- The capacity of partners to work together was not always present and good collaboration takes time and practice.
- At times, colleges were competing rather than collaborating.
- There is a need to join up the dots between the DES, HEIs and community groups in a real sense.
- Communication, including across HEIs, schools and communities.
- Building partnerships and links to communities
- Lack of consultation

Need for Cultural Change

- The need for a cultural change, including a cultural shift within organisations and institutes to commit to funding access initiatives.
- There is a need to build a more effective model of inclusion within HEIs and embed access in their core activities. HEIs need to think more coherently about integrating differing elements of access into a single coherent vision.

Accessing Data

- Accessing and using coherent data to help with targeting, underpin decision-making and better understand issues.

Evaluation

- Evaluating the student experience
- It is difficult to measure the impact of PATH 1 within 3 years as current 6th year students would only enter a PME in 3-4 years' time.

Early Intervention

- Exclusion begins early in education and effects future options; therefore, it might be better if initiatives started much earlier than 3rd level.

Engaging with Students

- Attracting applicants
- Student retention
- Getting information on funding out to target groups can be challenging.
- Raising the aspirations of students and raising their awareness of their own abilities.
- Managing expectations is challenging, particularly in situations where, for example, students are unsuccessful in getting a bursary.

Challenges Facing Applicants

- The complexity of funding options such as SUSI, including accessing and understanding them, navigating the application process and the length of time it can take.
- The cost of a 2-year PME is a huge issue, especially for lone parents.
- Need to be mindful of literacy challenges for applicants
- Huge personal information is disclosed as part of the application process
- The Irish language requirement for accessing teacher education.

How can these challenges be addressed?

Addressing Operational Issues

- Centralised funding would facilitate more cohesion and coherence.
- Less administration would lead to more capacity to support and develop students
- Flexible time frames and start times
- Timelines extended for impact (e.g. to a 6-year project)
- Renewal of timelines.

Policy Changes

- To address the barrier presented by the requirement of Irish for primary school teachers models used in other countries could be looked at. In some countries primary teachers do not teach all subjects. This way not all teachers would be required to have Irish which is inhibiting some of our target groups from accessing teacher education. Another suggestion was that students learn Irish as part of their B.Ed. or upon exit instead of entry.
- Extension of Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) to non-DEIS schools.
- Having Transition Year in 1st year instead of 4th year.



Centralising Access in HEIs

- Access needs to be reconfigured within individual institutions and become embedded and central – it is often on the fringes of institutions and under-resourced. PATH provides an opportunity to address this.
- An award for institutional buy-in and entry requirements that support diversity and access.
- Alternative pathways and flexible entry routes.

Communication and Collaboration

- Partnership/collaboration and community engagement offer a new way to conceptualise the way we work and listen to the voices of experience. Community ‘connectors’ on the ground in the community could be appointed to help with this.
- Engaging with teachers and principals as they play a key role in changing futures.
- Conferences such as this, with community groups and HEIs, including senior figures from HEIs.
- Recognising parents’, such as Traveller parents’, experience of education.
- Sharing models of good practice.
- Champions

Additional Resources

- Resource the community organisations to work with the HEIs instead of only allocating resources to the HEIs.
- Putting resources (including human resources) in place before activity begins.

Grants and Bursaries

- Confirmation of the continuance of the bursaries for the future.
- Roll out other bursaries such as the McManus Fund on a national level to provide other opportunities for students.
- Building on existing structures and programmes such as SUSI and McManus and improving what's there instead of building new systems all the time.
- Reviewing the SUSI application process
- Having one assessor per cluster for the 1916 Bursary, solely employed for that purpose
- Having a clear set of criteria for assessment for the 1916 Bursary
- Sending 1916 Bursary assessment forms to the relevant communities and target groups rather than HEIs, with completed forms being sent to HEIs.
- Restructuring the 1916 Bursary so that instead of giving students €5,000 per annum for four years, four times as many students could be given €5,000 over 4 years.

Accessing Data

- A national data system with robust access to data.
- There was interest expressed in using AIRO to address some challenges such as building links, and a desire to learn more through availing of workshops.

Early Intervention

- Early intervention to spot students early and bring them through the system.

Student Support

- Putting support structures in place early in college. For example, mentoring could be attached to bursaries.
- Having support structures available after college. For example, PA support often does not extend into the workplace for people with disabilities, who are often told it is not the responsibility of the HSE - it should be clear who is responsible.

- Supporting SUSI applicants and putting on workshops like the UCC SUSI workshops.

What are the learnings to date?

Reaching Target Groups

- PATH has provided us an opportunity to target the different groups who are not accessing higher education.
- The benefit of identifying students/applicants who may not get a bursary but require financial and other supports.
- To think about the workforce in the system and relevant organisations and how representative we are of the target groups. Are our services employing Travellers, members of other minority groups, single parents etc?
- It can be difficult to promote bursaries because individuals are disadvantaged.
- The importance of access to community education.



Importance of Early Intervention

- Needs to be thought of in the terms of a Prevention and Early Intervention approach and to start at primary level.
- The need to invest more into early education, primary and 2nd level and into marginalised communities across all ages.

Centralising Access in HEIs

- HEIs need effective models for inclusion - Access, Athena Swan etc.
- The need to change culture within HEIs and the difficulty of changing culture. Access offices are currently under-resourced and marginalised.

Effective Communication and Collaboration

- The importance of communication between partners and schools.
- The need to adopt a multi-disciplinary approach and communicate with all government departments.
- The importance of connectivity across sectors, HEIs and communities

- PATH was good at encouraging departments within college to work together, for example.
- Engagement with community partners needs to be proactive and purposeful or there is a risk of tokenism.
- PATH allowed groups to learn from one another and make use of the knowledge and expertise that exists within the sector.
- Set clear targets and accountability for the institutions to work towards together, in partnership with relevant service providers.
- All the provisions need clear definitions that everyone who engages with them understands. This would contribute to a shared understanding of objectives
- The passion we all have for making change to access in education.

Elements of PATH that worked well

- Small, local, supported seminars were helpful.
- The benefit of the regional approach and working as clusters.

Elements of PATH that need to be looked at

- There are major gaps in relation to the funding.
- Timing issues need to be addressed.
- Implementation of PATH displaced the administration of existing funding/bursary programmes.
- The need for a student-centred bursary programme so that the student can decide in advance where to go.

The Scale of the Challenge

- The overwhelming nature of the challenge, which is different across target groups and involves supporting entry to ITE for deeply disadvantaged individuals.
- The 1916 bursary applications revealed the depth of disadvantages.
- Support for disadvantaged communities and students is a long-term prospect.

Accessing Data

- The potential of AIRO for all clusters.

What is the feedback to DES and HEA?

Clarity

- Clear communication is critical.
- Clarity is needed around repeat students and funding after 3 years.
- Protocol on best practice would be helpful for all partners moving forward.

Support from DES/HEA

- There is a need for a roadmap as it is a complex landscape. Create a concept roadmap to assist in understanding where the student is at and where they need to go.
- It would have been useful initially if space for clusters to work in could have been provided by DES/HEA e.g. sending out funding proposals and providing space for clusters to start conversations.
- More funding is needed as there are currently major funding gaps.

Centralising Access in HEIs

- There is a need for HEIs themselves to develop a coherent model of inclusion and a single coherent vision. Access is everyone's business and not just the business of the access office.
- Passion and commitment by staff in HEIs should be captured and built upon.
- Look at alternative ways of allocating FET places in HEIs so that students from disadvantaged backgrounds have a better chance of entering university and IoT courses.

Data

- Data is critical to good decision making and this was illustrated by the AIRO presentation and the College Connect tool. Data helps with collating and evaluating supports.
- Interest in more information and workshops on AIRO.

Long-Term Approach

- Building relationships takes time – a longer lead in time to establish relationships with the partners in your cluster would be helpful and allow for a more seamless approach to PATH 2 AND 3.

- Access to teacher education needs a longer-term approach and joined up thinking across all sectors of education.
- PATH initiatives are worthwhile, but they are only a starting point.

Early Intervention

- Early years and primary school need to be looked at to start the discussion.

Geographical Challenges

- There are geographic and organisational challenges and some clusters are struggling to link up.
- There are huge geographical difficulties with the 'manufacture' of the clusters.

Communication and Collaboration

- Promote a stronger bridge between 2nd and 3rd level education.
- Create, advocate and resource community connectors to assist in developing meaningful and respectful partnerships.
- There is a huge advantage to getting competitors to collaborate.
- There should be more bottom-up than top-down leadership. Listen to access practitioners and community partners.
- Forge links with NCSE (National Council for Special Education).
- PATH presents an effective model for inclusion and integrating access across sectors.

Policy Changes

- Students in care/leaving care should be a specific target group.
- Review the role of Irish as an entry requirement.

Restructuring Funding

- Structure of bursaries should be looked at e.g. instead of €5,000 per year, awarding €2,500 each to a greater number of students.
- The 1916 bursary should be integrated into the CAO/SUSI system.

Learning from PATH

- Need to focus on the processes involved in PATH 3 and how we can learn from them.

Supporting Parents/Students

- Providing parents with support to access information and funding sources is key to access.

Future Challenges

- GDPR has implications and could cause difficulties.

Session 2 – Understanding Communities and Embedding Partnerships

Session 2 took place in the afternoon and included 4 presentations from service and policy partners supporting more integration at a national and local level. The afternoon presentations were as follows:

1. Wider Social Inclusion Policy Developments - Dr. Mary Cregg (Head of the Social Inclusion Unit, Department of Education and Skills).
2. Tusla's Education Welfare Support Services – Maria Tobin (National Integrated Services Manager, Education and Welfare Services).
3. Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) – Deirdre Kelly, Department of Rural and Community Development.
4. Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs) – Colma Nic Lughadha, National Co-ordinator for CYPSC, Tusla.

There was also an opportunity for questions and answers following the presentations, and further group discussions at participants' tables. The slides from speakers in this session will be/has been circulated to those attending.

Wider Social Inclusion Policy Developments – Including NTRIS – National Traveller and Roma Strategy

Dr. Mary Cregg, the head of the Social Inclusion Unit in the Department of Education and Skills, outlined the purpose of the unit and the spectrum of policies and strategies that address social inclusion. The following government plans and strategies were outlined:

- The 2017 DEIS Plan and the context and history of DEIS. DES are working to have a monitoring and evaluation framework for DEIS to draw on findings and build on what works.
- The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS), which is a whole of government strategy. A Steering Group has been set up to monitor the implementation of the Strategy, which has an Education Sub-Committee. There is an

overlap between the themes of the strategy and the work of PATH – as supporting Travellers and Roma to become teachers is one of the objectives of the strategy.

- The NTRIS two-year pilot was outlined which targets attendance, participation and school completion among Travellers to improve educational outcomes for Traveller and Roma students.
- The Mulvey report and the North East Inner City Initiative (NEIC), including the work being done locally in the NEIC area to support and improve educational outcomes.
- The Migrant Integration Strategy.

TUSLA's Education Welfare Services Support Services (including the Home School Liaison Service)

Maria Tobin from TUSLA provided an outline of the work of the TUSLA Educational Welfare Service. The premise of the scheme is that through supporting parents and the family, a child's educational outcomes can improve.

- The service's overarching objective is to improve the attendance, participation and retention of young people in school. She provided information on the role and contribution of Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme, the School Completion Plan and the Statutory Attendance Service and the integrated response of these strands was outlined.

The key areas of work of the HSCL officer were outlined including:

- Home visitation; Integrated work with local services; Parental development; Policy development; Principal and teacher engagement.
- The importance of the role of HSCL in making children and young people aware of the supports available is important – partnership with other services and other organisations working in this space was highlighted as vital to ensure that they can support pathways to higher education.
- Contact details of all national EWS managers was provided to attendees to support engagement and participation with other services and organisations.

Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) – Structured engagement with HEIs

Deirdre Kelly from the Department of Rural and Community Development provided information on Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) as a statutory structure at local level to support partnership working at a county level and gave an overview of a case study in Louth.

- LCDCs were introduced as part of the local government reform process and the Local Government Reform Act 2014. The Committees are structured in a way that aims to ensure balance and a range of interests, in line with the legislation.
- Essentially, it is a local authority committee, but it is independent from the local authority in its decision making.

- The role of the LCDC is to co-ordinate all local community development activities at a local level. There are 33 LCDCs in Ireland and all are unique and at different stages of development. Deirdre Kelly pointed out that a lot of the issues highlighted among higher education access stakeholders today were also reflected in community sector in the context of LCDCs.
- An outline of the range of members was provided. The Committees can include between 14-19 members. The community element comes from the PPN – Public Participation Networks which have been formed in local authority areas. In some areas, Family Resource Centres are also members of the LCDC.
- Information was provided on the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP), a six-year plan that is grounded in consultation, based on evidence and targets both economic and community goals. A case study on Louth was provided including information on the work being done in the area on access to education.
- Some challenges to LCDCs were discussed including the cross-government approach. It was highlighted that there is a potential for collaboration and that they will be instigating a training and support programme as part of the review of LCDCs that will be carried out.

Children and Young People’s Services Committees (CYPSC) – Interagency working

Colma Nic Lughadha, the national co-ordinator for CYPSC, provided an outline of CYPSCs and the interagency model. The goal of CYPSCs are to support and enhance local interagency working to improve outcomes for children and young people. They are guided in their work by the five national outcomes for children and young people, as stipulated in *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures*, and are structured based on these. CYPSCs mirror local authority boundaries. Their remit is 0-24 years of age. Their approach is universal – i.e. how are all children and young people in any county doing?

Information on the purpose of CYPSC was provided which includes:

- The area Children and Young People’s Plan, which is also based on data, evidence and consultation. It was highlighted that all CYPSCs carry out a mapping and audit of service provision for children and young people at a county level and that this can be a resource for services working towards promoting access in Ireland.
- Membership of CYPSC was outlined.
- There is currently a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in place on how LCDCs work with CYPSCs. There should be synergy between the work of CYPSCs and LCDCs.
- The work currently being carried out by CYPSCs and the level of third level engagement with the committees was outlined. A significant number of CYPSCs have engagement with HEIs. The range of HEIs and entities who are already engaged with their local CYPSC was provided, with membership evident across the majority of CYPSCs in Ireland. It was highlighted that HEIs have a valuable skill set to support their work including in developing plans and carrying out research.

- It was noted that there is a potential for engagement across all CYPSCs for engagement with senior personnel in HEIs and also access offices., and how CYPSCs can support education partners in adopting a PEI approach to access.

Question and Answer - Session 2

Seminar participants were offered an opportunity to ask questions of the afternoon's speakers and offer observations and comments. Some of the areas covered and points raised in this session included:

- These structures are appropriate for the mainstream, but there is a gap in supporting Travellers, for example. The resources which have been lost by Traveller groups in recent years was highlighted in this session.
- Some participants were heartened to hear similar issues coming from the HEIs in the room who were saying that for PATH to work there needed to be more targeting and positive discrimination.
- It was noted that there is a need to change culture and to enhance participation of people of colour, minorities and those with a disability by including these individuals in higher education and indeed at events like this today. The issue of dealing with gifted children was also highlighted and the need to support these students in the education system.
- The importance of inclusion in maximising people's potential and the role of education in supporting the achievement of this potential in a holistic way was raised.
- It was highlighted that presentations were welcomed for providing information on the efforts towards improving co-ordination and the foundations for joining up the pieces. These structures and systems provide hope for the future.

Group work – Session 2

In this session, participants engaged in collaborative discussions at their tables addressing two key questions from their experience of the three PATH strands to date:

1. What has been your experience in engaging with and building connections between institutions and the wider community structures to identify students from NAP target groups?
2. One thing that you have learned today that you will try to implement?

The key themes emerging from the group discussions under these two questions is provided below:



What has been your experience with engaging with and building connections between institutions and the wider community structures to identify students from NAP target groups?

Experiences Prior to PATH

- A to-be-published Ph.D. on access.
- The participation notes from future jobs.ie
- The student success strategies being developed.
- Individual rather than organisational engagement.
- Local area partnerships.
- Review of the CAO

Collaboration

- It is important that the engagement that takes place is meaningful, rather than tokenistic and involves equal partnership.
- People largely want to engage
- Work should take place across communities through CYPSCs, schools, community groups etc.
- Small relationships build others.
- A clear mission and goals are important.



Barriers to Collaboration

- Access practitioners have many demands on their time, making it difficult for them to allocate sufficient time for true engagement.
- Partnerships need time to develop but many practitioners are buried in paperwork and have no time to develop them.
- While many people are keen to collaborate, there are time limitations and steering committees, sub-groups, initiatives and 'gate-keepers' cut further into this time.
- HEIs targeting students for their individual institutions rather than for higher education overall is an issue. For example, one institute's access project hinges on collaboration with another HEI who are unsure whether to support them as they are 'competitors.'

- Multiple stakeholders from HEIs are linking with community partners. This can bring about 'partnership fatigue' amongst community groups.

Trust and Accountability

- Accountability is necessary.
- Trust needs to be built up and is harmed when time is spent filling out applications and proposals, but no support is provided.

Integration

- There should be greater integration of pathways between FET and HEIs, using structural links to continue to support the individual for example.
- There is a need for integration with all services and someone to co-ordinate them all

Cultural Change

- There is a need to continue to mainstream access and inclusion as an institution-wide activity.
- Some of the structures tasked with solving problems are a part of the problem. A hierarchy needs to be dismantled.

Opportunities

- There is an opportunity for PATHs to work together on ITE feedback as some of the discussion is too general.
- There is an opportunity to use existing databases on evidence of access to ITE (e.g. the DITE project from NUIG)
- Barriers to access can be reduced through competency-based learning and an apprenticeship/vocational approach.

Sustainability

- There is a need for continuation of initiatives and a 'passing of the mantle.' However, a lack of adequate funding to follow up on projects is an issue as when funding ends it threatens the continuation and sustainability of activities.

Other Issues

- The representation on LCDCs and CYPSCs isn't broad enough.

- The cohort slightly above thresholds need support.
- There needs to be fewer committees.

One thing that you have learned today that you will try to implement?

- To continue to mainstream access and inclusion as an institution-wide activity.
- To utilise AIRO maps for a data driven approach.
- To use Pobal.ie deprivation maps.
- To have fewer committees.
- Localised collaborations between all community organisations and HEIs with one steering group per county and national committees to evaluate, create and implement policies that focus on access and educations.
- Streamlining.



Closing Address from Minister Mary Mitchell O'Connor

Minister for Higher Education Mary Mitchell O'Connor closed the event. She stated that access is a key priority for the Department and that it was heartening to hear the conversations. She stated that education is critical and that it is important to put the student at the centre of all decisions in education and should be at the core of all policy decisions.

The Minister acknowledged that there are gaps in the system but that there is an ambition for participation in higher education in the Action Plan for Education, and this ambition could not be achieved without the dedicated work of everyone at today's seminar.

The Minister stated that the Department will shortly be publishing the completed progress review of the National Access Plan. It shows that participation has been increased across several target groups and in some groups access targets have been exceeded. There have been successes in other areas, including developing a National Access Data Plan. She thanked participants for their responses to the PATH fund.

The Minister also spoke of the challenges that are faced in improving equity of access, including the need to enhance partnerships between FET and HEI to develop access and foundation courses.

The government has committed more than €16m in funding over 3 years as part of the PATH fund. The Minister stated that its impact will be long lasting and ensure better targeting of the most disadvantaged in Irish society. The total capital investment of

government in education will be 20% higher in 2019 than in 2016 and access will be front and centre in this agenda of increased investment. Initiatives like PATH will enable access to move into the realm of everybody's business.

The Minister thanked all participants for their role in creating an equitable system for our education system. She expressed confidence that we can improve representation from target groups and work well regionally on an interagency basis to achieve collective goals.

Seminar feedback

Participants were invited to offer feedback on the event through evaluation forms that were made available at the end of the seminar. The feedback received was mainly positive and the majority of responses commended the event as being interesting, informative and well-organised. A number of participants highlighted that the seminar highlighted a number of interesting topics which helped them gain information on different groups, strategies and policies being implemented and structures which are in place. Participants also welcomed the opportunity to network other partners and stakeholders in the sector and welcomed the diversity among those attending on the day. As a recommendation for future events, some participants suggested allocating more time to table discussions and opportunities for questions and answers.