

NATIONAL ACCESS PLAN

A STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN FOR EQUITY OF ACCESS, PARTICIPATION AND SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION 2022-2028



REPORT OF CONSULTATION PROCESS JUNE 2022



An Roinn Breisoideachais agus Ardoideachais,
Taighde, Nuálaíochta agus Eolaíochta
Department of Further and Higher Education,
Research, Innovation and Science

HEA | HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS

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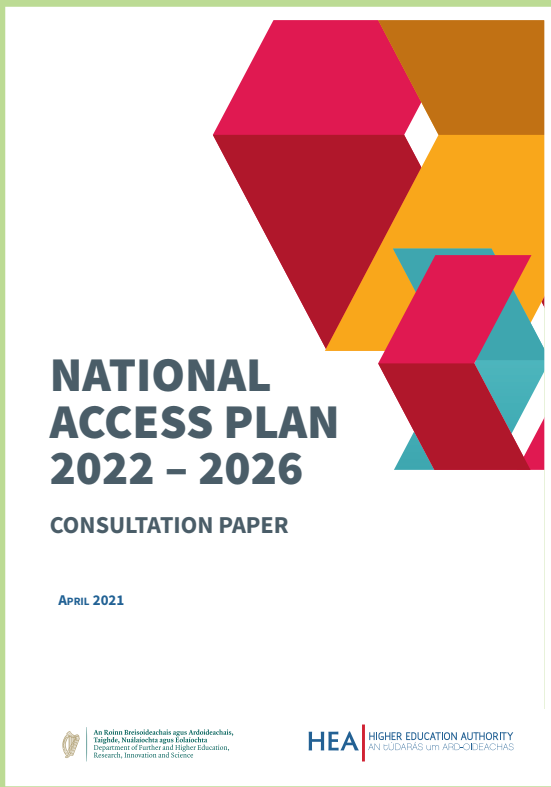
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Pre-entry and Post-entry activities

Overall vision for equity of access to higher education in Ireland

Funding programmes

Target groups

Challenges presented by COVID-19

Pathways to HE

Mainstreaming

Funding programmes

A whole of education approach

Social inclusion initiatives outside of the higher education sector

Equity of access from a student perspective

[CONSULTATION PROCESS – STATISTICAL HIGHLIGHTS]

150+
Attended the
National Access
Forum

50+
Students
attended the
Student
Consultation
Event

20+
One-to-one
stakeholder
consultations

250+
People interacted
with as part of the
process

[SOCIAL MEDIA - INSIGHTS]



**Announcement of
Consultation Process
with Minister Simon
Harris' video**

10,600+
views

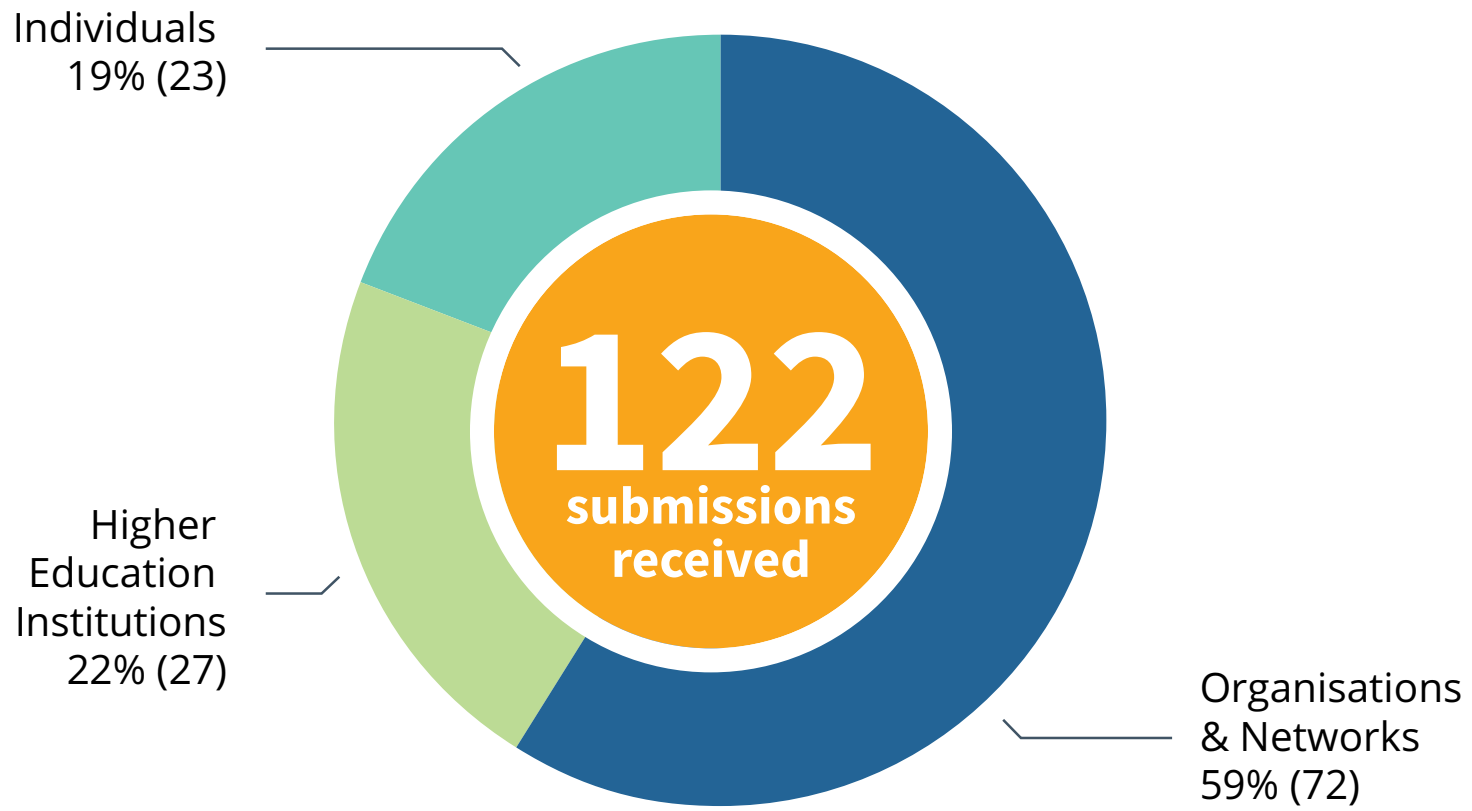
**Overall Impressions
during Consultation
Process (April to
June 2021)**

107,500+




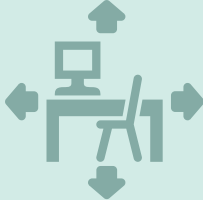




**Overall Profile visits
during Consultation
Process (April to
June 2021)**

2,500+

[BREAKDOWN OF SUBMISSIONS]



[KEY THEMES EMERGING]

<p>Financial Support for Students</p> 	<p>Priority Groups</p> 	<p>Financial Support for HEIs</p> 	<p>Pathways</p> 	<p>Part-time and Flexible Learning</p> 	<p>A Whole of Institution Approach</p> 
<p>Policy Coherence</p> 	<p>Mainstreaming and UDL</p> 	<p>Pathways from HE to Employment</p> 	<p>Local and Community Partnerships</p> 	<p>Data</p> 	<p>Post COVID-19</p> 

01



Financial Support for Students

- **Student Grant rates** are not sufficient to cover cost of living; creates additional challenges for students from rural areas
- A more responsive approach needed for individuals and families where **income just barely exceeds** the current income thresholds for grants
- **Enhanced allocations to HEIs** to specifically support student financial hardship in the coming years pending SUSI review
- Funding system does not adequately support students who wish to pursue **postgraduate education** or want to upskill
- Greater **alignment in policy** and practice between social protection and education e.g. BTEA, Jobseekers allowance, reduced application fees for people on social welfare
- Cost of **Student accommodation**
- Improve communication and **raise awareness of national supports**

02



Priority Groups

- **Traveller and Roma Communities** require more support – Traveller Education Officers should be placed in HEIs; early intervention needed in Traveller communities; more supports at second-level that are culturally appropriate
- **Mature Students** – COVID-19 has highlighted the needs of mature students and the additional demands they face including work, caring responsibilities and financial difficulties; definition of Mature Student needs further refinement
- **Students with disabilities** – more focus should be given to inclusion rather than access; specific pre-entry supports for SWD to prepare them for HE; post-entry supports to create meaningful participation in HE for SWD to ensure progression; more supports for SWD at postgraduate level
- **Lone parents** require more support in accessing higher education – no clear pathway to HE

02



Priority Groups (Continued)

- Students with intellectual disabilities, people who have experienced homelessness, survivors of domestic violence, migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, ethnic minorities, people who have experience of the criminal justice system, first in family, part-time flexible learners, older people (defined by the United Nations as aged 65+ and by the EU as 55+), students with chronic illnesses, adult literacy students, people who have experience of the care system – **require more prioritisation**
- Target groups should not only be those groups that are under-represented at the point of entry, but also those students and **groups who are at most risk of not progressing**
- Need to recognise the full spectrum of students, student backgrounds, identities, cultural expression - **intersectionality** of each student

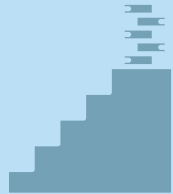
03



Financial Support for HEIs

- **Budget** for higher education needs to better support the access vision
- Increased funding so that HEIs can provide **additional resources** to support the oversight, management, and administration of access initiatives and increasing student numbers
- Support for **part-time** provision requires consideration

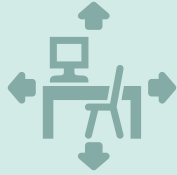
04



Pathways

- Specific pathways required for **specific cohorts** e.g. children in care and care leavers
- Flexible entry routes that recognise **parental education attainment** and being first generation in immediate family to access higher education
- **Foundation courses** provided in the most disadvantaged communities in co-operation with local post-primary schools/FE Colleges
- Higher numbers of **ringfenced places** in all HEIs for students coming from FE
- Clarity and more information for students - a **centralised information point** for all FE to HE entry routes
- Targeted supports for disadvantaged students trying to access **high points courses** e.g. medicine, law, etc.

05



Part-time and Flexible Learning

- System is perceived as being structured in a way that acts as a **financial disincentive** to accessing higher education on a part-time basis
- **Eligibility of SUSI** needs consideration in order to provide financial support to flexible, mature, and part-time learners
- Part-time students do not have access to **adequate supports** in higher education e.g. medical, counselling, financial support - there needs to be more funding to institutions to provide these supports
- More options for **asynchronous learning** and **alternative assessments**
- **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** needs to be embedded and mainstreamed in all HEIs – ambitious targets needed, increased visibility
- Greater focus on **lifelong learning**

06



A Whole of Institution Approach

- Create a cultural shift across education – **Access is an issue for everyone**; emphasise the **value of diversity** for the HEI through the perspectives, experiences and knowledge that diversity brings to education
- A focus on **inclusion structures in HEIs** – Access needs to be a part of the highest level decision making structures
- **Upskilling and staff development** is needed – ISL training, diversity training, disability awareness, etc.
- There needs to be **better representation** in educators at all levels of education – students need to see it to believe it
- Partnerships between Access offices and International offices in HEIs to ensure **inclusive mobility** – equal opportunities to go on Erasmus or pursue education abroad
- Meaningful **inclusion of students from target groups** in decision making structures in HEIs
- Formal **evaluation of approaches and interventions** within HEIs

07



Policy Coherence

- **Holistic and whole of government approach** needed - unintentional consequences of misaligned policies can have a huge impact on students
- **Career guidance and counselling services in schools** need to be reviewed and adequately resourced – National Guidance Framework
- **Early intervention** is needed – a **whole of education** support package which would identify children in need of support from as early as ECCE
- Concern that there is a disconnect between types of learning at second level and third level – need to **prepare students** for higher education
- **Imbalance between public and private secondary education** when it comes to accessing high points courses – how can schools be better supported so that all students can access these courses
- Increased support to vulnerable students trying to navigate the **CAO system**
- **Planned** approach is needed to prepare for future student numbers and student needs

08



Mainstreaming, Student Success & Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

- Mainstreaming needs to be **defined and clarification** is needed on what is expected of HEIs
- Learning supports should be available on a **needs basis**
- The goal should be HEIs providing **universal support** whilst also having the capacity to provide **additional supports** to students who need them
- **National policy on UDL** – performance framework, training, standardised national approach to UDL implementation
- Accountability for embedding UDL into programmes – goals and targets, link to funding streams where possible
- **UDL training** needs to be provided to educators throughout all levels of education
- Focus on **inclusion** – HEIs should provide a supportive learning environment that ensures students have the necessary resources/supports to reach their full potential

09



Pathways from HE to Employment

- **Idea of unemployment** once completing higher education will deter many from accessing higher education in the first place
- **Pathways for students entering the workforce** post-graduation; unpaid internships or volunteer work not an option for students from access target groups
- **Government apprenticeship schemes** through grants and/or employer tax incentives could be considered
- More focus on **entry into the jobs market for students with disabilities**
- **Supports for students in accessing information on transitioning to**, and accessing the workplace (mentoring schemes, career guidance, etc.)

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Local and Community Partnerships

- **Importance of community work** needs to be highlighted - Community partnerships are essential to delivering the access vision
- There should be more of a focus on **partnerships between HEIs and the local community** e.g. Communiversity programmes
- **Expansion of access programmes** into the community with a particular focus on DEIS schools and schools in rural areas where there is low participation in HE
- Need for **adequate funding for community initiatives and outreach programmes** - resourcing and funding is critical to their success
- **National mentor initiative** – currently mentor programmes in some HEIs are not accessible to all, needs to be developed on a national level in partnership with community organisations
- Greater focus on working with families in communities where there may be **cultural barriers** to accessing higher education

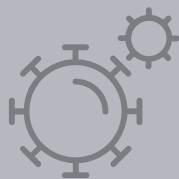
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Data

- A focus on **data and evidence-based policy** development should be maintained
- **Tracking student success**
- **Data collection infrastructure** needs to be put in place to ensure proper monitoring and evaluation
- More focus on **data sharing** across the sector and government
- A strategy to collect **data on participation of access cohorts in Post-Primary schools** to inform pre-entry strategies and approaches
- Develop **data analytics for specific target groups** e.g. lone parents, Travellers, care leavers etc.

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Post COVID-19

- Online learning has been extremely beneficial to many students – there should be a **blended** approach going forward
- Standardised national approach to **lecture recording and captioning**
- **Continuous assessment** instead of exams should be continued post COVID-19 especially for students with disabilities
- COVID-19 has highlighted the **digital divide** that exists amongst students – laptop scheme needs to be continued in some way, more focus on connectivity issues and digital literacy training
- Focus on **mental health supports** will be needed – COVID-19 will have a lasting impact on students
- A **new type of disadvantage** – people on the margins may now be considered disadvantaged; a new student cohort



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