

NATIONAL ACCESS PLAN

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



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



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

HEA

HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS



FOREWORD



**by Minister for
Further and
Higher Education,
Research,
Innovation and
Science**

This is our fourth National Access Plan setting out our ambition for an inclusive, diverse higher education sector.

We want a third level sector where neither your background nor experience has a bearing on your ability to attend and flourish in higher education.

Unfortunately, there remains significant barriers to access and some people and their wider communities have real fears about higher education.

This new Plan aims to support inclusion and diversity in our student body, address the wider struggles and challenges for students, and deliver sustainable progress. It recognises the needs of vulnerable learners, the most marginalised and those with special and additional needs.

This Plan will continue to target and support students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, students with disabilities and students from the Irish Traveller community.

I am also pleased to see that within these three core groups the Plan has identified specific cohorts of students who are underrepresented or marginalised, including students and mature students from disadvantaged areas; students with intellectual disabilities; members of the Roma community; those who have experience of the care system, homelessness, and the criminal justice system; as well as students who are survivors of domestic violence and students who are carers. ‘Second-chance’ mature students as well as migrants and refugees are also named for the first time.

We have worked with stakeholders, higher education leaders, and student representatives to bring about this plan. It aims to recognise every person’s educational journey is different and every person requires different supports.

Great strides were made over the course of the last National Access Plan and participation in higher education across the State has improved. Notwithstanding this, the data points to the scale of the challenge to grow participation by underrepresented groups in higher education.

This will require working with communities and schools across the country to identify the specific barriers facing underrepresented groups and put in place measures to address these.

Of course, capacity within our higher education institutions, the cost of going to college and the availability of flexible options are also barriers. We will continue to address funding for the higher education sector and the cost of third-level education for the most disadvantaged.

A recently published review of our Student Grant Scheme and Future Funding Framework for higher education gives us a roadmap for future improvements. It cannot all happen overnight but we can – and will – make meaningful change.

This Plan has been developed collaboratively between my Department and the Higher Education Authority and was informed by a significant consultation process with interested stakeholders, including higher education institutions, students, and individuals, representatives of priority groups, and other government departments and agencies. I take this opportunity to thank the HEA and all stakeholders who engaged in the consultation process for their valuable contribution.

I look forward to continuing to work with you in implementing this Plan, improving support for underrepresented priority groups and improving the learning experience, participation and success of all students in higher education.

Minister Simon Harris TD

PREFACE



by CEO of HEA

Equity of access to higher education is a priority for the HEA that is reflected in the HEA's founding legislation and in developments such as the Higher Education System Performance Framework and successive HEA strategic plans. Since 2005 there have been three national plans for equity of access, which demonstrates its importance in higher education policy. This new National Access Plan now continues, and builds on, the vision of those previous plans and our ambitions for achieving a more inclusive and diverse student population in higher education.

Since the last Plan was published in 2015, important developments have occurred in equity of access. The launch of the HEA-managed Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) with its initial three strands, focusing on broadening access to teacher education, the 1916 Bursary Fund and building partnerships between higher education institutions and community partners, has demonstrated short-term impact and laid the foundation for improving equity of access to higher education.

Higher education institutions have improved whole-of-education approaches to access, as well as student success strategies and universal design principles that provide quality inclusive learning experiences for all students. A new fourth strand of PATH launched in 2022 will further support inclusive universally designed environments for all students and will also develop provision for students with intellectual disabilities.

Data collection has improved. The Deprivation Index Scores (DIS) data provide detailed insight into the socioeconomic profile of our student population and enables targeted interventions to support equity of access.

Some targets identified in the last Plan have been achieved; but significant challenges remain. For groups such as students from the Irish Traveller community, students from disadvantaged areas and first-time mature students, participation rates are too low. Only 10% of students in higher education come from disadvantaged areas. It is clear that our student population is still unrepresentative of wider Irish society.

The new National Access Plan coincides with other developments in the higher education sector. The higher education landscape continues to evolve, with five technological universities now established. The higher education system continues to meet the skills needs of the economy with the growth of the Springboard+ and Human Capital Initiative programmes. Major changes are underway in the provision of apprenticeships. The recent publication of the funding and reform framework for higher education will have a significant impact on the development of the sector. Our ambitions for equity of access and participation are happening in tandem with these developments and it is imperative that the needs of marginalised and vulnerable students are at the focus of everything that we do.

I wish to thank the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science who has worked in partnership with the HEA Executive in the development of this Plan. I would also like to thank the many stakeholders who contributed to its development both through participation in the consultation events or through written submissions. Throughout the consultation process we engaged with over 250 individuals and received over 120 submissions. This extensive consultation has been critical in determining the goals, objectives and actions for the next seven years and articulating our ambitions for achieving a truly inclusive and diverse higher education population.

Dr Alan Wall, CEO, Higher Education Authority

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List of Acronyms

AHEAD

AHEAD is an independent non-profit organisation working to create inclusive environments in education and employment for people with disabilities. The focus of its work is further education and training, higher education and graduate employment.

CAO Central Applications Office

The Central Applications Office processes applications for undergraduate courses in Irish higher education institutions (HEIs). Decisions on admissions to undergraduate courses are made by the HEIs, which instruct the CAO to make offers to successful candidates.

CSO Central Statistics Office

Agency that gathers and analyses population and other data, through the national Census and other surveys.

DCEDIY Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

The Department's mission is to enhance the lives of children, young people, adults, families and communities, recognising diversity and promoting equality of opportunity.

DEIS Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

Department of Education policy instrument that addresses educational disadvantage by prioritising the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities through enhanced support for designated primary and secondary schools.

DFHERIS Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

The Department is responsible for policy, funding and governance of the higher and further education and research sectors and for oversight of the work of the state agencies and public institutions operating in those areas.

DIS Deprivation Index Scores

These measure the relative affluence or disadvantage of a particular geographical area based on data compiled from the Census.

DoE Department of Education

The Department of Education's mission is to help children and young people, through learning, to achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland's social, economic and cultural development.

DPER Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

The Department's goal is to serve the public interest through sound governance of public expenditure and by leading and enabling reform across the Civil and Public Service.

DRCD Department of Rural and Community Development

The Department's mission is to promote rural and community development and to support vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland.

DSP Department of Social Protection

The Department's mission is to promote active participation and inclusion in society through the provision of income supports, employment services and other services.

EAS Equal Access Survey

Annual voluntary set of questions asked of first-year full-time and part-time undergraduate students in Higher Education Authority (HEA)-funded institutions. The questions are asked as part of the registration process at the start of the academic year. Information obtained from the EAS supports measurement of national targets relating to equity of access and the development of an evidence base to inform policy in this area.

eduroam

eduroam (education roaming) is the secure, world-wide roaming access service developed for the international research and education community. eduroam provides internet connectivity to students, researchers and staff from participating institutions across campus and when visiting other participating institutions.

ETBs Education and Training Boards

In 2013 the former Vocational Educational Committees were dissolved and replaced by 16 Educational and Training Boards responsible for delivering primary, post-primary and further education in their regions, and developing appropriate further education and training programmes in conjunction with SOLAS.

FE/FET Further Education/Further Education and Training

FE/FET consists of post-secondary level, pre-higher education qualifications from Levels 1–6 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). It includes apprenticeships, traineeships, Post Leaving Cert (PLC) courses, community and adult education as well as core literacy and numeracy services. The Education and Training Board network provides FE/FET courses and programmes. Other local providers also offer courses, including online through SOLAS eCollege.

FSD Fund for Students with Disabilities

The FSD provides funding to higher education institutions to assist them in offering supports and services to students with disabilities to enable them to access, fully participate in and successfully complete their chosen course of study. The FSD also supports students on PLC further education and training courses.

GDPR General Data Protection Regulation

The General Data Protection Regulation is a European Union law that was implemented in 2018 and requires organisations to safeguard personal data and uphold the privacy rights of anyone in EU territory.

HCI Human Capital Initiative

HEA-managed programme whose primary objective is to fund additional capacity across the higher education sector and to use that investment to meet priority skill needs for the future.

HE Higher Education

Education at universities, technological universities, institutes of technology, and other education institutions, with qualifications of Levels 6–10 on the NFQ.

HEI Higher Education Institution

A university or technological university (TU), institute of technology (IoT), college of education or other institution offering higher educational qualifications.

HEA Higher Education Authority

The HEA leads the strategic development of the Irish higher education and research system. Its objective is to create a coherent system of diverse institutions with distinct missions which is responsive to the social, cultural and economic development of Ireland and its people and which supports the achievement of national objectives.

HEAnet

HEAnet is Ireland's National Education and Research Network. HEAnet delivers high-speed internet connectivity and IT shared services to all levels of the Irish education sector.

ITE Initial Teacher Education

ITE refers to the initial phase of learning to be a teacher when student teachers are engaged in a recognised teacher education programme.

IUA Irish Universities Association

Representative body for Irish universities and associated colleges.

NCSE National Council for Special Education

NCSE aims to improve the delivery of education services to people with special educational needs arising from disabilities with particular emphasis on children.

NDA National Disability Authority

Independent statutory body that provides information and advice to the Government on policy and practice relevant to the lives of people with disabilities.

NFETL National Forum for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

The NFETL is the national body responsible for leading and advising on the enhancement of teaching and learning in Irish higher education including professional development and student success.

NFQ National Framework of Qualifications

The NFQ is a 10-level system used to describe qualifications in the Irish education and training system.

NStEP National Student Engagement Programme

NStEP is a collaborative initiative of the QQI, USI and HEA. NStEP supports student engagement in higher education institutions, seeking to champion a strong culture of partnership between students and staff through practice-based activities, informing policy developments, and underpinning the national landscape.

OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

The OECD is an international organisation whose goal is to shape policies that foster prosperity, equality, opportunity and wellbeing for all.

PATH Programme for Access to Higher Education

PATH is a strategic funding programme established in 2016 for the delivery of equity of access objectives. PATH supports the implementation of National Access Plans by providing funding to deliver innovative responses, through specific strands of funding, to support participation and retention in higher education of specific target/priority groups.

P-POD –Post-Primary Online Database

P-POD is a central database for student and some school data which is hosted by the Department of Education. Post-primary schools access the system using the Department's Esinet secure portal to maintain their students' data.

QQI Quality and Qualifications Ireland

State agency that maintains the National Framework of Qualifications and provides quality assurance for further and higher education in Ireland.

RPL Recognition of Prior Learning

Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning as a means of fulfilling higher education entry requirements.

SAF Student Assistance Fund

A fund that provides financial assistance for higher education students who experience financial difficulties while attending college.

SEN Special Educational Need

A restriction in the capacity of a person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition.

SOLAS An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna

SOLAS is the state agency responsible for funding, planning and coordinating training and further education programmes.

SRS Student Record System

HEA system for gathering and analysing student data. Higher education institutions provide data to the HEA as part of an annual student statistical return.

Student Grant Scheme

This statutory means-tested grant scheme, provided for under the Student Support Act 2011, is the main scheme for supporting students attending approved further and higher education courses.

Student Support Scheme

The Student Support Scheme for People in the International Protection System provides financial supports for students who are in the protection system.

SUSI Student Universal Support Ireland

A business unit of the City of Dublin ETB, which is the appointed awarding authority for the statutory-based Student Grant Scheme.

THEA Technological Higher Education Association

Representative organisation for the technological higher education sector.

UD

Universal design in education is the creation of an environment which can be accessed by all and enables full engagement, progression and success for all students.

USI Union of Students in Ireland

The national representative body for students in third-level education on the island of Ireland.

Glossary of Terms

1916 Bursary Fund

The PATH 2 – 1916 Bursary Fund is a strand of the Programme for Access to Higher Education. The purpose of this funding is to encourage participation and success by the most socioeconomically disadvantaged students from sections of society that are significantly underrepresented in higher education.

Access service

A unit or office in higher education institutions that coordinates the planning and delivery of pre- and post-entry programmes targeting increased access and participation of students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, mature students, students with disabilities, and students from other underrepresented groups.

Apprenticeship

An apprenticeship is a training and education programme that combines learning in a higher education institution or a further education training institution with work-based learning in a company. Apprenticeships can last between two and four years with at least half of the learning completed in the workplace. Apprenticeships lead to internationally recognised qualifications and can be from Level 6 to Level 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Centres of teaching excellence

The centres of teaching excellence that participate in PATH strand 1 are Dublin City University, Maynooth University, National Institute of Studies in Education, National University of Ireland, Galway/St Angela's College, University College Cork, Marino Institute of Education/Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin/National College of Art and Design.

Completion rate

The proportion of undergraduate students who complete their programme of study.

Covid-19 Once-off Contingency Fund for Access Services

Announced in October 2020, the €1.9m once-off fund was aimed at supporting the delivery of access and support services to vulnerable students from target groups. The funding assisted HEI access services to implement supports to meet the needs of particularly vulnerable students, with priority given to National Access Plan target groups, who have been most impacted by Covid-19.

Dormant Accounts Funding for Traveller and Roma Students in Higher Education

Ring-fenced funding of €300,000 for targeted supports to address the implications of Covid-19 for students from the Traveller community to access and progress through higher education in 2021. The funding was secured through the Dormant Accounts Fund. In 2022 the fund increased to €450,000 and now also includes students from the Roma community.

Erasmus+

Erasmus+ is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe. The 2021–2027 programme places a strong focus on social inclusion, the green and digital transitions, and promoting young people's participation in democratic life.

Equity

Equity in education means ensuring that every student has an equal opportunity to achieve their potential and that any social or economic constraints that might prevent a student from having equal opportunities are mitigated.

Graduate outcomes

Graduate outcomes data comes from the Graduate Outcomes Survey, which is an annual survey of graduates conducted by HEIs nine months after graduation. Factors explored in the survey include occupation, salary, relevance of studies, enrolment in further study and barriers to employment or further study.

Leaving Certificate

The Leaving Certificate is the final exam of the Irish secondary school system and is used as a university matriculation examination in Ireland.

Mature student

A mature student is a person who is 23 years of age or older on 1 January in the year of application for entry to a higher education programme.

Part-time/flexible education

A higher education programme not offered on a full-time basis and generally with a value of less than 60 credits per academic year.

Participation rate

The proportion of people from a certain population/age group that enters higher education in a year.

Progression rate

The proportion of students who progress from first to second year of an undergraduate programme of study.

Qualifax

Qualifax is Ireland's National Learners' Database and the 'one stop shop' for learners and the public. It provides information about further and higher education and training options in Ireland and further afield. Articles and links are also provided to help students, jobseekers, parents, guidance professionals and graduates make informed choices for education, training and career pathways.

Regional clusters

Regional clusters of higher education institutions that collaborate in implementing PATH 2 and 3.

Special rate of grant

The Student Grant Scheme (<https://susi.ie/>; see above for definition) provides a special rate of grant to students who, on 31 December of the year previous to their application, have a reckonable income of equal to or less than an amount specified yearly in the Student Grant Scheme. The reckonable income must include an eligible long-term social assistance or social insurance payment or a payment under a designated programme.

Springboard+

An upskilling initiative in higher education which offers free and subsidised courses at certificate, degree and master's degree level leading to qualifications in areas where there are employment opportunities in the economy. It is managed by the HEA on behalf of DFHERIS.

StudentSurvey.ie

StudentSurvey.ie (the Irish Survey of Student Engagement) asks students about their experiences of higher education, including their academic, personal and social development, and how their institutions provide opportunities and support for this development.

System Performance Framework

Framework under which national priorities and key objectives of government for higher education are detailed.

Teaching Council

The Teaching Council is the professional standards body for the teaching profession, which promotes and regulates professional standards in teaching.

Tertiary education

Refers to the system of post-compulsory second level education consisting of further education and training, higher education and research.

Transition rates

The proportion of students entering higher education directly from second-level education.

Tusla

Tusla – Child and Family Agency is a state agency that supports and promotes the development, welfare and protection of children, and the effective functioning of families.



Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

Education has the power to transform lives, lift people out of poverty and break down cycles of disadvantage. Education is not an end in itself – it can enable people to reach their full potential, and create value, prosperity, resilience and a cohesive, sustainable and vibrant society. An inclusive higher education system is a priority for Ireland’s economic, social and equality objectives.

Equity of access to higher education is a fundamental principle of Irish education policy and a priority for the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and the Higher Education Authority. People should have equity of access to education independent of their socioeconomic background, ethnicity, gender, geographical location, disability or other circumstances.

It is clear that our student population is still unrepresentative of wider Irish society. We have identified a number of groups who continue to be underrepresented in higher education in general, and in certain programmes within higher education. In this new National Access Plan we focus strongly on tangible progress in equity of access for these groups and their families and communities. In pursuing this, we put students at the core of the Plan, through the five student-centred goals, and prioritise universal design in all aspects of higher education.

Widespread consultation and quality data formed the backbone of this fourth National Access Plan. We consulted with stakeholders within the education system, across government and in social inclusion and community organisations. We also consulted with people with direct personal experience of marginalisation. We sought data from multiple sources and used rigorous analysis to ensure the Plan has a firm footing.

The outcome is a Plan that sets measurable targets and actions to realise both the ambition of the Plan and the Department’s ambition of learning for all as set out in its Statement of Strategy, 2021–2023.

APPROACH TO DEVELOPING THE PLAN

GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRIORITIES

The new NAP was developed through partnership between DFHERIS and the HEA Executive. In developing the Plan we were guided by five fundamental principles and priorities.

The first principle was the need to consult widely and to use a partnership approach with shared responsibility across government, the education sector and the community. This aligns with our belief that student success is “everybody’s business”. The second focus was identifying the priority groups. This includes prioritising resources and looking at barriers for people experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage and those with disabilities, including intellectual disabilities. It was

also important to take account of demographic shifts in population and ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

The third priority was to develop the move beyond access to full participation and eventual success. We want students to start, enjoy fully and complete their education programmes. This broad definition of equity and success underpins the Plan. The fourth principle is the importance of flexibility, in particular creating flexible pathways that work for people's life situations. The last of the underpinning principles was to use a rigorous evidence-informed approach so that goals are based on quality data.

A WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT APPROACH

Higher education inclusion is part of a broader set of cross-sectoral policies in education, health, social welfare, housing, employment, etc. which affect disadvantage and exclusion. It is important to align and build on the wider ambitions of the Programme for Government (PfG), including the ambition of this Government under the social contract section to provide each citizen with accessible and affordable education. Cross-government and cross-agency collaboration is crucial.

A WHOLE-OF-EDUCATION APPROACH

Under a whole-of-education approach, accessibility becomes the responsibility of everyone across the education system, from pre, primary and post-primary school level to further and higher education. The Plan highlights a need for everyone to focus on overcoming barriers. One clear priority is providing better information to priority groups. A second is teacher diversity, an important driver in increasing diversity in the student population, with research showing that teachers from similar backgrounds have positive effects on ethnic minority students and low-income students. Another aspect of this whole-of-education approach is improving links between further education and training and higher education. In line with this whole-of-education approach we anticipate that future plans will be access plans for the whole tertiary sector.

THE WIDER CONTEXT

The Plan sits within wider national and international contexts.

THE EU AND INTERNATIONAL POLICY CONTEXTS

Equity and inclusion are European Union priorities in the area of education and training. In addition, this National Access Plan will support our collective work toward the UN Sustainable Development Goals and toward implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

THE COVID-19 CONTEXT

The disruption to society caused by the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to impact equity over the lifetime of this plan. We need to prioritise what was learnt from the Covid-19 experience and examine how blended delivery of teaching and learning, informed by universal design principles,

benefited underrepresented and disadvantaged students during the pandemic. The Plan considers how this type of learning can be continued to support priority groups.

PROGRESS SINCE THE LAST NATIONAL ACCESS PLAN

There have been marked improvements in data collection since the last NAP. In particular, the Deprivation Index Score (DIS) data provides detailed insight into the socioeconomic profile of the student population and allows us to better target interventions.

The launch of the PATH programme has shown short-term impact and laid the foundation for improving equity of access to higher education.

Whole-of-education approaches to access have developed across the sector. HEIs are implementing “strategies for student success” to manage cultural barriers and universal design principles to remove physical barriers.

Other headline issues since the last Plan include:

- Positive trends for students with disabilities and a decline in mature student participation.
- A strong need to address the cost of higher education.
- The recognition that some people “simply do not see themselves as belonging” and that cultural and social reasons also contribute to lower participation.

THE FUNDING FRAMEWORK

The current funding framework for equity of access and inclusion has two drivers: (1) funding that supports the HEIs to implement equity of access strategies and (2) funding that directly helps students to meet the costs of higher education. The two funding drivers include a combination of long-standing funding programmes and more recent investment during the lifetime of the 2015–2021 Plan. There are also other targeted and wider-government funding streams that support equity in higher education.

IDENTIFYING THE PRIORITY GROUPS

Consultation revealed a need to better understand or expand the targeted priority groups. We undertook this in line with the two overarching ambitions for our higher education system: 1) that the higher education student body, at all levels and across all programmes, reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland’s population, and 2) that our higher education institutions are inclusive, universally designed environments which support student success and outcomes, equity and diversity.

The Plan identifies three main groups who are underrepresented in higher education: students who 1) are socioeconomically disadvantaged; 2) are members of Irish Traveller and Roma communities and 3) have disabilities including intellectual disabilities.

Within the first overarching group – students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged – we identified some of the life situations that contribute to disadvantage, including being from a low-income background or socioeconomically disadvantaged area; being a first-time or second-chance mature student; having experienced the care system, the criminal justice system or homelessness;

being a lone or teen parent; being a carer; being a migrant or refugee or being from an ethnic minority; having experienced the international protection process; or being a survivor of domestic violence.

It is clear that a number of these life situations will intersect for many people; for example, a member of the Traveller community with a disability is potentially also socioeconomically disadvantaged. Within these groupings each person has their own barriers to contend with.

THE STRATEGIC STUDENT-CENTRED GOALS

This Plan places the student at the core of every aspect. Everything is directed at delivering positive and inclusive outcomes for all students at every stage of their higher education journey. The focus of this NAP are five student-centred goals:

- 1) **Inclusivity:** The inclusivity goal underpins all aspects of higher education, focusing on creating an inclusive education experience and a sense of belonging. Our major objectives under this goal include embedding a whole-of-institution approach to student success and universal design; engaging priority group students in decision-making, including in equity policies; improving opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities; ensuring a more diverse population across all programmes and levels of study, both undergraduate and postgraduate; supporting students through universal and targeted funding programmes.
A vital aspect of inclusivity is working toward a more diverse teacher and early years educator workforce by supporting equity in initial teacher education and Level 7-8 programmes in Early Learning and Care (ELC) for priority groups. Research has clearly shown the value of this measure in increasing diversity.
- 2) **Flexibility:** The flexibility goal recognises students' individuality. It supports every student to participate in higher education in a way that aligns with their individual needs and circumstances. Major objectives under this goal are: supporting students to study on a flexible basis including part-time and blended learning; promoting flexible modes of teaching and learning; providing infrastructure that enables all students to fully participate in remote learning; exploring new routes for priority groups to access programmes; and improving the use of Recognition of Prior Learning.
- 3) **Clarity:** The clarity goal is how we get our message across. It aims to provide clear information to prospective students on how to access higher education. Major objectives include providing clear consistent information on financial and other supports; ensuring greater coordination of pre-entry and mentoring work across HEIs; developing student-friendly processes; and aligning existing access structures.
- 4) **Coherence:** The coherence goal aims to provide coherent joined-up supports and approaches to inclusion across the education system and government. This includes recognising the role of local, community and regional partners, and the voluntary sector, and creating smooth pathways that suit all individuals with their different needs and experiences. Major objectives include developing partnerships widely across education, business and the community; engaging the whole of the education sector, from primary level up; and strengthening collaboration within government departments and agencies.
- 5) **Sustainability:** The sustainability goal is about ensuring the capacity of higher education to deliver the vision of this Plan, addressing cost as a barrier to higher education for priority groups and improving funding for student support. Major objectives include developing a sustainably funded higher education system that will support the objectives of this Plan;

developing initiatives involving HE and community partnerships; expanding funding to address both the cost of going to college and flexibility, such as part-time study, for socioeconomically disadvantaged students from within priority groups.

Underpinning these five goals is the sixth core goal:

- 6) **Using an evidence-driven approach:** Major objectives under this goal include developing the evidence base, and evaluating and monitoring the impact of access and inclusion initiatives.

NATIONAL TARGETS AND INDICATORS FOR EVALUATION

Measuring performance is at the heart of this National Access Plan and we propose to measure its impact in three ways: through key performance indicators, national targets and qualitative indicators. The Plan proposes nine key performance indicators and four overarching targets for the higher education system. The key performance indicators will be measured yearly where possible.

The mid-term review (in 2025) will allow us to consider how we can refine or develop targets and indicators, taking account of potentially improved data and the outcomes of the proposed Access Data Plan. The new Data Plan will greatly improve performance measurement and it is intended to put it in place early in the lifetime of the Plan to examine ways to improve data collection for priority groups.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The nine key performance indicators are grouped by context:

- Flexibility within higher education: 1) Participation by part-time and flexible learners, 2) Progression from further education to higher education.
- Diversity across programmes and levels: 3) Postgraduate study among selected priority groups, 4) Student diversity across selected fields of study.
- Access and participation for priority groups: 5) Students with a disability who are supported by FSD, 6) Students attending DEIS schools, 7) Students who are lone parents.
- Student success and engagement: 8) Progression and completion among selected priority groups, 9) Graduate outcomes among selected priority groups.

NATIONAL TARGETS

The second major aspect of performance measurement is the four national targets. Targets are an important component of international and national education action plans. We have set specific targets for the following groups: 1) new entrants from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, 2) new mature entrants from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, 3) new entrants with a disability, 4) new entrants from the Traveller community.

These groups were chosen as the targets can be measured using current datasets, while baseline data is not available for some of the other priority groups. Setting and monitoring these targets for the higher education system will allow us to assess the system's progress toward the ambitions of this Plan.

QUALITATIVE INDICATORS

The final but equally important aspect of measurement is qualitative indicators, and we focus here on three areas: access and success strategies within HEIs, cross-agency forums for knowledge sharing, and the results of national student surveys.

The access and student success strategies within HEIs show the breadth and depth of qualitative work that is crucial to realising the inclusion objectives. This includes pre-entry work with schools and community organisations, pre-entry academic supports, relationship building, induction and orientation, and the range of post-entry supports that are driven by the access services in HEIs. Events and forums where good practice is shared ensure knowledge is disseminated across departments and agencies. The results of national student surveys give a snapshot of the student experience, including living conditions and finances, all vital information for policy.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MID-TERM PROGRESS REVIEW

IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURES

Overall responsibility for overseeing delivery of the National Access Plan will reside with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. The Implementation Steering Group chaired by the Department will provide guidance and advice into the Annual Work Plan agreed between the Department and the HEA.

PROGRESS REVIEW

A progress review will take place in 2025. This will assess progress against the goals, objectives and targets and consider how these may need refining or developing in view of new government strategies or initiatives and improved data.

RESOURCING

A range of universal and targeted supports will support delivery of this Plan. The Department's Statement of Strategy commits to sustainable funding for higher education, which is essential for our HEIs to deliver quality education and achieve critical outcomes for society and the economy. Institutions can also use funding from their Devolved Capital Grant or as part of broader building upgrade projects, and the new phase of capital investment calls will emphasise universal design principles and fostering inclusion in all its facets.

CONCLUSION

This Plan is about students, and about equity and inclusion. We want to achieve access, participation and success in higher education for the priority groups. We want all students to enjoy the student experience as fully as possible. We want to create more opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities. We want to improve pathways between different parts of the education system. We want equity in higher education to become “everybody's business”. Above all, we want Ireland's student population to reflect the rich diversity of the overall population, so that everyone can reach their full potential and in doing so, make their own uniquely valuable contribution to our society and economy.



1 Introduction

Equity of access to higher education is a fundamental principle of Irish education policy, and one that has been endorsed by successive governments. It is also a priority for the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. The Department's overall mission as set out in its Statement of Strategy¹ is to:

Develop Ireland's further and higher education and research systems to support people in reaching their full potential and to create value, prosperity, resilience and a cohesive, sustainable and vibrant society.

The Statement of Strategy recognises that to achieve our overall mission, we need to strategically review our policy framework with a view to improving access to higher education. The Statement of Strategy sets out how the Department and stakeholders will work together to achieve this overall mission through delivery of the following strategic goal:

Provide supports and opportunities for learning to all, recognising the needs of vulnerable learners and the most marginalised, and assist people in access to and progression through higher and further education and training, so as to grow prosperity across communities and build social cohesion.

People should have access to education independent of their socioeconomic background, ethnicity, gender, geographical location, disability or other circumstances. Work is ongoing to develop a more unified tertiary education sector which is fair and just. This will help ensure that the system as a whole can meet the personal objectives of individual learners and researchers and will also positively influence inclusion. However, work remains to achieve a sector where each learner, regardless of their circumstances, can access and participate successfully in all education pathways including in higher education.

While good progress was made in supporting learners to access higher education during the previous National Access Plan (2015–2021), this Plan focuses on the remaining gaps in equity of access, participation and success in higher education.

¹ <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/3f066-statement-of-strategy-2021-2023/>

Since 2005 there have been three national plans for equity of access in higher education, which demonstrates the importance of equity of access in policy. It has been put on a statutory basis, including in the Higher Education Authority (HEA) Bill 2022. The commitment to equity of access is articulated in developments such as the Higher Education System Performance Framework, successive HEA strategic plans and the access strategies of higher education institutions (HEIs).

Since the last Plan was published in 2015, important developments include expansion of the resources supporting equity of access, participation and success. The Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) with its four strands focusing on 1) broadening access to teacher education, 2) the 1916 Bursary Fund, 3) building partnerships between higher education institutions and community partners, and 4) universal design and engagement of students with intellectual disabilities in higher education, are laying the foundations for innovative ways of improving equity.

This Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success 2022–2028, to be known as ‘the National Access Plan’ in keeping with its now well-established branding, continues and builds on the vision of previous plans and the Department’s ambitions for a more inclusive and diverse student population in higher education. The ambition of the new National Access Plan extends beyond access to a greater focus on the participation and success of the student.

The ambitions of this Plan are encapsulated in the following two statements:

That the higher education student body entering, participating in and completing higher education, at all levels and across all programmes, reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland’s population.

That our higher education institutions are inclusive, universally designed environments which support and foster student success and outcomes, equity and diversity, and are responsive to the needs of students and wider communities.

Equity is crucial if Ireland is to achieve its ambition to be a country which cherishes all of its citizens equally. Education has the power to transform lives, lift people out of poverty and break down cycles of disadvantage. An inclusive higher education system is a priority for our country’s economic, social and equality objectives. Our society must welcome diversity and work toward a higher education system accessible to all. Culture shapes people’s behaviour, including the way we think about higher education and how we belong in education more generally. Transforming our education institutions, and indeed the whole of society, will require challenging cultural norms so as to improve inclusiveness across higher education.

Using extensive consultation and an evidence-informed approach, we identified a number of groups who are still underrepresented in higher education and in certain programmes within higher education. The Plan sets measurable targets and actions aiming to realise both the Plan’s ambitions and the Department’s ambition of learning for all.



2 Approach to Developing the Plan

2.1 Guiding principles and priorities

In developing the Plan, we drew on the following fundamental principles and priorities regarding enabling equity of access, participation and success for all.

Engaging with stakeholders and promoting coherence

- Recognising the need to engage with all stakeholders.
- Using a cross-sectoral partnership approach, with shared responsibility across government, the higher education system, the education sector and the community.
- Promoting the concept that student success is ‘everybody’s business’ – where a whole-of-institution approach, driven by leaders, works with a universal design approach and targeted measures to support learning.

Identifying and supporting priority groups

- Prioritising people who are the hardest to reach to enable them to participate fully in higher education by targeting resources where they are most needed.
- Continuing to target specific groups, with policy measures, funding and institutional initiatives working together to support these groups.
- Examining barriers to higher education for people with a disability, including an intellectual disability.
- Recognising the demographic shift of the population and the diversity of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Moving beyond access

- Continuing the move beyond access to examine and respond to factors that affect student participation, success and outcomes.
- Fostering equity in the student experience so all students can avail of the opportunities that a full and vibrant student experience offers, including international mobility.

Creating and promoting flexible pathways

- Creating conditions and opportunities to help people transition to and progress through higher education at a suitable time and stage in their lives.
- Developing a stronger focus on pathways between further education and training (FET) and higher education, recognising that both sectors have equal roles in increasing access to lifelong learning and in providing learning and development options to meet the needs of underrepresented groups.
- Providing clear information on education pathways for the priority groups identified.
- Reaching out to local communities including businesses as partners in ensuring successful outcomes and pathways to work.
- Focusing on diversity in the teaching profession, recognising the significant influence teachers have as role models for building a sense of belonging in education and supporting student ambitions.

Using an evidence-informed approach

- Underpinning policy with evidence through analysis of quality data.
- Focusing strongly on concrete tangible progress for students, families and communities over the lifetime of the Plan.

Guided by these principles and priorities and by the consultation process, the Plan outlines the strategic ambitions, goals, objectives and key actions for delivering participation targets and supports for the priority groups over 2022–2028.

2.2 A whole-of-government approach

The Plan sits within the Government's wider strategic priorities. Higher education inclusion policies are part of a broader set of cross-sectoral policies in education, health, social welfare, housing, employment, etc., which impact on disadvantage and exclusion. Development of this National Access Plan takes place in the context of Programme for Government commitments and other national anti-poverty and social inclusion policy measures. Coordination across policies is important to ensure that accumulated disadvantage and its impact on higher education, learning outcomes, employability and life chances are effectively addressed.

It was important for the Plan to align with, and build on, the wider ambitions of the Programme for Government (PfG). The social contract section of the PfG aims to provide accessible, affordable education to each citizen. This will be achieved by providing greater security for individuals and communities founded on the principle of equality and ensuring that every citizen can achieve their full potential. Policy decisions during the course of the current government will aim to improve living standards for the most vulnerable. The PfG called for particular attention to refugees and asylum seekers, homeless people and people living on low incomes.

In line with the PfG, as we emerge from the Covid pandemic, we sought to build on the unity which was fundamental in our response to that emergency. We want to improve outcomes for people getting by on low incomes, struggling with caring responsibilities, raising families alone, or living with a disability. A vital part of addressing wider issues of social inclusion is through implementation of the new social inclusion strategy: Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020–2025². In developing the Plan we wanted to ensure that these wider commitments and the Plan are in line. Other relevant strategies include:

- National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy³ – new strategy under development
- National Action Plan Against Racism – new plan under development
- Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014–2020⁴
- National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017–2021⁵
- Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015–2024⁶

2 <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/46557/bf7011904ede4562b925f98b15c4f1b5.pdf#page=1>

3 <https://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/National%20Traveller%20and%20Roma%20Inclusion%20Strategy,%202017-2021.pdf/Files/National%20Traveller%20and%20Roma%20Inclusion%20Strategy,%202017-2021.pdf>

4 <https://assets.gov.ie/23796/961bbf5d975f4c88adc01a6fc5b4a7c4.pdf>

5 <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/8072c0-national-disability-inclusion-strategy-2017-2021/>

6 <https://assets.gov.ie/18906/1120bc6ad254489db9571c74e8572f44.pdf>

- Pathways to Work 2021–2025⁷
- Working to Change: Social Enterprise and Employment Strategy 2021–2023⁸
- Youth Homelessness Strategy – new strategy under development
- The National Carers’ Strategy⁹

Significant engagement took place across government to identify how this Plan could complement the PfG commitments, and the strategies and initiatives of other departments.

The Plan aims to reinforce the actions and ambitions of other PfG commitments and strategies to build a more inclusive and equitable society.

Cross-government and cross-agency collaboration is essential to delivery of this Plan. The Department and the HEA engaged with all relevant departments and agencies, including:

- Department of Education
- Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
- Department of Social Protection
- Department of Rural and Community Development
- Department of Justice
- Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- Department of Health
- SOLAS
- Tusla
- The Probation Service
- QQI

Departments and agencies are committed to working together to improve inclusion in higher education and promote successful transitions for students from the priority groups.

This Plan will also support our work toward the UN Sustainable Development Goals¹⁰ and toward implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities¹¹, as well as helping HEIs to meet their legislative responsibilities on equality and accessibility.

2.3 A whole-of-education approach

A whole-of-education approach to equity of access, participation and success in higher education involves all levels of the education system. This starts at pre-school and continues as the learner journeys through primary and post-primary into further and higher education. The Plan recognises the importance of early intervention and of creating a sense of belonging in education as well as suitable pathways that help students to meet their potential, raise their aspirations and support the ambition to pursue further education.

⁷ <https://assets.gov.ie/152608/090ec83f-7e86-4419-a63c-d3ee92bbce4a.pdf>

⁸ https://www.workingtochange.ie/_files/ugd/af924b_bd5cc18e2f504ad2a36134c61dc295f7.pdf

⁹ <https://assets.gov.ie/10945/d62cf66f0a8f442bb594bbe0b48ef6ad.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

¹¹ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-2.html>

The consultation process identified the importance of inclusion being at the core of education institutions and embedded at leadership level. The Plan highlights the need for *everyone* to focus on how barriers to entry can be overcome. One clear priority is providing more coherent and accessible information on access and supports to priority groups.

Teacher diversity is an important driver in increasing the diversity of the student population. Research shows that teachers from similar backgrounds have positive effects on ethnic minority and low-income students in terms of motivation, role-modelling and performance (OECD, 2019). We continue to focus on teachers as role models in the community.

Ongoing collaboration between the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, the Department of Education and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science will be necessary for delivery of this Plan. Departments are committed to working together to improve inclusion in education and successful transitions for students from priority groups. Planning for transitions, and data-sharing between departments and agencies to support transitions, are also crucial.

Improved links between further education and training and higher education will create better pathways through the system, which will improve access, participation and success for the priority groups, ensure equality, and champion diversity.

This Strategic Plan is one of a wider range of initiatives to implement the Department's ambition of a more inclusive tertiary education system. These include:

- Adult Literacy for Life – A 10 Year Adult, Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy¹²
- Future FET: Transforming Learning – The National Further Education and Training (FET Strategy 2020–2024)¹³
- Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021–2025¹⁴

The new technological universities across the country will also improve access to higher education and act as an anchor for regional and national innovation and growth. This will present greater opportunities over the next seven years to widen participation in higher education across the regions. While the focus of this Plan is higher education, we may in future plans consider widening the scope to include the whole of the tertiary system (HE and FET).

Coherence is crucial to ensure that supports across the wider education sector reinforce equity. A whole-of-education approach is required to meet students' needs and help them to reach their full potential on a suitable path and in a way that recognises their individual needs and circumstances.

12 https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/b78324692b/15607_all_strategy_web.pdf

13 https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/64d0718c9e/solas_fet_strategy_web.pdf

14 <https://assets.gov.ie/132640/00c012f4-531c-4578-b8bb-179db4351939.pdf>

2.4 Consultation and data analysis

The DFHERIS and the HEA Executive worked in partnership to develop the new Plan. We agreed a timeline and project plan, and the two organisations collaborated on consultation and drafting.

We updated the National Access Plan Steering Group on progress throughout the process. The Steering Group is made up of representatives of target groups, students, HEIs and policymakers. It monitored and advised on the implementation of the 2015–2021 National Access Plan.

The approach to developing the Plan included extensive consultation and data analysis. Ongoing engagement of DFHERIS and the HEA in equity of access issues at European and international fora underpinned the work.

2.4.1 Consultation

DFHERIS and the HEA agreed that consultation on the Plan should be as extensive as possible. To facilitate this, the HEA published a Consultation Paper¹⁵ and launched a public call for submissions in April 2021¹⁶. The Consultation Paper aimed to explain the context for the new Plan, raise questions for consideration and encourage input from stakeholders.

The response to the consultation process was high and we received 122 submissions from a wide range of stakeholders. This shows the importance of equity of access and the willingness of stakeholders to participate in developing the Plan. Figure A gives an overview of the submissions received.

Figure A: Overview of submissions



¹⁵ <https://assets.gov.ie/136502/a244259a-d405-48eb-89d3-edd88d289907.pdf#page=null>

¹⁶ <https://hea.ie/policy/consultation-new-national-plan-for-equity-of-access-to-higher-education-2022-2026/>

Other consultation events during development included the National Access Forum and a Student Consultation meeting. Over 200 people attended these consultation events. We also facilitated one-to-one consultations with a range of organisations, government departments and agencies and held a special meeting of the National Access Plan Steering Group.

A report on outcomes from the consultation is available on the HEA website (www.hea.ie). Appendix B includes details of all submissions received and individual stakeholder meetings.

We value enormously all contributions to the consultation process. These provide a rich, innovative and diverse range of perspectives, which have been essential to developing this new Plan.

2.4.2 Data analysis

An evidence-informed approach to policy-making drives this Plan, underpinned by the availability and analysis of quality data. Key data sources include:

- Deprivation Index Scores (DIS)
- HEA Student Records System (SRS) including Equal Access Survey (EAS)
- HEA completion, progression and graduate outcomes data sets
- Census data
- Data published by other organisations, for example, Department of Education, AHEAD, NDA, NCSE, OECD

Chapter 6 contains a detailed analysis of the approach to data in developing and implementing the Plan and there is more detail in Appendix A.



3 The Wider Context

3.1 The EU and international policy contexts

Equity and inclusion are European Union priorities in the area of education and training. EU policy stresses the importance of integrating the social dimension in the purposes, functions, actions and delivery of education in HEIs. Although higher education participation and attainment has increased in Europe over the past two decades, this has not yet led to equity of participation. Challenges remain in participation at European and institutional level of students in categories who are statistically less likely to access and attain higher education.

In developing this Plan we were guided by the work of the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) and its Advisory Group on the social dimension of higher education. This Group has been developing a new forward-looking strategic document for 2020–2030: ‘Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)’¹⁷.

The European Social Fund (ESF) is the EU’s key instrument for investing in people; improving employment, education opportunities and social inclusion; and tackling poverty. It has been important in supporting delivery of previous National Access Plans and co-financing the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) and the Student Assistance Fund (SAF).

For the 2021–2027 period, the ESF will be merged with the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) and the directly managed Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), to become ESF+. The aim of ESF+ is to achieve high employment levels, fair social protection and a skilled and resilient workforce for the future world of work, in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights principles. Under current plans, the next round of ESF+ funding will support this Plan.

As already noted, this Plan will also support our work toward the UN Sustainable Development Goals and implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

3.2 The Covid-19 context

The disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to have an impact on equity of access, participation and success over the lifetime of this strategy. In particular, the impact on engagement in post-primary education during the pandemic may have significant implications for transition to higher education in the years ahead.

Dealing with the immediate impact of the pandemic on tertiary education and society has been a priority since early 2020, and there will be a continued need to support disadvantaged and vulnerable students in the higher education system as we recover from the pandemic.

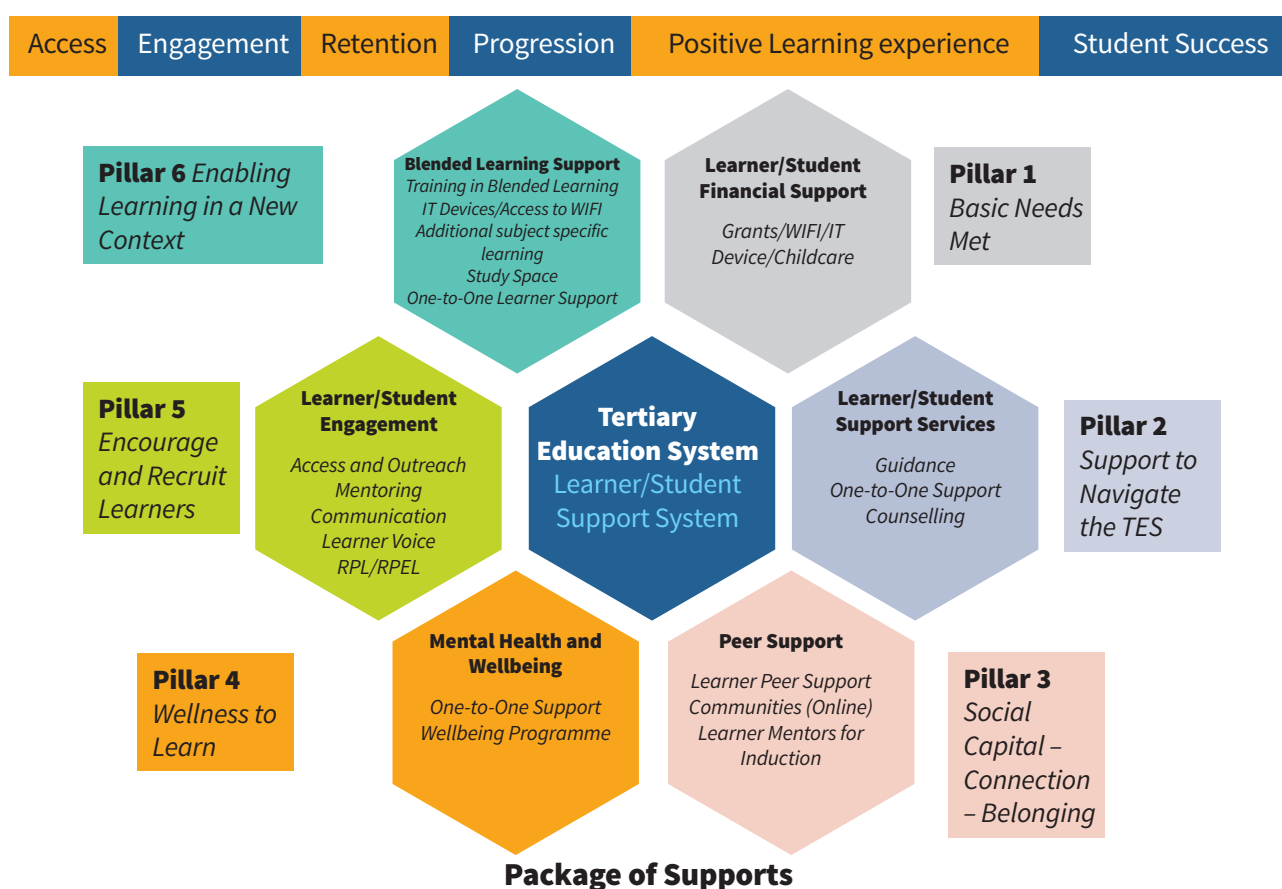
17 http://ehea.info/Upload/BFUG_HR_UA_69_5_2_AG1_PAGs.pdf

3.2.1 Covid-19 initiatives

Higher education institutions, in partnership with the HEA, the DFHERIS and other government departments, led responses to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The work of the Mitigating Educational Disadvantage Working Group, represented by key stakeholders¹⁸ and led by AONTAS, and work by the National Access Plan Steering Group was essential in developing suitable responses. The Mitigating Educational Disadvantage Working Group identified issues affecting marginalised learners and offered high-level solutions, which were documented in a set of ten papers.¹⁹ A collection of common themes articulated by stakeholders across the tertiary education system is outlined in Figure B, and these informed materials and initiatives.

Figure B: Tertiary Education System Learner/Student Support System. Source: O'Reilly (2020)²⁰



Apart from the Student Grant and dedicated access supports, a range of temporary extra supports were created for underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students to mitigate the risk arising from Covid-19. These included:

- Doubling the core Student Assistance Fund
- Creating a once-off Covid-19 Contingency Fund for HEI access services
- Student laptop scheme

¹⁸ The group comprised representatives from across the tertiary education system: 31 members representing 23 agencies in addition to academic experts (Prof. Tom Collins, Dr Fergal Finnegan, and Dr Michael Hallissey).

¹⁹ Digital Learning, Assessment, Learner Engagement, Community Education, Educational Equity and Learner Cohort, Tutors and Practitioners, Financial Barriers and Mental Health, Progression and Barriers in the Return to Remote Learning.

²⁰ O'Reilly, N (2020) Reducing Educational Disadvantage in the Pandemic, Education Matters (2020–2021).

- Once-off grant of €250 for students
- Dormant Accounts Funding for the Traveller and Roma communities in higher education
- €3m to underpin wellbeing and mental health and student services in HEIs as part of the funding package in July 2020 to mitigate the direct financial impact of Covid-19 on HEIs and students in 2020
- A Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund (an allocation of €8m in 2020, additional spend of €6.85m in 2021) for community education.

3.2.2 Research on the effects of Covid-19

The main issues for disadvantaged and vulnerable students were the shift to emergency remote learning, additional caring responsibilities, learner engagement, financial issues, mental health, barriers to progression and ongoing remote learning (study space, devices, Wi-Fi and skills to engage). Some target groups were impacted more than others. There was also a sizeable strain on access offices in HEIs. Pre-entry services were particularly challenged during the lockdown. Access services adapted extremely well to the demands of Covid-19 in reorienting their pre- and post-entry supports for students.

A number of research projects are ongoing including the partnership project ‘Next Steps for Teaching and Learning: Moving Forward Together’²¹.

While the pandemic has brought many positive technological advances and opportunities for online engagement, various studies and surveys have highlighted the difficulties faced by students, particularly isolation. The evidence emerging calls for continued blended or hybrid learning post-Covid as a means of creating more accessible and flexible modes of learning for students. This was especially important for people with disabilities, adult learners and one-parent families. But for some, including Traveller and Roma students, in-person learning was essential. There is no ‘one size fits all’, but blended learning (in person and online) is valuable.

AHEAD’s recently published ‘Learning from Home’²² research indicates that 9% of students with disabilities would like to continue engaging with classes or learning activities mostly remotely from home in the post-Covid world. This highlights the importance of options in the mode of engagement as an inclusion measure. Within the report, when students were asked what their priorities for inclusion in education in the coming years were, of the ten priorities listed, students with disabilities rated recording/captioning of lectures (88% rated as high priority) and more flexibility/choice in assessment (78% rated as high priority) as their top two, rating them as higher priorities than individual benefits such as increased student grants.

Key research findings²³ on the impact of Covid-19 on the social dimension of higher education include:

- At-risk students will be disproportionately affected.
- The Covid-19 crisis is exacerbating pre-existing educational disparities rather than causing those disparities.

21 <https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/2021/05/11/minister-launches-national-teaching-and-learning-partnership-project/>

22 https://www.ahead.ie/userfiles/files/Learning%20from%20home%20report_digital.pdf

23 https://nesetweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NESET-AR4-2020_Full-Report-1.pdf

- At-risk students now face extra challenges in accessing, participating fully in and successfully completing higher education.
- The pandemic will affect educational equality in pre-tertiary education causing knock-on effects on higher education:
 - a) reducing equal access to higher education
 - b) reducing the participation of at-risk students in the coming years
 - c) causing long-term ‘scarring’ for people under the age of 25 – the ‘Covid generation’ – resulting in an unprecedented decline in social mobility due to rising economic and educational inequalities.

Early indications of the Irish experience are positive in terms of retention and progression within higher education during the pandemic; this will be shown by data emerging from the HEA²⁴. However, given the research on future impact, it is imperative to continue to support priority groups and ensure higher education is an option for all.

We must prioritise what we have learnt from the Covid-19 experience and examine how blended teaching and learning, informed by universal design principles, benefitted underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students. We must also consider how to continue this approach to support the priority groups. Learning from the pandemic is particularly relevant for us as we develop our new Strategy and for HEIs as they develop their own access, participation and success plans.

3.3 Progress since the last National Access Plan

3.3.1 Developments during the last Plan

Over the lifetime of the last National Access Plan, substantial investment and progress coincided across a number of areas.

Implementation of the three strands of the Programme for Access to Higher Education is a headline achievement, with funding of €42m over six years. Each of the PATH strands has been renewed for a further three years. The full impact of PATH investment will be seen over the lifetime of this and subsequent plans. This investment includes ongoing development of a central applications and assessment facility for the 1916 Bursary Fund.

Both the FSD and SAF were comprehensively reviewed, resulting in altered funding allocation models and both funds being opened up to part-time students.

Recently the FSD has also been used for projects to develop strategic disability services in HEIs and supports for students. Examples include universal design in teaching and learning, improving online teaching and learning practices, staff training, improving campus experience for students with disabilities, assistive technology supports and autism-friendly spaces.

There has also been progress toward embedding a whole-of-institution approach to access. This means making access the responsibility of everyone in a HEI. HEIs have developed student success

²⁴ <https://hea.ie/statistics/data-for-download-and-visualisations/students/progression/progression-introduction/>

strategies focused on a quality educational experience for all students. The work of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (NFETL) and its Student Success Toolkit²⁵ are important developments in this area. We have also seen development within HEIs in inclusive learning environments and practices that benefit all students.

On a wider strategy level, equity of access is one of the six high-level objectives in the Higher Education System Performance Framework and is reflected in mission-based performance compacts agreed between the HEA and HEIs.

3.3.2 Data collection and findings from research

Our understanding of the profile of students in the higher education population has improved significantly over the lifetime of the last Plan. Studies on participation in higher education by lone parents²⁶ and mature students²⁷ have contributed to a better understanding of the experiences and challenges they face. The Review of the Student Grant Scheme²⁸ highlights the student experience of financial support and makes recommendations for the future.

Improved approaches to data collection to ensure that policy-making is informed by a robust evidence base have been an important feature of progress and have led to publication by the HEA of Deprivation Index Scores. This data enables a more accurate understanding of the socioeconomic profile of our higher education population and supports more targeted approaches to equity of access. The DIS has been critical in establishing targets for this Plan.

The review of progress undertaken during preparation of this Plan showed that the student population is still not diverse or inclusive enough.

New data points to the continued need for positive actions. Headline issues include:

- The DIS analysis shows that in 2019/2020, 10% of all full-time new entrants (aged 18–20) to higher education in Ireland came from disadvantaged areas compared to 18% from affluent areas.
- Of note, 15% of school leavers in 2019 were from disadvantaged areas compared to 14% from affluent areas.
- The current student population is still some way from fully reflecting wider Irish society. This remains a significant challenge for policymakers and HEIs.
- The socioeconomic profile of students across programmes and levels is varied.
- Mature student participation is declining – the student pool is also declining but greater focus on disadvantaged mature students is needed.
- Financial cost has been identified as a significant issue and the cost of higher education has risen. The Review of the Student Grant Scheme along with consultation on this Plan point strongly to the need to address the cost of going to college.
- The number of students with a disability in higher education has increased substantially.
- 1% of Travellers have a third-level qualification compared to 55% of the general population.

25 <https://studentsuccess.teachingandlearning.ie/>

26 <https://assets.gov.ie/24760/5c424910fec84e6c9131d40081b3ff48.pdf>

27 https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2021/06/FINAL-Study-of-Mature-Student-Participation-in-Higher-Education_June-2021.pdf

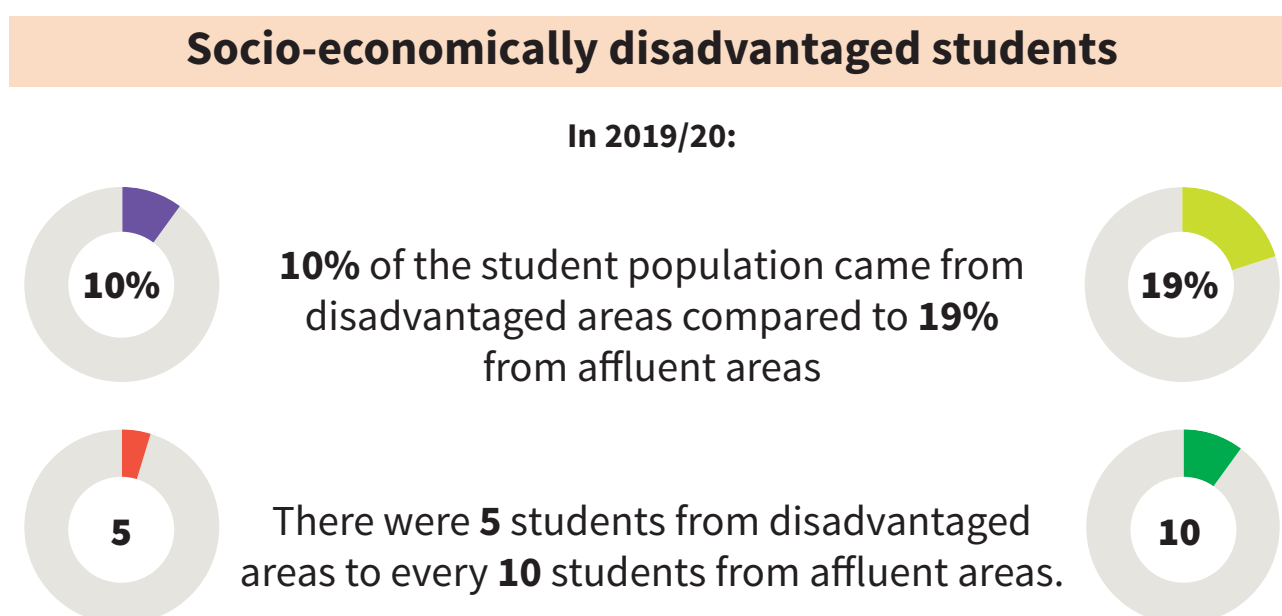
28 <https://assets.gov.ie/222788/dca6e2fa-926d-4c95-b31a-fba35aac8040.pdf> Table A14 in Appendix A summarises the proportion of new entrants receiving the special rate of the Student Grant scheme (non-adjacent and adjacent) for HEA-funded HEIs in 2020/2021 and 2019/2020, as provided by SUSI.

Despite progress in recent years there are still communities and parts of our population not accessing higher education. Research shows that some prospective students simply do not see themselves as belonging in higher education.

Research also tells us that barriers to access and successful participation in higher education can be complex and multifaceted. We must consider these barriers when setting the strategic direction for policy interventions. The research also shows that we need to continue efforts to understand the cultural and social reasons for lower participation so that we can build on successes and learn from areas where progress has been less satisfactory.

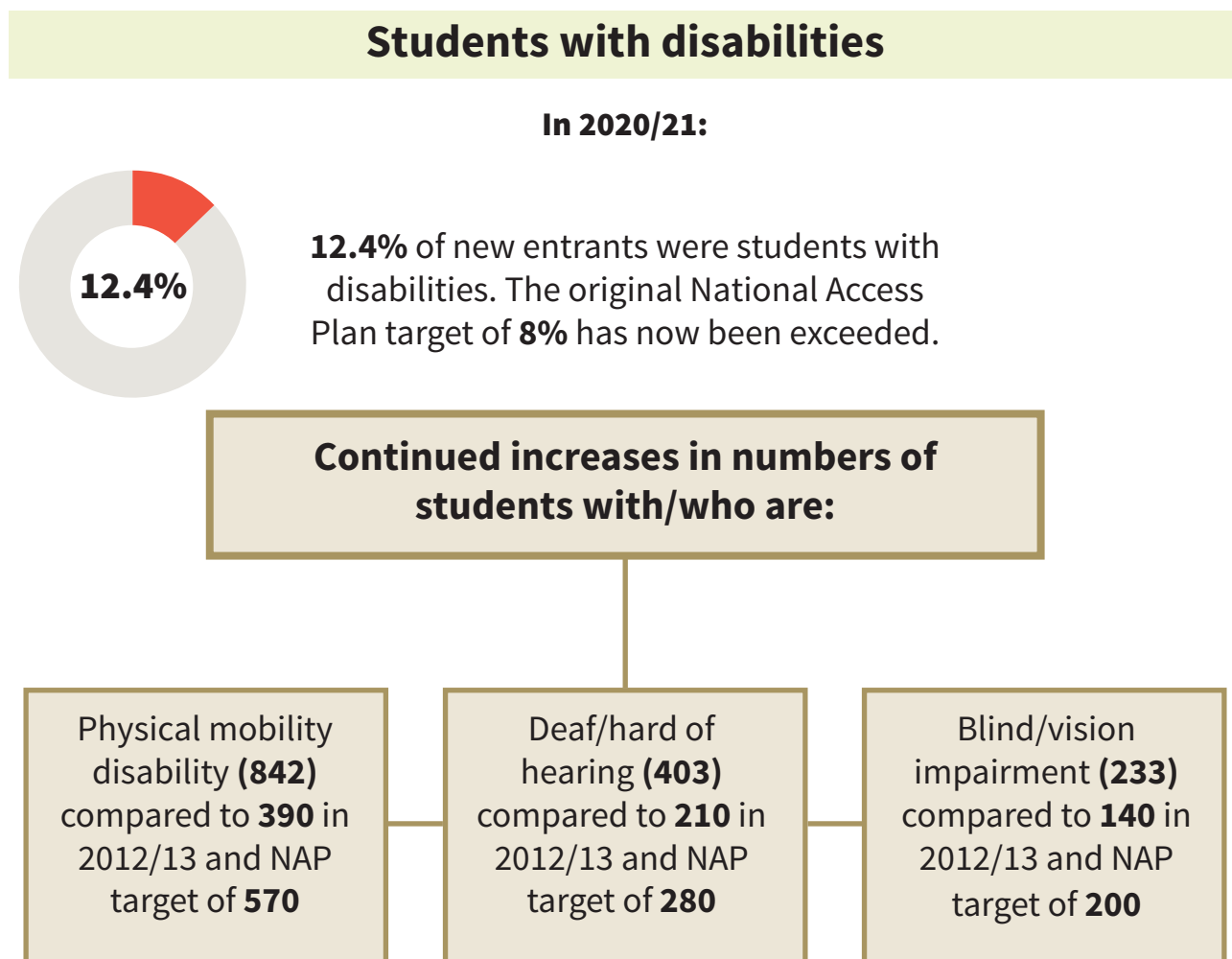
We must also consider prevailing economic and social conditions in a more diverse society. Increasing demographic pressures mean that enrolment in higher education is projected to continue rising over the next number of years. Figure C shows the divergence in student population from disadvantaged areas compared to affluent areas.

Figure C: Socioeconomically disadvantaged students



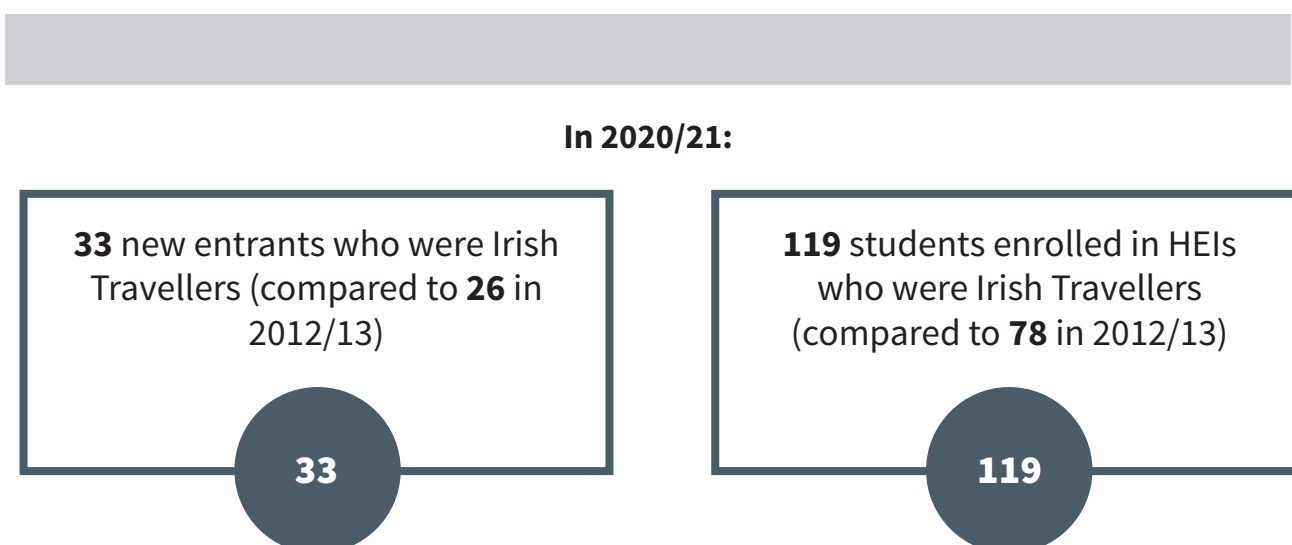
The trends are positive for students with disabilities, with a sustained increase in participation and in the number of students in specific disability categories. The original new entrant participation target of 8% has been exceeded and the figure is currently 12.4% (2020/2021 academic year). For students with specific disabilities (physical mobility, deaf/hard of hearing, and blind/vision impairment), the original targets (570, 280 and 200 respectively) have also been exceeded (842, 403 and 233 respectively). But the higher education population of students with disabilities does not reflect the wider population. Census 2016 found that in total 643,131 people had a disability, meaning that 13.5% of the population had a disability of some kind. It is important to sustain and build on progress to date. Figure D shows the new entrants in 2020/2021 who have disabilities and the breakdown of those disabilities.

Figure D: Students with disabilities



The number of students who are members of the Irish Traveller community has improved marginally but remains disappointingly low as shown in Figure E. This Plan aims to substantially increase participation levels.

Figure E: Students who are members of the Irish Traveller community

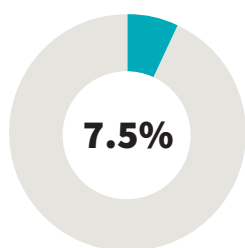


Participation rates for first-time mature students are well behind the targets set in the last National Access Plan as shown in Figure F. This is despite the extension of key supports such as the FSD and the SAF to part-time students, and the fact that mature students represent a sizeable proportion of 1916 Bursary recipients (an average of 44% over four years).

Figure F: First-time mature students

First-time mature students

In 2020/21



7.5% of full-time new entrants were mature students (compared to **13%** in 2012/13 and below the National Access Plan target of **16%**)

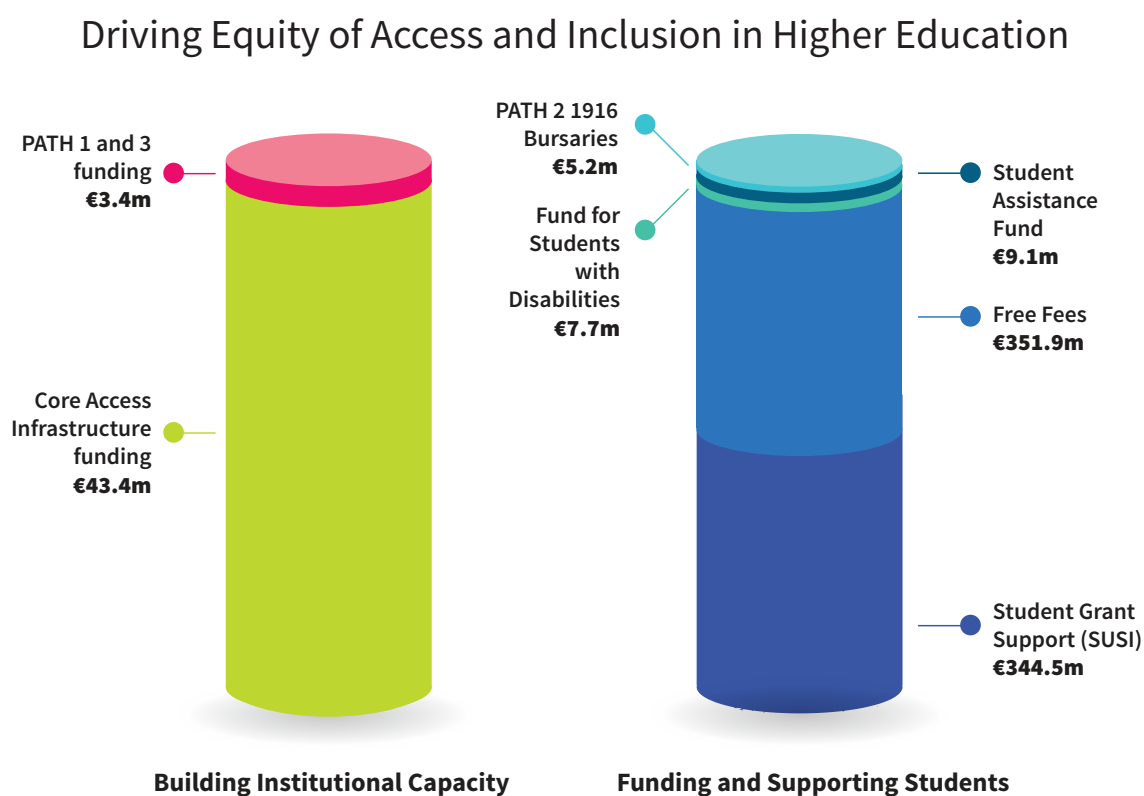
The data points to the scale of the challenge to grow participation from underrepresented groups in higher education. Overcoming this challenge and delivering the ambition of this Plan will require sustained commitment from all government departments but especially from the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, the Department of Education and associated state agencies. This Plan adopts an innovative and ambitious approach aimed at delivering sustainable progress. It requires resourcing and commitment from all stakeholders.

3.4 The funding framework

Public funding and targeted equity of access initiatives underpin the Plan's objectives and targets.

Key elements of the current funding framework for equity of access and inclusion are shown in Figure G (2021 allocations).²⁹ There are two funding drivers: (1) funding that supports the HEIs to implement equity of access strategies and (2) funding that directly helps students to meet the costs of higher education. The two funding drivers include a combination of long-standing funding programmes and more recent investment during the lifetime of the 2015–2021 Plan.

Figure G: Funding framework for equity in higher education



²⁹ Amounts exclude additional Covid-19 related allocations.

3.4.1 Building institutional capacity

Core Access Infrastructure

Central to delivering the equity of access vision are the access services and staff in HEIs. These services are established through core HEI funding from the State. Core funding is allocated to HEIs on the basis of student numbers and additional funding is allocated for each student in a HEI who is within one of the National Access Plan priority groups. This funding supports HEIs to put in place an access infrastructure that enables pre-entry and post-entry work to take place. The access services are the central infrastructure providing the pre-entry and post-entry work to support students from the priority groups to access higher education and enjoy a positive student experience. Student feedback consistently applauds the work of access services and the commitment of staff in providing supports and advice.

The recently published 'Funding the Future – a funding and reform framework for higher education'³⁰ has identified enhancing student participation and success with a focus on underrepresented groups as a priority.

In addition, capital funding from the State also plays a role in embedding equity of access, inclusion and universal design in the physical infrastructure of HEIs. Annual capital investment by DFHERIS will progressively increase from €500 million this year to €652 million by 2025, an increase of 30%. The overall objective of this investment is to support a knowledge-based, resilient and innovative society and economy, in which all citizens have the opportunity to reach their full potential. The revised National Development Plan (NDP) provides for Exchequer investment of nearly €2.9 billion in further and higher education infrastructure, research and innovation over the five-year period 2021–2025.

PATH Funding

The Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) Fund is a multi-strand initiative established during the lifetime of the 2015–2021 Plan. This fund supports time-bound programmes and projects with innovative approaches to deliver the ambitions, goals, objectives, actions and targets of National Access Plans.

PATH 1 focuses on broadening access to initial teacher education (ITE). It funded those HEIs that are Centres for Teaching Excellence to strengthen their capacity to deliver access through innovative projects to improve diversity in the teacher workforce.

PATH 2 (referenced below in direct student supports)

PATH 3 funded regional clusters of HEIs to develop partnerships with the FE sector and other community partners to support students from underrepresented groups. To coincide with the launch of this Plan a new strand of funding has been introduced.

PATH 4, over two phases, will strengthen universal design for all students, including students with autism, and enhance opportunities for engagement of students with intellectual disabilities in higher education.

30 <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/11787-landmark-policy-funding-higher-education-reducing-cost-for-families/>

3.4.2 Direct student funding

Student Grant (SUSI)

The Student Grant Scheme administered by SUSI is the core direct financial support for students. The Student Grant Scheme has had a positive impact on the growth of the higher education system and on supporting student participation, including among students from low-income or disadvantaged backgrounds. The recently published review of the Scheme has made recommendations to further improve the system of student support.

The Student Grant Scheme is means-tested but allows for a range of income disregards when calculating reckonable income, including certain income support payments – aftercare allowance, adoption maintenance allowance, blind pension (where paid to the applicant), carer's allowance, carer's support grant (where paid to recipients of the carer's allowance and domiciliary care allowance), DFHERIS third-level bursary schemes, disability allowance (where paid to the applicant) and one-parent family payment (means-tested – where paid to the applicant). A higher special rate of maintenance grant is also paid to low-income welfare-dependent students.

The independent Review of the Student Grant Scheme was published on 4 May 2022. The research, conducted by Indecon Economic Consultants, confirmed that the majority of students in receipt of a grant would have been unlikely to have pursued studies without this direct financial support. However, the research noted that the rate of grants for undergraduate student supports has been relatively unchanged over the previous number of years due to budgetary constraints while over the same period the cost of living for students has increased by 25%. The report outlined recommendations including:

- Increase student maintenance grant rate levels targeting those most in need. In this connection the report identified the following priority groups:
 - Key Group 1: Non-adjacent students whose costs have risen the most and who report the highest levels of financial difficulty, and who are more likely to have been affected by rising rent levels; and
 - Key Group 2: Those students on lower incomes who research shows are more likely to come from deprived areas (i.e. students on special rate and 100% maintenance grant).
- Further extend supports to low-income postgraduate students.
- Extend supports to more flexible forms of learning including blended/online and part-time.

In the context of flexible learning the Review notes that many individuals, particularly those from lower-income families or disadvantaged groups, may not be in a position to engage full-time in higher education or may need to engage in a way that more flexibly meets their needs. The Review also finds that many students would have considered part-time if the option had been available to them. It suggests that facilitating students to complete their third-level education on a more flexible basis would also mean that some students could remain part of the labour force and contribute to the Exchequer via taxes on employment income. The Review highlights that the issue is complex and that significant planning is needed at both national and institutional level to manage the major supply-side impacts on educational institutions. A clear understanding of what constitutes part-time, blended and other forms needs to be established at national level to guide policy. The Review also notes that individual educational institutions need to plan if they are to expand their part-time education options, including deciding which courses should be part-time.

The Review of the Scheme with its recommendations provides a framework for the continued improvement of the system of student grant support.

Fee Support – Free Fees and Springboard+

The Free Fees Initiative, under which the State pays the tuition fees for eligible full-time undergraduate students, exclusive of the student contribution, also supports equity in higher education. This initiative allows a large group of students to enter higher education every year; they can then be supported through SUSI and other direct funding.

Since its launch in 2011, Springboard+ has also provided free and subsidised upskilling and reskilling opportunities through higher education in areas with an identified skills need. It has allowed people who are unemployed or receiving a social welfare payment to access or return to higher education and helped them back into employment.

Student Assistance Fund

The Student Assistance Fund (SAF) provides financial support to full- and part-time students who experience financial difficulties while attending higher education. It is a key support for students who need help with day-to-day or unexpected costs. In the 2020/2021 academic year, over 20,000 students were supported through the SAF.

Fund for Students with Disabilities

The Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) funds HEIs to provide services and supports to students with disabilities. It allows HEIs to put in place supports that enable students with disabilities to participate in higher education on an equal basis with their peers. In the 2020/2021 academic year, over 15,000 students received supports under the FSD.

PATH 2 – 1916 Bursary Fund

Launched in the 2017/2018 academic year, the PATH 2 – 1916 Bursary Fund initially provided around 200 students a year with a bursary worth €5,000 during each year of their studies. In 2021/2022, a second tier of 120 bursaries worth €2,000 per year was introduced as well as a once-off third tier worth €1,500 for that academic year.

The bursaries provide extra support to students from disadvantaged and underrepresented backgrounds to successfully participate in higher education, including at postgraduate level. The 1916 Bursary Fund and the number and diversity of students it has supported has been a key achievement during the lifetime of the 2015–2021 Plan and will continue to play an important role in this new Plan.

Student Support Scheme for Students in the International Protection Process

The Student Support Scheme for People in the International Protection System provides financial supports for students who are in the protection system or at the leave-to-remain (but not deportation order) stage. The Department of Education and Skills (later DFHERIS) Pilot Support Scheme was introduced in 2015 and provides financial grants for prospective students who are in the broad international protection system. It was renamed the Student Support Scheme in July 2020 and is now established as a permanent scheme.

3.4.3 Other funding programmes

In addition to the overarching funding framework and the Covid-19-related funding referred to above, other targeted and wider government funding streams support equity in higher education.

The Special Disadvantaged Initiatives Fund (€450,000) supports a number of community-based projects that specifically target children and young people in primary and post-primary DEIS schools who are generally at risk of not reaching their full academic potential. The projects also seek to target activities at children and young people who demonstrate high academic potential but who may be at risk of not progressing to further or higher education for a variety of reasons.

In Budget 2020, €2m was provided to address student mental health and wellbeing in higher education. This was allocated by the HEA to HEIs through the Recurrent Grant Allocation Model (RGAM).

Other funding streams from wider education and wider government also support access, including, the Human Capital Initiative and Dormant Accounts Funding, for example, funding for members of the Traveller community in HE, Performance Funding, Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), Aftercare Support for Care Leavers, Back to Education Allowance, National Childcare Scheme, Part-Time Education Option or other weekly Department of Social Protection payments.

At schools level, the DEIS programme complements the wide range of universal supports provided to all schools, DEIS and non-DEIS, to support the inclusion of all students and address barriers that prevent students achieving their potential. Supplementing these universal supports, the DEIS programme provides a targeted and equitable way to address concentrated educational disadvantage that promotes equity and has benefits for students, including their long-term outcomes.



4 Identifying the Priority Groups

In the Introduction we set out our two overarching ambitions for equity in higher education. We repeat those ambitions here as they are the bedrock upon which this Plan and the Department's policy rest:

That the higher education student body entering, participating in and completing higher education, at all levels and across all programmes reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population.

That our higher education institutions are inclusive, universally designed environments which support and foster student success and outcomes, equity and diversity and are responsive to the needs of students and wider communities.

In line with these ambitions, the Plan targets underrepresented students, vulnerable students, and students who have experienced disadvantage and who face challenges in accessing higher education and feeling they belong.

The consultation process highlighted the importance of recognising and naming additional 'priority groups', which are groups considered marginalised or disadvantaged. We have identified a number of priority groups, and there is much intersection between them. We recognise that an individual may fit within a number of the groups and subgroups identified here. For example, a member of the Traveller community with a disability is also potentially socioeconomically disadvantaged, meaning that they would come within all three of the main groupings.

We have identified three main groups, with the ‘socioeconomically disadvantaged’ group covering a number of different life situations that can lead to disadvantage:

- **Students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged**

We recognise that students experiencing such disadvantage may come from various backgrounds including:

- Students from low-income families and/or who are long-term social welfare dependent
- Students from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas
- Students who are mature and have never previously accessed higher education
- Students who are mature and who previously attended higher education but did not complete a course (that is, ‘second-chance’ mature students)
- Students who are lone parents or teen parents
- Students who are migrants or refugees or who have experience of the international protection process, or students from ethnic minorities
- Students who have experience of the care system
- Students who are survivors of domestic violence
- Students who are carers
- Students who have experienced homelessness
- Students who have experience of the criminal justice system

- **Students who are members of Irish Traveller and Roma communities**

- **Students with disabilities including intellectual disabilities**

Figure H presents the three overarching priority groups and Figure I illustrates some of the life situations that can lead to social disadvantage.

Figure H: The three overarching priority groups

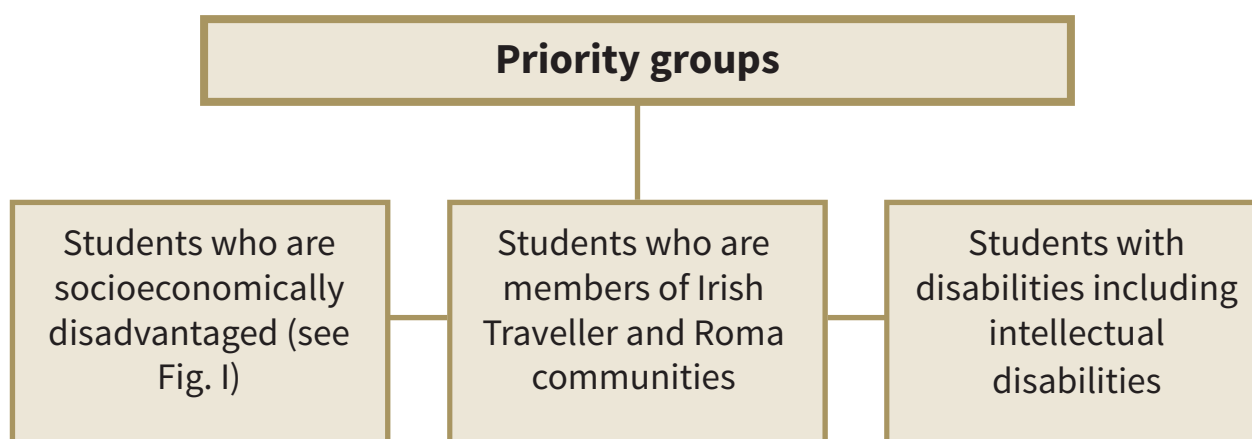


Figure I: Life experiences that can cause socioeconomic disadvantage



The life experiences shown in Figure I reflect the outcome of the consultation process but we acknowledge that there are multiple other life experiences that also impact on access to higher education. All students who experience socioeconomic disadvantage and the resulting barriers to higher education are included in this Plan.

It is important to note the difficulties and complexities of gathering data on these priority groups. While many positive developments were made during the lifetime of the previous Plan (2015–2021), data gaps remain across the entire education sector. A new Access Data Plan is needed to map how to systematically gather accurate, timely and fit-for-purpose data on the additional priority groups. Table A1 in Appendix A details the additional priority groups identified during development of this Plan, the current data availability for those groups, and the priorities for data collection during the lifetime of the Plan.



5 The Strategic Student-Centred Goals

Having defined the ambition for this National Access Plan and the priority groups, we now identify the detailed goals, objectives and actions that will drive performance.

The Plan places the student at the centre. Everything is directed at delivering positive and inclusive outcomes for all students at every stage of their higher education journey. At the core of this Plan are five student-centred goals. These are:

1) *Inclusivity*

2) *Flexibility*

3) *Clarity*

4) *Coherence*

5) *Sustainability*

Underpinning these five goals is a sixth core goal:

6) *Evidence-driven approach.*

These six goals provide the overarching framework for development and implementation. Each goal is underpinned by:

- **Objectives** for delivering outcomes for students
- **Actions** that describe how the objectives will be achieved
- Stakeholders with **responsibility** for implementing the actions
- **Key performance indicators** for measuring and assessing achievement of objectives.

The national targets set out in Chapter 6 will be achieved through these objectives and actions.

Figure J: The student-centred goals



5.1 Goal 1: Inclusivity

The Inclusivity Goal underpins all aspects of the higher education system, embraces diversity in the student population, and aims to provide all students with an accessible, supportive and inclusive higher education experience. A crucial aspect of this is the importance of diversity in the student-teacher population, as teachers play a key role in encouraging their students to access higher education. It is vital that teachers, and early years educators are role models and that their backgrounds and life experiences mirror those of their students and the children they work with.

In an inclusive environment:

- higher education is accessible
- every student feels a sense of belonging
- every student has a positive student experience supported by the principles of universal design and inclusive approaches to teaching and learning
- all programmes and all levels of study have diverse student populations
- decision-making structures in HEIs show meaningful inclusivity and reflect the wealth of talent of the full student body
- the teacher and early years educator workforces are diverse ones.

Table 5.1: Goal 1: Inclusivity

Objective	Action	Responsibility	Key Performance Indicator
1.1	To support students from priority groups to access higher education and have an inclusive experience with a successful outcome.	HEIs to implement access, participation and success strategies that support delivery of the ambitions of this Plan. In these strategies HEIs should consider pathways to higher education and reserved places for students from priority groups.	HEIs, HEA, DFHERIS, NFETL HEIs report to HEA yearly on implementation of National Access Plan as part of Strategic Dialogue Process and annual data reporting through Student Records System (SRS) and Equal Access Survey. NFETL updates HEA on implementation of the Student Success Framework.
1.2	To support underrepresented, disadvantaged or vulnerable students through the Covid-19 pandemic with targeted funds.	To review the impact of the Covid-19 Contingency Fund and the extra once-off funding under the SAF as part of the wider vision of increased access, participation and success.	HEIs, HEA, DFHERIS Number of students supported by targeted funds and associated qualitative outcomes.
1.3	To embed a whole-of-institution approach to student success and universal design.	To support and implement inclusive practice and design principles, for example, managing universal design-focused Strategic Initiatives funded under the Fund for Students with Disabilities.	DFHERIS, HEA, HEIs Evidence of inclusive practices, for example, accessible learning platforms, staff training, appointment of universal design champions, improved campus accessibility and qualitative review of universal design in HEIs.

Objective	Action	Responsibility	Key Performance Indicator	
1.3	To embed a whole-of-institution approach to student success and universal design.	To consider how PATH funding can be used to embed inclusive practices and help HEIs prepare for greater inclusion of priority groups including students with intellectual disabilities.	DFHERIS, HEA, HEIs	Policy development and implementation commenced.
1.4	To incorporate the voice of priority group students in decision-making on access, participation and student success policies, programmes and initiatives	To use existing initiatives such as NStEP (National Student Engagement Programme) and StudentSurvey.ie to include the voice and experiences of priority group students.	DFHERIS, HEA, HEIs, QQI, USI, IUA, THEA, NStEP	Incorporation of NStEP Framework and student engagement principles within HEIs. Annual Report from Student Survey.ie outlining additional findings from priority groups students.
1.4	To incorporate the voice of priority group students in decision-making on access, participation and student success policies, programmes and initiatives.	To improve mechanisms for students to meaningfully contribute to access policy.	DFHERIS, HEA, HEIs	Future policy developments arising from Plan include student voice in development and implementation.
1.5	To improve opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities to engage in higher education.	To develop policies and implementation plans to promote meaningful participation of students with intellectual disabilities.	DFHERIS, HEA, HEIs, DCEDIY	Policy development and implementation commenced.
1.6	To consider how to achieve a more diverse student population across all programmes and all levels of study, both undergraduate and postgraduate.	To consult with stakeholders on ways to promote diversity and inclusion in the professions and in high points or high demand courses and at postgraduate (taught and research) level.	DFHERIS, HEA, HEIs, research funding agencies	Increase in diversity in programmes with a view to reflecting overall population.
1.6	To consider how to achieve a more diverse student population across all programmes and all levels of study, both undergraduate and postgraduate.	To promote Erasmus+ mobility options among all students, including those who have fewer opportunities (in line with the stated priorities and targeted groups in the Erasmus+ Programme 2021).	DFHERIS, HEA, HEIs	Number of students participating in Erasmus+ mobility programmes including those receiving extra supports.
1.7	To work towards a more diverse teacher workforce by supporting equity of access, participation and success in initial teacher education for the priority groups.	To develop baseline data on diversity in initial teacher education (ITE) programmes from priority groups.	DFHERIS, DoE, HEA, HEIs	Accurate comprehensive data gathered on students from priority groups on ITE programmes to inform decision-making.

Objective	Action	Responsibility	Key Performance Indicator
1.7	<p>To work towards a more diverse teacher workforce by supporting equity of access, participation and success in initial teacher education by priority groups.</p> <p>To consider the impact of PATH 1 projects on students from priority groups and their ability to access ITE, including meeting entry requirements and overcoming barriers to access.</p> <p>To build on learnings from PATH 1, with increased focus on early intervention.</p>	DFHERIS, DoE, HEA, Teaching Council	<p>Findings of PATH impact assessment provide insight on how priority groups have been supported to access ITE.</p> <p>Increase in the number of students from priority groups on ITE programmes over the lifetime of the Plan.</p>
1.7	<p>To work towards a more diverse teacher workforce by supporting equity of access, participation and success in initial teacher education by priority groups.</p> <p>To include priority groups in campaigns to promote participation in the teaching profession.</p>	DoE, Teaching Council	Promotional campaigns to feature members of priority groups where possible.
1.7	<p>To work towards a more diverse teacher workforce by supporting equity of access, participation and success in initial teacher education by priority groups.</p> <p>Consider the findings of the longitudinal study of reconfigured ITE programmes to inform the development of measures to support the supply, diversity and retention of newly qualified teachers.</p>	DoE, Teaching Council	Findings from research commissioned by the Teaching Council and the Department of Education are considered.
1.8	<p>To promote diversity in the Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SLC) workforce to provide role models for children and ensure connections with families and communities.</p> <p>To develop and introduce a mechanism for the funding of Early Years Educators to undertake Level 7/8 programmes in Early Learning and Care.</p>	DCEDIY	<p>New funding mechanism in place.</p> <p>Graduate-led workforce in Early Learning and Care by 2028.</p>
1.8	<p>To promote diversity in the Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SLC) workforce to provide role models for children and ensure connections with families and communities.</p> <p>To evaluate a range of entry routes into Early Learning and Care in consultation with relevant Departments.</p> <p>To improve data collection and research on diversity in ELC and SAC workforce to improve target settings</p>	DCEDIY	<p>Evaluation of potential entry routes and access programmes complete, and actions taken on evaluations.</p> <p>Baseline data gathered and potential targets examined.</p>
1.9	<p>To support students through universal and targeted funding programmes.</p> <p>To continuously review targeted access measures and programmes to address priority policy areas.</p>	DFHERIS	Number of students supported by targeted funds and associated qualitative outcomes.

5.2 Goal 2: Flexibility

The Flexibility Goal supports every student to access and participate in higher education in a way that aligns with their individual needs and circumstances. This includes part-time and remote learning opportunities or other hybrid-learning models. A flexible system requires a responsive approach recognising that students come to higher education at different stages in life and through diverse routes, such as further education or community education, and progress through higher education with varying timeframes and through different modes of study.

Table 5.2: Goal 2: Flexibility

	Objective	Action	Responsibility	Key Performance Indicator
2.1	To support priority group students who study on a flexible basis and to promote flexible teaching and learning practices informed by inclusive practices and principles.	To consider measures to help priority group students who wish to study on a part-time or flexible basis, including direct financial support, HEI student services and adapting learnings from Covid-19 to enable a blended and inclusive student experience based on inclusive learning principles.	DFHERIS, HEA, IUA, THEA, HEIs, QQI, NFETL	<p>Implementation of recommendation in respect of part-time/flexible learning arising from Review of Student Grant Scheme.</p> <p>HEIs report yearly to HEA on implementation of National Access Plan as part of the Strategic Dialogue Process.</p> <p>NFETL updates HEA on implementation of the sectoral project: Next Steps for Teaching and Learning: Moving Forward Together.</p>
2.2	To identify connectivity initiatives that facilitate all students to fully participate in remote learning.	To further advance connectivity supports by considering measures which enable greater and more widespread access to high-speed internet.	DFHERIS, HEAnet	Increase in provision of eduroam locations.
2.3	To explore new routes for priority groups to access programmes and improve the use of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).	To develop a national approach to RPL and other prior learning outcomes.	DFHERIS	<p>Implementation of HCI-funded RPL project including roll-out of National RPL Framework.</p> <p>QQI scopes and publishes national approach to RPL in tertiary education.</p>

5.3 Goal 3: Clarity

The Clarity Goal aims to provide clear understandable information to prospective students on how to access higher education and the steps in making a higher education application. Clear information should be available on all supports, financial and otherwise, and how students can access them. Information should be user-friendly and accessible to learners and families from diverse backgrounds and communities.

Table 5.3: Goal 3: Clarity

	Objective	Action	Responsibility	Key Performance Indicator
3.1	To give students, families and community partners clear consistent information and career guidance, as well as guidance on financial and other supports.	To conduct a review of studentfinance.ie with appropriate stakeholder consultation to ensure it meets the needs of priority groups.	HEA, DFHERIS	Review completed and website updated.
3.1	To give students, families and community partners clear consistent information and career guidance, as well as guidance on financial and other supports.	To develop a new Qualifax website providing information on learning opportunities, including access supports.	DFHERIS, QQI	Review completed and website updated.
3.1	To give students, families and community partners clear consistent information and career guidance, as well as guidance on financial and other supports.	To improve career information and career guidance tools for priority group students at all stages of the education lifecycle.	DoE, DFHERIS, DCEDIY, Tusla	Outcomes from progress implementation of 2019 Review of Career Guidance ³¹ . Enhancement of the Right Course tool ³² . Guidance resources for pilot projects which support transitions for students from priority groups.
3.2	To ensure greater coordination and consistency of pre-entry and mentoring work across HEIs.	To establish a working group across the higher education system involving stakeholder and community partner consultation to consider a coherent approach to pre-entry and mentoring.	DoE, DFHERIS, HEA, HEIs, SOLAS, DCEDIY, NCSE	Agreed set of best practice principles.
3.3	To develop student-friendly processes and align existing access structures.	To implement a centralised application and assessment facility for the PATH 2 – 1916 Bursary Fund, including appointing a PATH coordinator and rolling out a promotional campaign.	DFHERIS, IUA	Centralised application and assessment facility for PATH 2 in operation.

31 <https://assets.gov.ie/24951/dffde726604b451aa6cc50239a375299.pdf>

32 www.gov.ie/therightcourse

5.4 Goal 4: Coherence

The Coherence Goal aims to provide coherent information and joined-up supports and approaches to inclusion throughout the education system and across government. This extends to recognising the roles of local, community and regional partners, and the voluntary sector, in raising awareness among priority group students for successful transitions to and within higher education. A whole-of-education approach to equity in higher education includes all levels of the education system. It recognises the importance of encouraging and developing the aspirations of students and potential students (mature and second-chance students) and supporting their ambition to pursue higher education throughout the pre-school, primary, post-primary and further education stages. It acknowledges the important role that further education and community education providers have as bridges to higher education through developing pathways for underrepresented groups moving from FET to HE. It involves educators at all levels in creating inclusive learning experiences and environments. A holistic and joined-up approach supports seamless transitions in a student's journey.

A coherent cross-departmental approach provides coordinated and aligned support structures, recognising the wider intersectionality, environmental and societal factors that can affect a person's educational journey. This approach ensures continued focus on student success and positive outcomes.

Table 5.4: Goal 4: Coherence

	Objective	Action	Responsibility	Key Performance Indicator
4.1	To develop strategic partnerships and approaches to support access, participation and success by students from priority groups.	To build on and improve partnerships and collaborative pathways between the FET and HE sectors, community education providers, community partners and employers as part of future development of PATH.	DFHERIS, HEA, SOLAS, HEIs, DRCD, other stakeholders as appropriate	Increased participation by students from priority groups. Evidence of partnerships in place with outcomes for students from priority groups.
4.2	To develop a whole-of-education approach to inclusion in education, with the need to target students earlier in the education cycle.	To equip all teachers to teach a diverse school population and support students to transition to further and higher education.	DoE, Teaching Council, DFHERIS, NCSE	Information gathered on how the core element of inclusive education, as defined in 'Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education' ³³ is being implemented across all ITE programmes on completion of the second cycle of accreditation of programmes.
4.2	To develop a whole-of-education approach to inclusion in education, with the need to target students earlier in the education cycle.	To put in place a structure for formal engagement on transitions from post-primary to further and higher education and to examine transitions to and within further and higher education – both with a particular focus on students from priority groups.	DFHERIS, DoE, QQI, NCSE	Structure in place. Common principles and a coordinated approach to inclusion developed that supports priority group students at all stages of the education cycle. Sharing of data on progression from different stages in the education cycle in place.

33 <https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/news-events/latest-news/ceim-standards-for-initial-teacher-education.pdf>

Objective	Action	Responsibility	Key Performance Indicator
4.2	To develop a whole-of-education approach to inclusion in education, with the need to target students earlier in the education cycle.	To develop and implement a Traveller Education Strategy under the National Traveller and Roma Integration Strategy (NTRIS), building on the Action Plan for Increasing Traveller Participation in Higher Education 2019–2021 ³⁴ and the roll-out of Dormant Accounts funding to support Traveller and Roma participation in higher education.	DCEDIY, DoE, DFHERIS Publication of Traveller Education Strategy. Outcomes from PATH funding and Dormant Accounts funding.
4.2	To develop a whole-of-education approach to inclusion in education, with the need to target students earlier in the education cycle.	To support equity of access to Early Learning and Care (ELC) through the Access and Inclusion Model and target resources to address issues of socioeconomic disadvantage.	DCEDIY Implementation of recommendations of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) Evaluation when finalised. Development of policy and implementation plan to address issues of disadvantage in ELC to include a focus on transitions.
4.3	To develop collaboration between government departments and agencies to ensure a whole-of-government approach to removing barriers to access, participation and success.	Strengthen synergies between the Plan and whole-of-tertiary education approaches and relevant national strategies. These include the Road Map for Social Inclusion, the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, the Migrant Integration Strategy ³⁵ , Working to Change, and the Youth Homelessness Strategy when developed.	DFHERIS in partnership with other government departments and agencies DFHERIS representation on groups and input to strategies. Structured links with regional bodies, community organisations and HEIs.

34 <https://assets.gov.ie/79100/1b57b3ea-7a1a-4106-a9e7-82d8eea21df4.pdf>

35 https://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Migrant_Integration_Strategy_English.pdf/Files/Migrant_Integration_Strategy_English.pdf

5.5 Goal 5: Sustainability

The Sustainability Goal requires that the higher education system has the core resources to provide an inclusive higher education experience. Sustainability is about ensuring the capacity of the higher education system to deliver the vision of this Plan while noting that the capacity of partners in the wider education and community sectors is also central to realisation of the vision. Sustainable funding is key to continuing and developing access services in HEIs as these services are mainly funded through core HEI budgets.

This Goal also recognises the need to continuously improve funding for student support to incentivise greater participation for underrepresented groups and to protect against the increased costs of college for students from priority groups.

Table 5.5: Goal 5: Sustainability

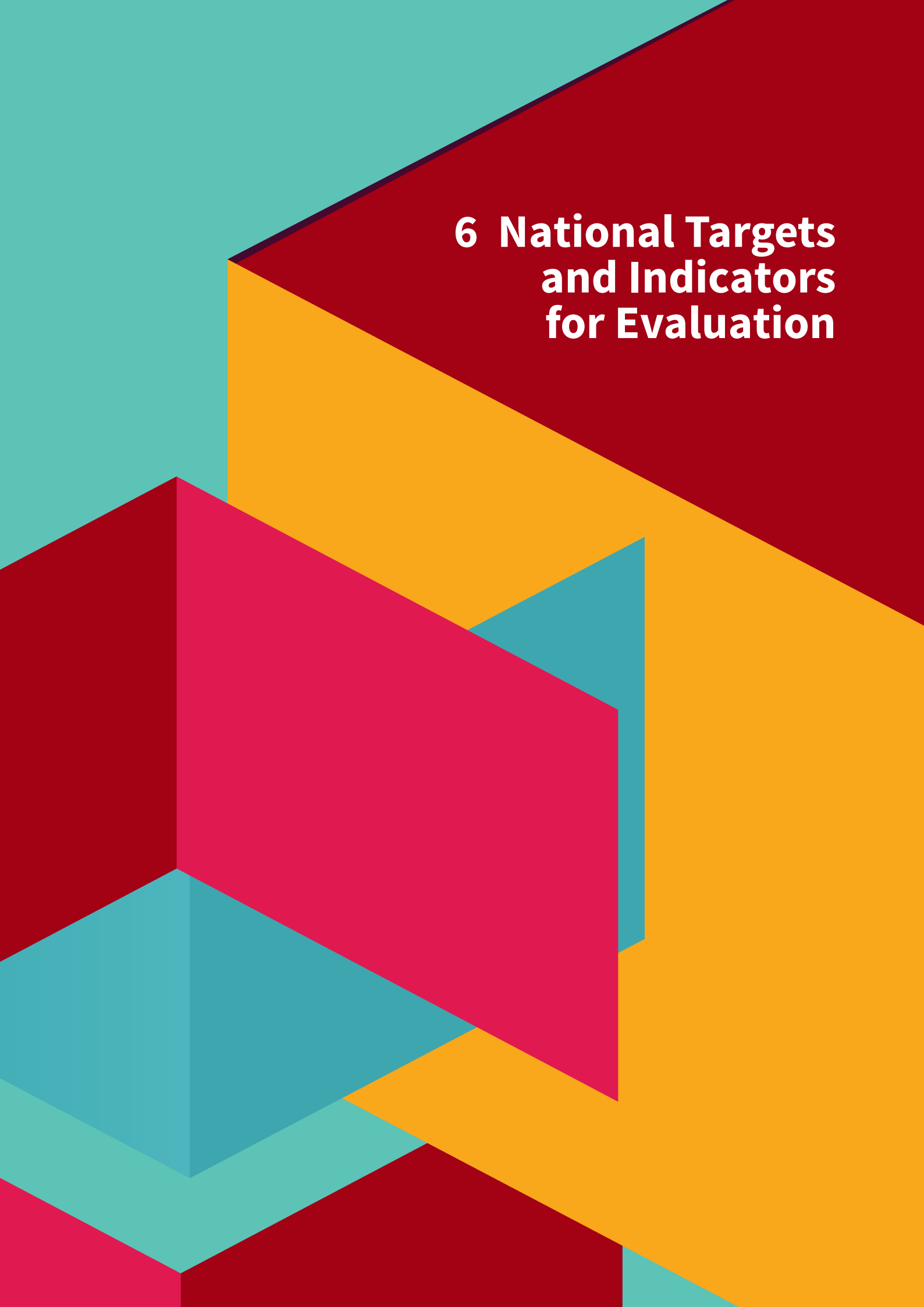
	Objective	Action	Responsibility	Key Performance Indicator
5.1	To develop a sustainably funded higher education system that will support the objectives and actions of this Plan.	To build capacity within HEIs to support equity of access and student success for priority groups.	DFHERIS	Evidence of enhanced students supports and flexibility arising from increased resources to HEIs.
5.2	To sustain funding and develop initiatives and activities that involve HE and community partnerships, funded through time-limited programmes.	To evaluate the impact of pilot projects funded through time-limited programmes to help identify projects that prove effective so as to continue these projects through core funding.	DFHERIS, HEIs, HEA	Projects that show impact are sustained through core funding. PATH impact assessment completed.
5.2	To sustain funding and develop initiatives and activities that involve HE and community partnerships, funded through time-limited programmes.	To explore how the higher education sector can engage better with partners such as DEIS schools, further education providers, community and voluntary groups, existing local initiatives to tackle educational disadvantage, and Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs).	DFHERIS, DoE, SOLAS, DRCD, DCEDIY	Increased partnership between HEIs and partners to support transitions to and within HE. Roll-out of PATH programme. HEI representation on LCDCs.
5.3	To expand funding to address the cost of going to college and enable part-time study for socioeconomically disadvantaged students from priority groups.	To implement the recommendations of the Review of Student Grant Scheme in respect of addressing the cost of going to college and considering extra direct financial support for students from priority groups under the PATH programme. To consider measures to help priority group students who wish to study on a part-time or flexible basis, including direct financial support.	DFHERIS	Increase to Non-Adjacent, Special Rate and Band A Maintenance Grants and increased opportunities for undergraduates from priority groups to continue to postgraduate study. Increase in PATH Bursaries. Implementation of recommendation in respect of part-time/flexible learning arising from Review of Student Grant Scheme.

5.6 Goal 6: Evidence-driven approach

The Evidence-Driven Approach Goal is the core underpinning goal throughout this Plan. Every policy, objective and action proposed is rooted in rigorous evaluation and analysis of the data and evidence. Delivery of the vision can be achieved if policy interventions are informed by data and evidence of what works is consistently evaluated and improved based on the emerging data.

Table 5.6: Goal 6: Evidence-driven approach

	Objective	Action	Responsibility	Key Performance Indicator
6.1	To develop the evidence base for inclusive access, participation and success to inform future policy and planning.	To arrange regular meetings between DFHERIS, HEA, HEIs and other partners to share information and best practice.	DFHERIS, HEA, HEIs	Annual Access Forum, annual community of practice events, Implementation Steering Group, IUA Access Steering Group, SUSI Advisory Group.
6.1	To develop the evidence base for inclusive access, participation and success to inform future policy and planning.	To prepare a new Access Data Plan that meets the needs of this Plan and to consider data-sharing agreements to support its implementation.	DFHERIS, HEA	New Access Data Plan and improved evidence base for policy-making developed and implemented.
6.1	To develop the evidence base for inclusive access, participation and success to inform future policy and planning.	To review national and international trends in access, transfer and progression, including existing QQI provisions and context with recommendations for future.	DFHERIS, QQI	High-level review commissioned.
6.2	To evaluate and monitor the impact of access and inclusion initiatives.	To carry out an impact assessment of PATH 1, 2 and 3.	DFHERIS, HEA	Recommendations of impact assessment implemented.
6.2	To evaluate and monitor the impact of access and inclusion initiatives.	To ensure updates to the Higher Education System Performance Framework reflect the learning from implementation of this Plan.	DFHERIS, HEA	Plan vision reflected in new System Performance Framework.



6 National Targets and Indicators for Evaluation

This Plan proposes nine key performance indicators. The baseline data for each of these indicators are set out in this chapter and progress along these indicators will be measured yearly where possible.

6.1 Performance measurement

Measuring performance is at the heart of this National Access Plan. The ambition of the Plan is to deliver equitable access, participation and success in higher education. Effective quantitative measures are required to allow progress to be monitored and assessed over the lifetime of the Plan. This quantitative measurement must be rigorous, and the Plan's success will ultimately be evaluated by such measurement.

This Plan proposes nine key performance indicators. The baseline data for each of these indicators are set out in this chapter and progress along these indicators will be measured yearly where possible. Higher education institutions must address these indicators in their access, participation and success strategies.

In addition, four overarching targets for the *higher education system* are proposed. These are challenging and ambitious targets, but they can be achieved if stakeholders place inclusion at the heart of their strategic plans and work to deliver progress across each of the performance indicators.

The mid-term review (in 2025) will allow us to consider how we can refine or develop targets and indicators, taking account of potentially improved data and the outcomes of the proposed Access Data Plan. We propose to initiate the Data Plan early in the lifetime of this Plan to examine ways to collect improved data for all priority groups. The Data Plan will aim to address challenges in data collection for priority groups and consider the possibilities created by new technologies, administrative databases and data-sharing opportunities.

Appendix A (Data Report) gives detailed background material, data, rationale and methodology for the performance indicators and targets set out at summary level in this chapter.

6.2 Key performance indicators

Nine performance indicators will be monitored in parallel with targets to assess progress and trends over the lifetime of this Plan. These are arranged by context, as shown below:

Flexibility within higher education

- 1) Participation by part-time/flexible learners
- 2) Progression from further education to higher education

Diversity across programmes and levels

- 3) Postgraduate study among selected priority groups (for example, postgraduate/mature students from disadvantaged areas, Traveller students, students with disabilities)
- 4) Student diversity across selected fields of study (for example, initial teacher education, medicine)

Access and participation for priority groups

- 5) Students with a disability who are supported by FSD
- 6) Students attending DEIS schools
- 7) Students who are lone parents

Student success and engagement

- 8) Progression and completion among selected priority groups (for example, students and mature students from disadvantaged areas)
- 9) Graduate outcomes among selected priority groups (for example, students from disadvantaged areas and those attending DEIS schools)

Baseline data is not currently available for certain priority groups including students from the Roma community, students with intellectual disabilities, and certain groups within the socioeconomically disadvantaged group:

- students who have experience of the care system
- students who are survivors of domestic violence
- students who are migrants
- students who have experience of the international protection process or who are refugees
- students from ethnic minorities
- students who have experience of the criminal justice system
- students who are carers
- students who have experience of homelessness.

At the mid-term review, we will consider whether to include extra key performance indicators for these groups.

Table 6.1 presents an overview of the baseline data and how the indicators will be measured over the course of the Plan. The baseline data refers to the most up-to-date data available, that is, 2019/2020 DIS data and 2020/2021 SRS/EAS data where available.

Table 6.1: Performance Indicators – Baseline Data and Measurement

Key Performance Indicator (1) Part-time/flexible learners

	Baseline Data	Measurement over the period 2022–2028
Participation of flexible learners	In 2020/2021, 25% of students were studying on a part-time/flexible basis compared to 23% in 2019/2020 (see Figure A1 in Appendix A).	Participation trends in flexible learning using SRS data
Socioeconomic profile of part-time students	<p>DIS data for 2019/2020 shows that part-time postgraduate students are the most affluent cohort (mean score of 4.6 compared to a mean score of 3.4 for full-time postgraduate students).</p> <p>At undergraduate level, there is little difference by mode (mean score of 1.7 for full-time and 1.6 for part-time students).</p>	Socioeconomic profile of part-time students at both postgraduate and undergraduate levels using DIS data

Key Performance Indicator (2) Progression from further education to higher education

	Baseline Data	Measurement over the period 2022–2028
Entry basis for new entrants to higher education	In 2020/2021, 6.1% of new entrants entered higher education based on a further education award. This compares to 5.9% in 2019/2020 and 5.5% in 2018/2019 (see Figure A2 in Appendix A).	% of new entrants entering higher education based on a further education award using SRS data

Key Performance Indicator (3) Postgraduate study among selected priority groups (for example, postgraduate/mature students from disadvantaged areas, Traveller students and students with disabilities)

	Baseline Data	Measurement over the period 2022–2028
Socioeconomic profile of postgraduate student population	2019/2020 DIS data shows that postgraduate students are more affluent than undergraduate students (mean score of 4.0 vs 1.7). PhD students have a mean score of 4.5 . Taught Master's students have a mean score of 3.9 compared to a mean score of 1.6 for Research Master's students.	Socioeconomic profile of postgraduate population, including analysis of PhD and Research Master's students using DIS data
Socioeconomic profile of mature postgraduate student population	In 2019/2020, 6.5% of mature postgraduate students were disadvantaged (compared to 7.6% of non-mature postgraduate students).	Socioeconomic profile of mature postgraduate student population using DIS data
Proportion of Traveller students undertaking postgraduate study	In 2020/2021, 6% of Traveller students were engaging in postgraduate study compared to 94% at undergraduate level .	% of Traveller students participating in postgraduate study using SRS/EAS data
Proportion of students with a disability undertaking postgraduate study	HEA SRS data shows that in 2020/2021, 6% of those who indicated a disability were pursuing postgraduate study. This compared to 5% in 2019/2020 ³⁶ .	% of students with a disability participating in postgraduate study using SRS/EAS data

³⁶ Of note, according to AHEAD data in 2019/2020, 2.5% of the postgraduate population were registered with disability support services in comparison to 7.2% of the undergraduate population.

Key Performance Indicator (4) Student diversity across fields of study

Baseline Data		Measurement over the period 2022–2028
Socioeconomic profile of new entrants to initial teacher education courses	In 2019/2020, 8.7% of new entrants to secondary teacher education courses were disadvantaged compared to 6.1% of those pursuing primary teaching (overall, 10.8% of new entrants are disadvantaged).	Socioeconomic profile of new entrants to teacher education courses using DIS data
Socioeconomic profile of new entrants to selected fields of study	<p>Summary of the % of new entrants who are from disadvantaged areas across selected fields of study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economics 2.3% • Medicine 5.2% • Financing, Banking & Insurance 9.6% • Law 10.9% • Nursing and Midwifery 13.0% • Social Work and Counselling 19.4% • Childcare and Youth Services 21.9% <p>For a full breakdown of the socioeconomic profile of new entrants by all fields of study, see Table A13 (Appendix A).</p>	Socioeconomic profile of new entrants to selected fields of study using DIS data

Key Performance Indicator (5) Students with a disability who are supported by FSD

Baseline Data		Measurement over the period 2022–2028
Proportion of students supported by FSD across all categories of disability	<p>Number of students supported by FSD has increased from 11,773 in 2017/2018 to 15,145 in 2020/2021.</p> <p>Largest proportion of students supported by FSD are indicating 'specific learning difficulties' (35% in 2020/2021), followed by 'mental health' issues (13% in 2020/2021), 'significant ongoing illness' (10% in 2020/2021) and 'autistic spectrum disorder' (9% in 2020/2021).</p> <p>See Table A2 in Appendix A for a breakdown of numbers in each category for 2017/2018–2020/2021.</p>	No. and % of students in each disability category using FSD data

Key Performance Indicator (6) Entry to higher education for students attending DEIS schools

Baseline Data		Measurement over the period 2022–2028
Proportion of new entrants from DEIS schools entering HE	SRS data shows that in 2020/2021, 12% of new entrants came from DEIS schools. This compares to 10% in 2019/2020. See Figure A3 in Appendix A for a trend analysis.	% of new entrants from DEIS schools using SRS data

Key Performance Indicator (7) Lone parents in higher education

Baseline Data		Measurement over the period 2022–2028
Proportion and socioeconomic profile of new entrant parents who are receiving a one-parent family payment	<p>In 2020/2021, 893 (or 2% of new entrants) indicated they were parents compared to 782 (2% of new entrants) in 2019/2020.</p> <p>Of those identifying as parents in 2020/2021, 23% indicated they receive one-parent family payments compared to 26% in 2019/2020.</p> <p>Of those identifying as parents in 2019/2020, the mean DIS score is –1.6 (compared to an average of 1.4 for all new entrants).</p> <p>See Table A3 in Appendix A for more detail.</p>	<p>No. and % of new entrant parents who receive a one-parent family payment using SRS data</p> <p>Socioeconomic profile of new entrant parents who are receiving one-parent family payments using DIS data</p>

Key Performance Indicator (8) Progression and completion among selected priority groups (for example, students from disadvantaged areas and mature students from disadvantaged areas)

Baseline Data		Measurement over the period 2022–2028
Progression rates for those from disadvantaged areas and mature students from disadvantaged areas	<p>For 2019/2020 new entrants, overall non-progression rates are 9%.</p> <p>This increases to 12% for those from disadvantaged areas and to 15% for mature students from disadvantaged areas.</p>	% of progression/non-progression for new entrants and mature new entrants from disadvantaged areas using SRS progression data
Completion rates for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and for those attending DEIS schools	<p>Recent findings for those who entered higher education in 2010/2011 show that completion rates are lower for those from underrepresented socioeconomic backgrounds (75%) when compared to those from all other backgrounds (78%). Completion rates are also lower for students who attended DEIS schools (67%) compared to all other schools (76%). However, multivariate analysis shows that Leaving Certificate points largely drive these differences.</p>	% of completion/non-completion for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and for those attending DEIS schools using SRS completion data

Key Performance Indicator (9) Graduate outcomes among selected priority groups (for example, students from disadvantaged areas and those attending DEIS schools)

	Baseline Data	Measurement over the period 2022–2028
Graduate earnings by socioeconomic background	Analysis of 2020 graduates shows that those from affluent areas earn the most and those from disadvantaged areas earn the least, nine months after graduation. For example, when like-for-like graduates are compared, affluent graduates earn around €38,000 per year, compared to €36,600 for disadvantaged graduates (a gap of almost €1,400).	Graduate earnings by socioeconomic background using Graduate Outcomes Survey data
Graduate earnings by school type	Analysis of 2020 younger graduates shows that those who attended DEIS schools were earning 6.5% less than average graduates (in unadjusted terms), nine months after graduation.	Graduate earnings by school type using Graduate Outcomes Survey data

6.3 National targets

Targets are an important component of both international and national education action plans. Specific targets have been set in this National Access Plan for the following groups:

- New entrants (aged 18–20) from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas
- New entrants who are mature and from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas
- New entrants with a disability
- New entrants from the Traveller community³⁷.

These targets can be robustly measured and monitored using current datasets and due to the availability of accurate population data.

By setting targets for the higher education system, it is possible to assess the system's progress toward achieving the ambition of this Plan, that is, that the student body in higher education reflects the diversity of the population. We acknowledge that targets alone do not raise standards or bring about improvements; instead, it is the actions of key stakeholders in their approach to reaching targets that is most important.

The four overarching targets are summarised in Table 6.2.

³⁷ While initial targets focus on Traveller students, the Plan will aim to incorporate students from the Roma community when data becomes available.

Table 6.2: Overview of National Access Plan targets for 2022–2028

New entrants from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas	
Current transition rate between school and higher education	42%
Target transition rate between school and higher education	54%
New mature entrants from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas	
Current % of mature new entrants from disadvantaged areas (as a % of all disadvantaged new entrants)	11%
Target % of mature new entrants from disadvantaged areas (as a % of all disadvantaged new entrants)	20%
New entrants with a disability	
Current % of students with a disability (as a % of all new entrants)	12.4%
Target % of students with a disability (as a % of all new entrants)	16%
New entrants from the Traveller community	
Current number of Traveller new entrants	33
Target number of Traveller new entrants	150
Current % of Traveller new entrants (as a % of all new entrants)	0.07%
Target % of Traveller new entrants (as a % of all new entrants)	0.32%

Further information is included in Appendix A on the limitations of target setting and the approach used for setting targets.

6.4 Qualitative indicators

In addition to quantitative data, this National Access Plan recognises the importance of qualitative indicators in understanding and monitoring equity in higher education. HEI access strategies and student success strategies show the breadth and depth of qualitative work in HEIs that is crucial to realising the inclusion objectives. This work includes pre-entry work with schools and community organisations, pre-entry academic supports, relationship building, induction and orientation, and the range of post-entry supports (financial and other) that are driven by the access services in HEIs.

Events where good practice is shared provide a forum for learning and implementation of best practice. These events give the sector an opportunity to take stock of and evaluate the huge range of qualitative work taking place in HEIs.

Analysing the results from national student surveys, such as the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (now known as StudentSurvey.ie) and the Eurostudent Survey as well as other relevant data sources is also important. The Irish Survey of Student Engagement includes a wide range of questions relating to the student experience. There is great potential for HEIs to analyse the data at institutional level to guide programme design. Furthermore, the Eurostudent Survey provides valuable data at both national and institutional levels to inform better understanding of student living conditions and financial circumstances. Such surveys contribute to a clearer picture of the student experience to guide evidence-based policy-making. This Plan recognises the work of the higher education sector in actively responding to the multifaceted and complex needs of an increasingly diverse student population. We must develop qualitative indicators that effectively capture and adequately measure progress in these areas over the next seven years.



7 Implementation and Mid-term Progress Review

Overall responsibility for delivery of the National Access Plan will reside with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

7.1 Implementation structures

7.1.1 Responsibility for implementation

Overall responsibility for delivery of the National Access Plan will reside with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. The Department will be responsible for coordinating actions and setting policy relevant to the further and higher education sectors as well as managing coordination with the wider education sector in collaboration with the Department of Education. It will also liaise with other government departments on relevant actions (for example, DCEDIY, DSP). This will allow a coherent whole-of-education and whole-of-government approach to providing inclusive learning environments and support structures for students. DFHERIS devolves elements of the operational management of the implementation, including monitoring and the associated funding, to the HEA in line with its statutory functions, performance agreement with DFHERIS and an annual work programme.

7.1.2 Monitoring performance delivery (System Performance Framework and Strategic Dialogue Process)

The System Performance Framework is a steering and performance-based framework for the higher education and research system, and has the following objectives:

- To hold the system accountable for delivery of national priorities and to monitor the performance of the system as a whole;
- To set out the expectations of different areas of government and agencies across the various aspects of higher education activity;
- To increase visibility of the performance of the system to government and the public;
- To contribute to system and policy development by highlighting structural and other deficits including the capacity to gather data;
- To allow HEIs to identify their strategic niche and mission and agree a performance compact aligned with funding with the Higher Education Authority.

The HEA requires every HEI to have a strategy for equity of access to higher education and associated metrics and methods of evaluation.

As part of the annual Strategic Dialogue Process, the HEA will review the performance of each HEI on its agreed targets. On equity of access and student success, HEIs must be able to show the steps they are taking to advance participation as part of the national priority of equity as specified in the Higher Education System Performance Framework and how they are contributing to the goals, objectives and targets set out in this Plan.

The HEA will also work with HEIs through the strategic dialogue and agreement of compacts process, to support participation by priority group students across the institution and different disciplines and professions.

HEIs will report yearly to the HEA on progress against key performance indicators (KPIs) agreed in their compacts. The HEA will report regularly to DFHERIS on implementation of the Framework and achievement of its objectives.

7.1.3 Implementation Steering Group

Following the launch of the National Access Plan, the DFHERIS will establish a Steering Group to oversee implementation.

The Terms of Reference for this group will be agreed following its establishment but it will primarily be responsible for monitoring progress on implementing this Plan for 2022–2028.

7.1.4 Annual Work Plan

An Annual Work Plan will be agreed yearly between the Department and the HEA. Agreement of the Work Plan will follow consultation with the Steering Group on priorities for the year.

7.1.5 Annual Access Forum

An annual Access Forum will be part of the structure underpinning the implementation, monitoring and ongoing development of the Plan.

The Forum will give an opportunity to report progress against commitments. It will also allow engagement between officials from the Department, the HEA, those with responsibility for delivering and implementing the Plan, representatives of the priority groups, and students. It will highlight progress on implementation to stakeholders and invite feedback and suggestions to inform future priorities.

7.2 Progress review

A progress review of this National Access Plan will take place in 2025. This will assess progress against the goals, objectives and targets and consider how these may need refining or developing, particularly in view of new government strategies or initiatives and improved data.

This review will be published and may include priorities for the remaining period of the Plan.

7.3 Resourcing implementation of the National Access Plan

Implementing the Plan requires a supporting framework that enables HEIs and other partners to meet the goals and objectives. This means a higher education sector that is sustainably funded both in core day-to-day operations such as access services and specific funding programmes that support students. The Department's Statement of Strategy commits to sustainable funding for higher education underpinned by accountability for performance in the context of significant public investment. The recently published 'Funding the Future – a funding and reform framework for higher education' has identified enhancing student participation and success, with a focus on underrepresented groups, as a priority.

This is essential for our HEIs to support student success and achieve equitable outcomes for the whole of society and the economy.

Delivery of ambitions and goals will be supported through universal design and targeted measures across the wider education system and across government. It will also continue to be supported by the Student Grant Scheme, which is a key enabler for priority groups.

The recently published Review of the Student Grant Scheme and the Study of Mature Student Participation in Higher Education chart pathways for improvements to student support and provide clear evidence of the need for significant investment in direct financial supports for students. In Budget 2022, significant positive changes to SUSI maintenance grant rates and eligibility thresholds were made.

Budget 2022 provided an additional €15m for 2022 (rising to over €30m in 2023) to enhance the existing financial supports under the Student Grant Scheme for implementation in 2022. For the academic year 2022/2023 this will mean:

- An increase to all student grant maintenance payments, including the special rate of grant, of €200 per year, which will benefit all students entitled to receive a maintenance grant.
- The income thresholds to qualify for the standard rate of student grant have been increased by €1,000.
- The qualifying-distance criterion for students to qualify for the non-adjacent rate of grant has been reduced from 45km to 30km, effective from the start of the 2022/2023 academic year.

These changes have been prioritised for the 2022/2023 academic year and will benefit thousands of students, building on the improvements made in Budget 2021 in respect of an expansion of the fee contribution from €2,000 to €3,500 for postgraduate students, which commenced in the 2021/2022 academic year. Further investment in student grants is planned over the lifetime of this Plan, as resources allow through the budgetary process.

The new Higher Education Authority legislation will place this National Access Plan and future plans on a statutory footing, signalling continued and even stronger commitment to building an inclusive system. Investing in inclusive actions and measures will be a critical driver of success.

A range of universal and targeted supports will support delivery of this Plan. The review of progress for the previous Plan outlines the expanded resources supporting its implementation, particularly

the new funding streams, including:

- the PATH programme
- the Student Support Scheme for Students in the International Protection Process
- the expansion of the Student Assistance Fund and Fund for Students with Disabilities to part-time students.

An extra €5m per year (€35m over the lifetime of the Plan) was secured as part of Budget 2022 for this Plan, which will enable an expansion of the PATH programme. This will bring annual PATH funding to €14.3m. Further investment in the number of bursaries is planned over the lifetime of this Plan, as resources allow through the budgetary process.

Institutions can also address accessibility using funding from their Devolved Capital Grant or as part of broader building upgrade projects. The new phase of capital investment calls will encourage collaborative proposals from further and higher education institutions and emphasise universal design principles and fostering inclusion in all its facets.

Erasmus+ is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe. The 2021–2027 programme places a strong focus on social inclusion.

The private sector also contributes, with philanthropic sources adding to state funding for higher education. Philanthropy has played a valuable role in higher education and particularly in improving equity of access. The Department welcomes such philanthropy and is grateful to all who have contributed and who continue to contribute. The Department is happy to engage with philanthropic funders working to further the objectives of the new National Access Plan.

Measures and investment by other partners in the education sector, government and the community and voluntary sectors will continue to build whole-of-education and whole-of-government capacity to deliver on the vision of the Plan. A recent key development in this regard was Budget 2022, which allocated the largest-ever increase in funding for the DEIS programme, providing for an additional allocation of €18 million in 2022, rising to an additional €32 million in 2023. This means that by 2023 the Department of Education will target over €180 million at addressing educational disadvantage through the DEIS programme, an increase of 20%.

On 9 March last the Minister for Education announced a major expansion of the DEIS programme. From September 2022, 1,206 schools, serving over 240,000 students, will be included in the DEIS programme and will be eligible for increased supports.

Other initiatives include the Kickstart Scholarship Fund established by the Probation Service and the Tusla Educational Support for Children in Care and Aftercare Bursary.

Appendix A: Data Report

This data report provides additional context and detail on the data underpinning this National Access Plan and the performance indicators and targets presented in Chapter 6.

Part A summarises additional priority groups, current data availability and key priorities for this Plan. This section also provides more detail on the following key performance indicators:

- Students studying on a part-time or flexible basis (2015/2016–2020/2021)
- Entry basis for new entrants to higher education (2018/2019–2020/2021)
- Students with disabilities supported by FSD (2017/2018–2020/2021)
- Entry to higher education for students attending DEIS schools (2015/2016–2020/2021)
- Analysis of parental status field in the SRS (2019/2020 and 2020/2021).

Part B provides greater context for the approach to target setting, and focuses on the following:

- Limitations of target setting
- Socioeconomic disadvantage and Deprivation Index Scores
 - What are Deprivation Index Scores?
 - What does the data tell us?
- Transition rates and setting targets for disadvantaged students
- Setting targets for disadvantaged mature students
- Setting targets for students with disabilities
- Setting targets for students from Irish Traveller and Roma communities
- Summary of the socioeconomic profile of 2019/2020 new entrants by field of study
- Summary of the proportion of new entrants receiving the special rate of the Student Grant Scheme for HEA-funded HEIs in 2020/2021 and 2019/2020
- Participation rates for 2019/2020 Leaving Certificate students in higher education in 2020/2021.

Part A Data overview

Table A1: Priority Groups, Current Data Availability and Priorities for This Plan

Priority Group	Data Currently Available	Data Not Currently Available	Priorities for This Plan
Students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. Students experiencing such disadvantage may come from a diversity of backgrounds and include:			
<i>Students from low-income families and/or who are long-term social welfare dependent.</i>	DIS data comprises 10 Census measures that cover the demographic profile, social class composition and labour market position of each area.		Specific targets have been set for new entrants from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas using DIS data .
<i>Students from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas.</i>	DIS data comprises 10 Census measures that cover the demographic profile, social class composition and labour market position of each area.		Specific targets have been set for new entrants from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas using DIS data .
<i>Students who are mature and have never previously accessed higher education.</i>	SRS data allows the identification and analysis of first-time new entrants to higher education for mature and non-mature students.		Specific targets have been set for new entrants who are mature and from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas using DIS data .
<i>Students who are mature and who previously attended higher education but did not complete a course (that is, 'second-chance' students).</i>		While SRS enrolment data includes students who are new entrants, repeat students and students transferring from their own or another HEI, there is no official data source identifying students who are experiencing a 'second chance' at undergraduate study.	A priority for this Plan will be to consider ways to collect more reliable data on 'second-chance' mature students. This will form part of the remit of a new Access Data Plan.
<i>Students who are lone parents or teen parents.</i>	SRS, Equal Access Survey (EAS) data and DIS data allow for the analysis of the proportion and socioeconomic profile of new-entrant parents who are receiving a one-parent family payment.		Lone parents are included as a specific key performance indicator in this Plan. The proportion and socioeconomic profile of lone parents will be monitored over time using SRS, EAS and DIS data .

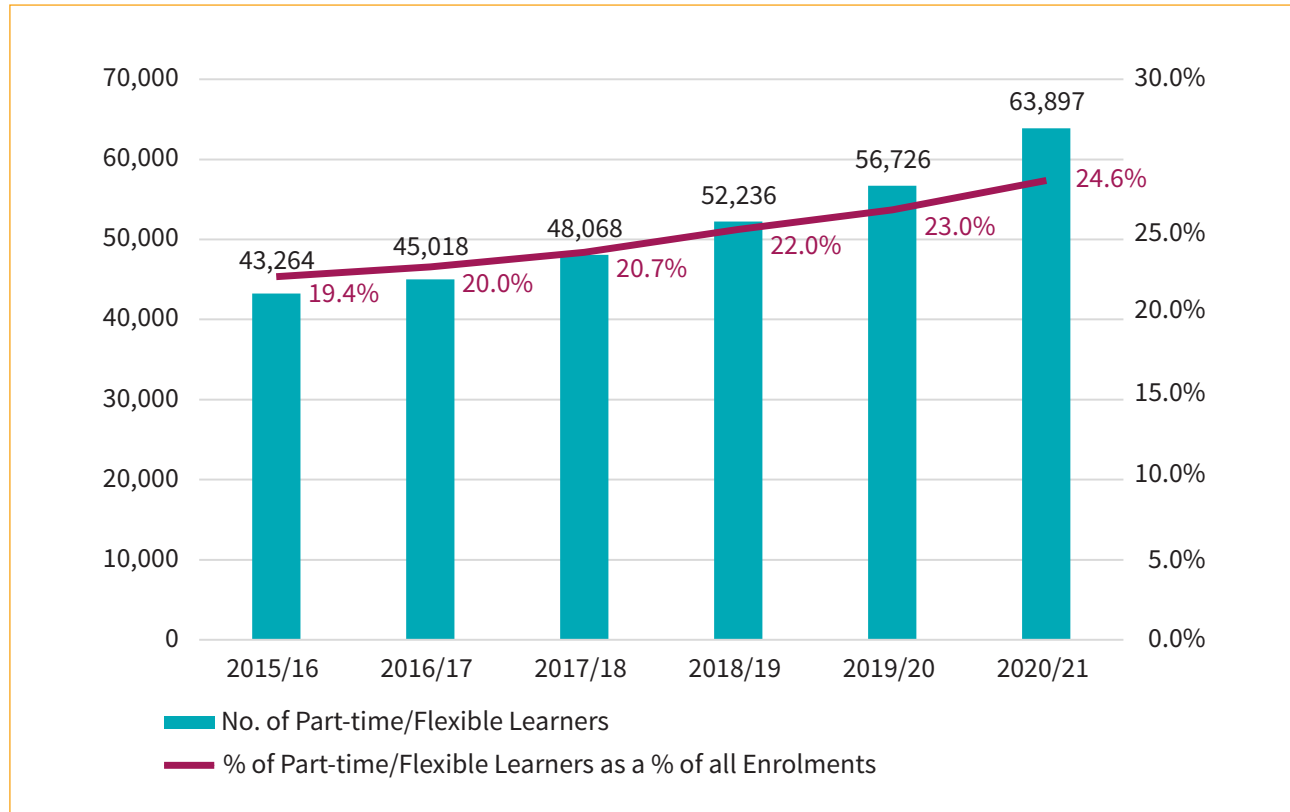
Priority Group	Data Currently Available	Data Not Currently Available	Priorities for This Plan
<i>Student who are migrants, students with experience of the international protection process and refugees or students from ethnic minorities.</i>		There is no official data available to describe or track the educational attainment and progress of students who are migrants, students with experience of the international protection process and refugees or students from ethnic minorities.	A priority for this Plan will be to consider ways to collect more reliable data on higher education students who are migrants, those who have experience of the international protection process and refugees or students from ethnic minorities. This will form part of the remit of a new Access Data Plan.
<i>Students who have experience of the care system.</i>		<p>There is no official data available to describe or track the educational attainment and progress of care-experienced young people, that is, those who have spent time in care during childhood.</p> <p>Data on care-experienced young people's entry to higher education is limited to the data published via HEAR programme reporting since 2016 and this data only relates to those students who self-identify as care leavers in order to apply for the HEAR programme.</p>	A priority for this Plan will be to consider ways to collect more reliable data on higher education students who have experience of the care system. This will form part of the remit of a new Access Data Plan.
<i>Students who are survivors of domestic violence.</i>		There is no official data available to describe or track the educational attainment and progress of students who are survivors of domestic violence.	A priority for this Plan will be to consider ways to collect more reliable data on higher education students who are survivors of domestic violence. This will form part of the remit of a new Access Data Plan.
<i>Students who are carers.</i>		There is no official data available to describe or track the educational attainment and progress of students who are carers.	A priority for this Plan will be to consider ways to collect more reliable data on higher education students who are carers. This will form part of the remit of a new Access Data Plan.
<i>Students who have experienced homelessness.</i>		There is no official data available to describe or track the educational attainment and progress of students who have experienced homelessness.	A priority for this Plan will be to consider ways to collect more reliable data on higher education students who have experienced homelessness. This will form part of the remit of a new Access Data Plan.

Priority Group	Data Currently Available	Data Not Currently Available	Priorities for This Plan
<i>Students who have experience of the criminal justice system.</i>		There is no official data available to describe or track the educational attainment and progress of students who have experience of the criminal justice system.	A priority for this Plan will be to consider ways to collect more reliable data on higher education students who have experience of the criminal justice system. This will form part of the remit of a new Access Data Plan.
Students who are members of Irish Traveller and Roma communities.	SRS Equal Access Survey data allows for the identification and analysis of higher education students who are self-declared members of Irish Traveller and Roma communities. It is expected that accurate data on the number of Roma students attending higher education will become available from 2021/22 onwards.		<p>Specific targets have been set for new entrants from the Traveller community using SRS Equal Access Survey data.</p> <p>Targets will be developed for Roma students when accurate baseline data becomes available.</p>
Students with disabilities, including students with intellectual disabilities.	<p>SRS Equal Access Survey data allows for the identification and analysis of higher education students who self-identify as having a disability of some kind.</p> <p>HEA data is also collected on students with a disability who are supported by the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD).</p>	There is no official data available to describe or track the educational attainment and progress of students with intellectual disabilities .	<p>Specific targets have been set for new entrants with a disability using SRS Equal Access Survey data.</p> <p>Students with a disability who are supported by the FSD are included as a specific key performance indicator in this Plan. The proportion of students supported by FSD across all categories of disability will be monitored over time using HEA FSD data.</p> <p>A priority for this Plan will be to consider ways to collect more reliable data on higher education students with intellectual disabilities. This will form part of the remit of a new Access Data Plan.</p>

A1 Students studying on a part-time or flexible basis

As shown in Figure A1, the number of students studying on a part-time/flexible basis has increased steadily during the lifetime of the previous National Access Plan, increasing from 19.4% in 2015/2016 to 25% in 2020/2021³⁸.

Figure A1: Percentage of Students Studying on a Part-Time/Flexible Basis

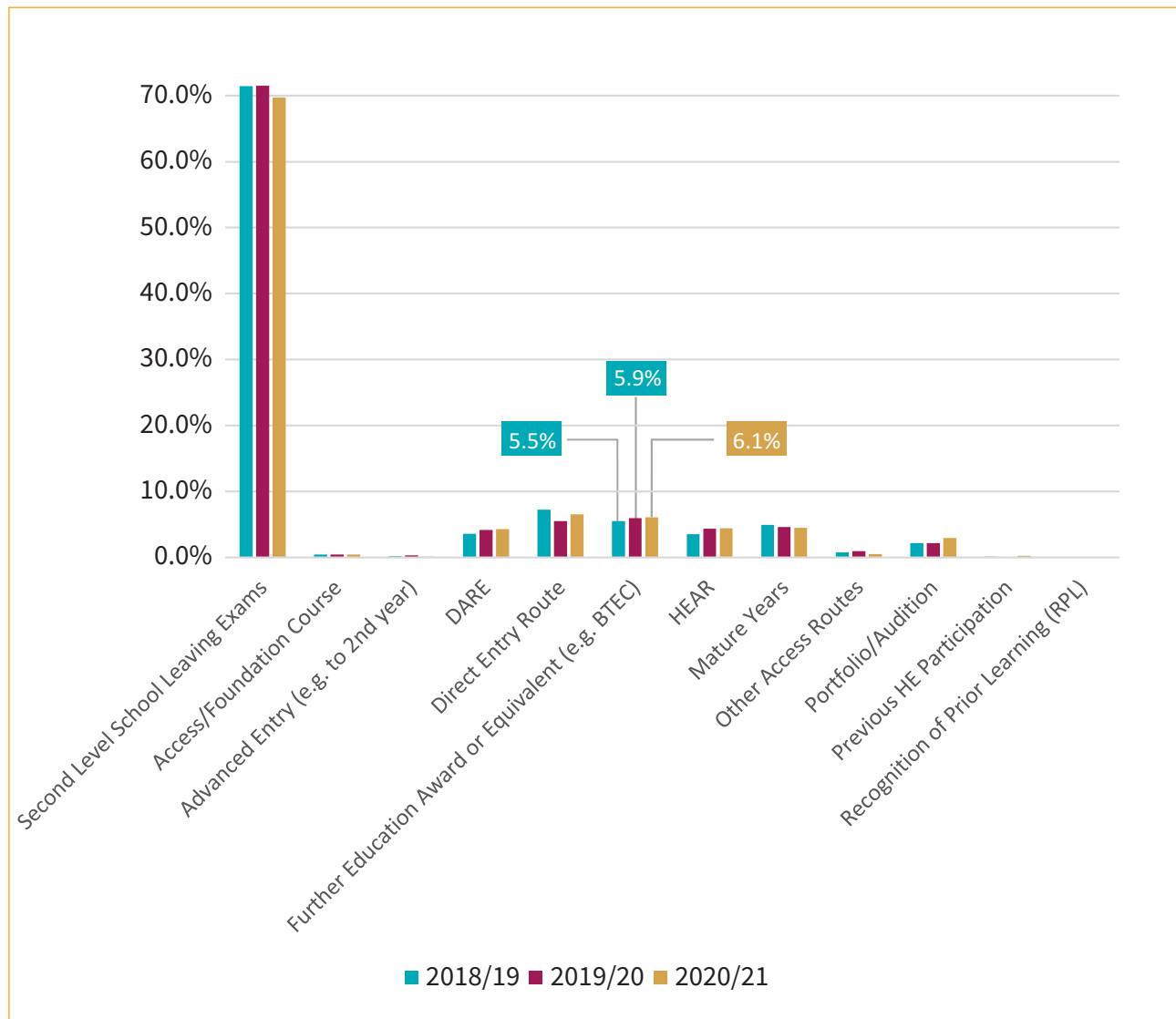


³⁸ Data may differ to previous Plans as this methodology is in line with current SRS reporting.

A2 Entry basis for new entrants to higher education

Since 2018/2019, the SRS collects data on the entry basis for higher education new entrants. This data relates to those identified by the HEIs as accepted for entry to their course based on a further education qualification³⁹. As shown in Figure A2, in 2020/2021, 6.1% of new entrants (2,805 students) were accepted into their course based on a further education award or equivalent compared to 5.5% (2,355 students) in 2018/2019.

Figure A2: Entry Basis for New Entrants in 2018/2019, 2019/2020 and 2020/2021



³⁹ Where multiple paths of entry are available to a student, for example, Leaving Certificate points and a mature option, the route of entry used to allocate a place should be the one recorded through the SRS.

A3 Students with a disability who are supported by FSD

Table A2 outlines the number and percentage of students supported by FSD in higher education by disability category between 2017/2018 and 2020/2021. Overall, the number of recipients has increased from 11,773 in 2017/2018 to 15,145 in 2020/2021.

Table A2: Students receiving supports funded under FSD in Higher Education by Disability Category, 2017/2018–2020/2021

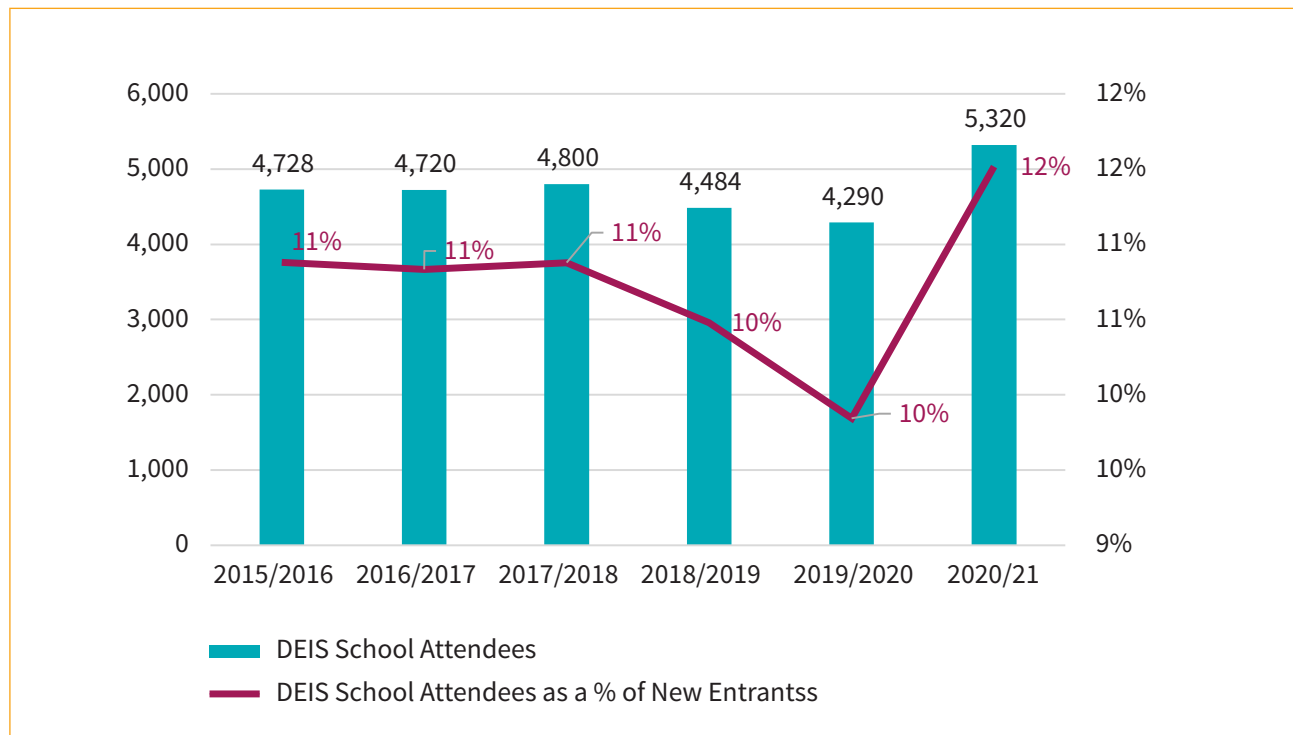
Disability Category	2011/2012		2012/2013		2013/2014		2014/2015		2015/2016	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
ADD/ADHD	549	5%	630	5%	701	5%	905	6%		
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	812	7%	1,023	8%	1,190	8%	1,403	9%		
Blind/Visual Impairment	218	2%	221	2%	234	2%	233	2%		
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	314	3%	358	3%	364	3%	403	3%		
Developmental Coordination Disorder (Dyspraxia/Dysgraphia)	726	6%	785	6%	1,016	7%	1,137	8%		
Mental Health	1,600	14%	1,963	15%	2,199	15%	1,963	13%		
Other	3	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%		
Physical Disability/Mobility Impairment	741	6%	827	6%	867	6%	842	6%		
Significant Ongoing Illness	1,345	11%	1,586	12%	1,650	11%	1,551	10%		
Specific Learning Difficulties	4,857	41%	5,192	39%	5,479	38%	5,365	35%		
Speech, Language and Communication Disorder*	n/a	n/a	133	1%	n/a	n/a	372	2%		
Neurological Condition	608	5%	480	4%	658	5%	971	6%		
Total	11,773	100%	13,198	100%	14,358	100%	15,145	100%		

The figures relate to those indicating a primary disability only.
 * Category not separately identified in 2017/2018 or 2019/2020.

A4 Entry to higher education for students attending DEIS schools

As shown in Figure A3, in 2015/2016, according to SRS data, there were 4,728 new entrants from DEIS schools (11% of the new entrant population). This figure increased to 4,800 in 2017/2018 but dropped in both 2018/2019 (to 4,484) and 2019/2020 (to 4,290). A notable increase is evident in 2020/2021, with 5,320 new entrants from DEIS schools attending higher education. This finding is in line with a DEIS (2021) report which noted an increase in the transition rates of those attending DEIS schools to higher education in 2020⁴⁰.

Figure A3: Number and % of New Entrants Who Attended DEIS Schools, 2015/2016–2020/2021



40 See Education Indicators 2021 <https://assets.gov.ie/212247/a97b6e7c-92bb-4039-938f-1eda1736fb99.pdf> for more information.

A5 Parental status

Since 2019/2020, data is collected through the EAS on the parental status of new entrants and whether they are receiving a one-parent family payment⁴¹. Analysis using this new field⁴² is summarised in Table A3.

Table A3: Analysis of Parental Status Field in the SRS, 2019/2020 and 2020/2021

2019-2020	2020/2021
In total, 782 (or 2% of new entrants) indicated that they were parents.	In total, 893 (or 2% of new entrants) indicated that they were parents.
Of those identifying as parents, the mean DIS score is -1.6 (compared to an average of 1.4 for all new entrants).	DIS data for 2020/2021 is not currently available.
Of those identifying as parents, 26% indicated they receive one-parent family payments.	Of those identifying as parents, 23% indicated they receive one-parent family payments.
Recipients of one-parent family payments are mainly female (86%) and mature (71%), with 44% entering higher education on the basis of maturity.	Recipients of one-parent family payments are mainly female (90%) and mature (72%), with 54% entering higher education on the basis of maturity.
The most popular course areas for one-parent family payment recipients include social work and counselling (14%), nursing and midwifery (13%), and childcare and youth services (9%).	The most popular course areas for one-parent family payment recipients include nursing and midwifery (18%) and social work and counselling (18%).

41 Data quality issues, for example, a small number of students reported 'no' to parental status and 'yes' to receiving a one-parent family allowance. Furthermore, the data refers to students who self-identified as parents and one-parent family payment recipients.

42 As with all survey data, caution should be exercised when interpreting the findings. These figures reflect the numbers that identified as parents and recipients of one-parent family payments.

Part B Approach to setting targets

A6 Limitations of target setting

Setting targets is not a straightforward process as there are tensions and complexities.

Target setting relies on the availability of high-quality, accurate and timely data. In setting targets for this National Access Plan, there are limitations around data collection and availability. For example, ethnicity and disability data is collected through the Equal Access Survey (EAS), which is a voluntary set of questions asked of first-year students in higher education each year. Furthermore, limited data is available for the additional priority groups identified in this Plan.

Target setting does not allow for the interrogation around the heterogeneity, or difference, among members of a particular target group, for example, a multitude of factors (race, gender, ability, socioeconomic background) can interact to influence potential participation in higher education.

Data improvements in the coming years will help address the limitations identified. The Data Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education⁴³ (2017) has identified ways of addressing data shortages, particularly in terms of data linking between education sectors. It is important to note that Deprivation Index Score data quality is expected to improve year on year as address data coverage becomes more accurate and readily available. The next Census iteration, due in 2022, will also collect data on Roma students and in line with this, a category for Roma students has now been added to the EAS. Moreover, ethnicity data from the Post-Primary Online Database (P-POD) will be useful for tracking and measuring outcomes for Traveller and Roma students.

43 <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2018/05/HEA-Data-Plan-Report-2017-V16-Haase-Pratschke-Final.pdf>

A7 Socioeconomic disadvantage and Deprivation Index Scores

Since 2007, the HEA has used the Equal Access Survey to collect equal access data on the socioeconomic, ethnic/cultural and disability background of incoming students. The socioeconomic elements of the EAS are based on the socioeconomic group categories used in the Census. Throughout the last National Access Plan, the limitations of the current data on students from target socioeconomic groups were noted, including the need to move away from a survey-based approach for measuring disadvantage to one that uses recent technological advances in data collection to develop a more refined and targeted understanding of socioeconomic disadvantage. Changing perceptions and definitions of socioeconomic groups presented challenges in interpreting data relating to these issues.

Arising from the goals of the last National Access Plan, the Data Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education was published in 2017. This Data Plan focused on developing a new approach to measuring and understanding socioeconomic disadvantage. The new approach involves identifying and geocoding students entering and studying in HEIs and estimating the socioeconomic position of these students by identifying the relevant Census small area⁴⁴ based on home address. As the 2017 Data Plan states (2017, p. 3), ‘this way of identifying socioeconomic position – using an aggregate-level indicator as proxy – provides an accurate and effective measure of social background’. It helps overcome the challenges presented by a survey-based approach, such as low response rate and respondents’ understanding of questions, as well as the principle of determining socioeconomic position based on parents’ occupation. The report also notes that aggregate small area data is widely used in other fields such as health and is also consistent with the approach adopted by the Department of Education in identifying schools for inclusion in the DEIS Programme⁴⁵.

What are Deprivation Index Scores?

Since 2017/2018 we have been able to analyse the socioeconomic profile of higher education students by institute using student address data in the HEA Student Records System⁴⁶. Deprivation Index Scores based on the Census small areas that students come from are used to assign a relative measure of deprivation or affluence to students for aggregate analysis⁴⁷. DIS are a composite index of ten Census measures (that is, age dependency rate, population change, primary education figure, third-level education figure, professional classes figure, persons per room, lone parent figure, semiskilled and unskilled classes figure, male unemployment rate and female unemployment rate). These measures cover the demographic profile, social class composition and labour market situation of each area using the 2016 Census relative HP scores for small areas. On average, there are just under 100 households in each Census small area, with a high degree of homogeneity.

44 Census small areas are a sub-division of the Electoral Division administrative unit.

45 <https://assets.gov.ie/220043/d6b98002-a904-427f-b48a-0fa0af756ea7.pdf>

46 TCD was not included in 2017/2018 and there were several data quality issues with other institutions. For that reason, the targets will be formulated based on 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 DIS data.

47 <https://www.pobal.ie/app/uploads/2018/06/The-2016-Pobal-HP-Deprivation-Index-Introduction-07.pdf>; Haase, T. & Pratschke, J. (2018) The Pobal HP Deprivation Index for Small Areas in the Republic of Ireland. Dublin: Pobal.

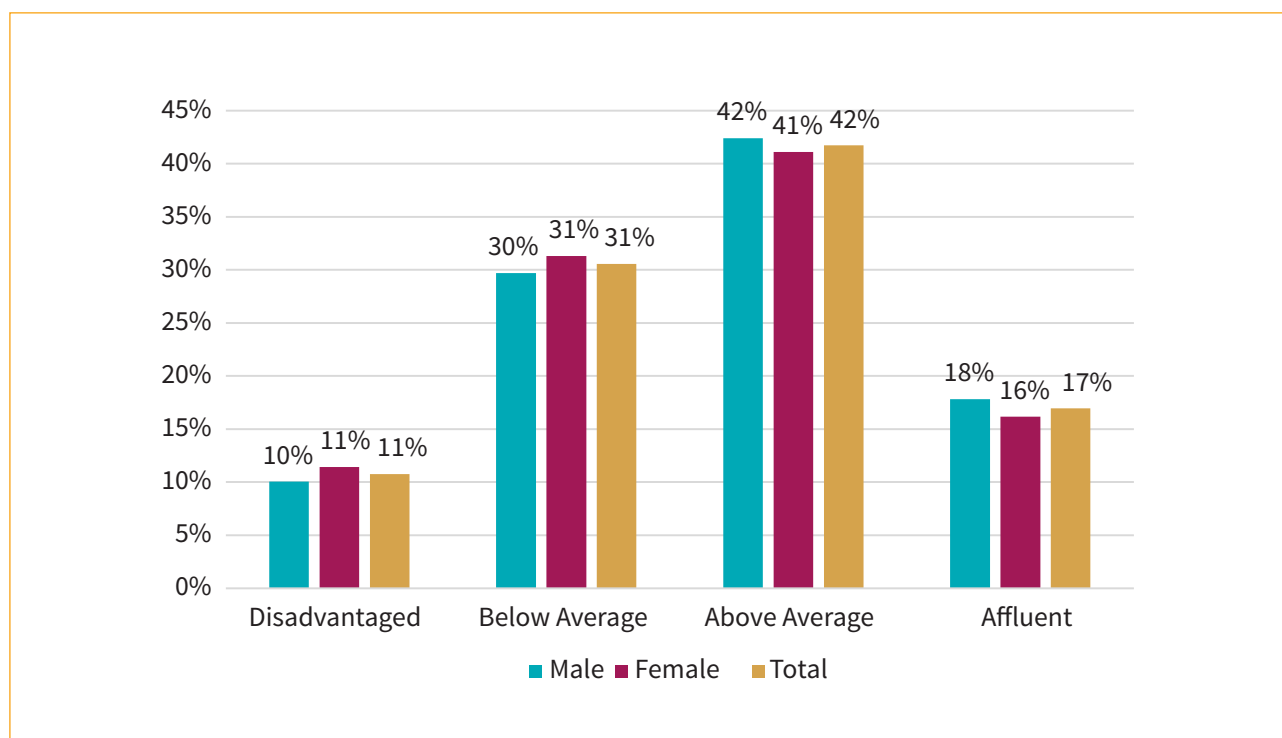
Deprivation Index Scores range from around –40 to +40. The most disadvantaged areas have scores less than –30 and the most affluent areas have scores greater than +30. Less than –10 is considered disadvantaged (used in DEIS school identification) and more than 10 is considered affluent for the analysis in this Plan. The scores for the whole population by area approximately follow a normal distribution with a mean of zero and standard deviation of 10.

What does the data tell us?

Based on 2019/2020 data, the mean of the higher education population (that is, total full-time and part-time enrolments), based on the small areas they come from, is 2.0⁴⁸. In total, 9.7% of the higher education population, based on the small areas they come from, are from disadvantaged areas (less than minus 10)⁴⁹. For all new entrants to higher education, the mean DIS of the population is 1.4 in 2019/2020 (compared to 1.5 in 2018/2019), with 10.8% coming from disadvantaged areas (1.8% are ‘extremely’ or ‘very’ disadvantaged and 9.0% are ‘disadvantaged’)⁵⁰.

Figure A4 gives a summary of full-time new entrants to higher education in 2019/2020 by gender and DIS categories. When considering the gender differences, it is important to note that females account for 53% of the overall new entrant population⁵¹.

Figure A4: All Full-Time New Entrants to Higher Education in 2019/2020



Note: Excludes ‘unknowns’, who account for 4% of the new entrant population, and those identifying as ‘non-binary’.

48 This compares to a mean score of 2.1 in 2018/2019.

49 Similarly, 9.6% were classified as disadvantaged in 2018/2019. For more information, see <https://hea.ie/statistics/data-for-download-and-visualisations/socio-economic-data-and-maps/socio-economic-dashboard-2018-19-enrolments/>

50 This compares to 10.6% coming from disadvantaged areas in 2018/2019.

51 The gender differences in DIS may suggest lower entry rates from males in disadvantaged areas than from females in disadvantaged areas.

For a full breakdown of new entrants, including numbers, by gender and DIS categories for 2019/2020 and 2018/2019, see Tables A4 and A5.

Table A4: All Full-Time New Entrants to Higher Education in 2019/2020

	Male	2019/2020 Female	Total	Male	2019/2020 Female	Total
Disadvantaged	1,863	2,350	4,213	10.1%	11.4%	10.8%
^ Extremely Disadvantaged						
^ Very Disadvantaged	320	381	701	1.7%	1.9%	1.8%
Disadvantaged	1,543	1,969	3,512	8.3%	9.6%	9.0%
Below average	5,495	6,441	11,936	29.7%	31.3%	30.5%
Above average	7,844	8,461	16,305	42.4%	41.1%	41.7%
Affluent	3,295	3,328	6,623	17.8%	16.2%	16.9%
Affluent	3,119	3,148	6,267	16.9%	15.3%	16.0%
^ Very Affluent						
^ Extremely Affluent	176	180	356	1.0%	0.9%	0.9%
Total	18,497	20,580	39,077	100%	100%	100%

^ Due to low numbers in the 'extremely disadvantaged' and 'extremely affluent' categories, figures are not reported separately.

Table A5: All Full-Time New Entrants to Higher Education in 2018/2019

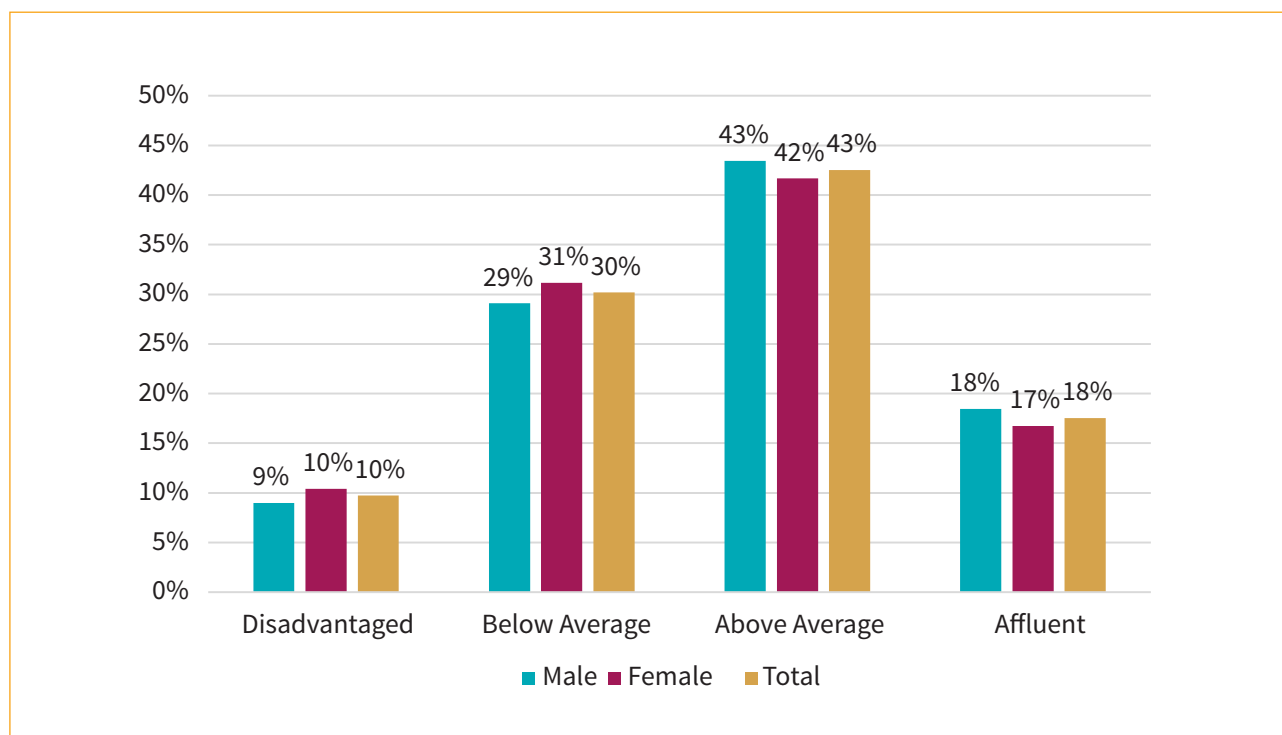
	Male	2018/2019 Female	Total	Male	2018/2019 Female	Total
Disadvantaged	1,870	2,229	4,099	10.1%	11.1%	10.6%
^ Extremely Disadvantaged						
^ Very Disadvantaged	286	354	640	1.5%	1.8%	1.7%
Disadvantaged	1,584	1,875	3,459	8.5%	9.3%	8.9%
Below average	5,510	6,368	11,878	29.7%	31.6%	30.7%
Above average	7,727	8,134	15,861	41.7%	40.4%	41.0%
Affluent	3,426	3,416	6,842	18.5%	17.0%	17.7%
Affluent	3,243	3,238	6,481	17.5%	16.1%	16.8%
^ Very Affluent						
^ Extremely Affluent	183	178	361	1.0%	0.9%	0.9%
Total	18,533	20,147	38,680	100%	100%	100%

^ Due to low numbers in the 'extremely disadvantaged' and 'extremely affluent' categories, figures are not reported separately. Excludes 'unknowns', who account for 2%.

In line with the previous National Access Plan (2015–2021), it is important to consider students who are ‘typical’ school leavers (for example, aged 18–20). Based on 2019/2020 data, the mean of the higher education population in this age category is 1.7 (compared to 1.4 for all new entrants). As shown in Figure A5, for all new entrants to higher education in this age category, 10% are from disadvantaged areas (1.5% are ‘extremely’ or ‘very’ disadvantaged and 8.2% are ‘disadvantaged’).

Figure A5: All Full-Time New Entrants (Aged 18–20) to Higher Education in 2019/2020

Note: Excludes ‘unknowns’, who account for 4% of the new entrant (aged 18–20) population, and those identifying as ‘non-binary’.



For a full breakdown of new entrants (aged 18–20) by gender and DIS categories for 2019/2020 and 2018/2019, including numbers, see Tables A6 and A7.

Table A6: All Full-Time New Entrants (Aged 18–20) to Higher Education in 2019/2020

	Male	2019/2020 Female	Total	Male	2019/2020 Female	Total
Disadvantaged	1,406	1,827	3,233	9.0%	10.4%	9.7%
^ Extremely Disadvantaged						
^ Very Disadvantaged	224	284	508	1.4%	1.6%	1.5%
Disadvantaged	1,182	1,543	2,725	7.6%	8.8%	8.2%
Below average	4,544	5,471	10,015	29.1%	31.2%	30.2%
Above average	6,787	7,314	14,101	43.4%	41.7%	42.5%
Affluent	2,884	2,938	5,822	18.5%	16.7%	17.6%
Affluent	2,731	2,779	5,510	17.5%	15.8%	16.6%
^ Very Affluent						
^ Extremely Affluent	153	159	312	1.0%	0.9%	0.9%
Total	15,621	17,550	33,171	100%	100%	100%

^ Due to low numbers in the ‘extremely disadvantaged’ and ‘extremely affluent’ categories, figures are not reported separately.

Table A7: All Full-Time New Entrants (Aged 18–20) to Higher Education in 2018/2019

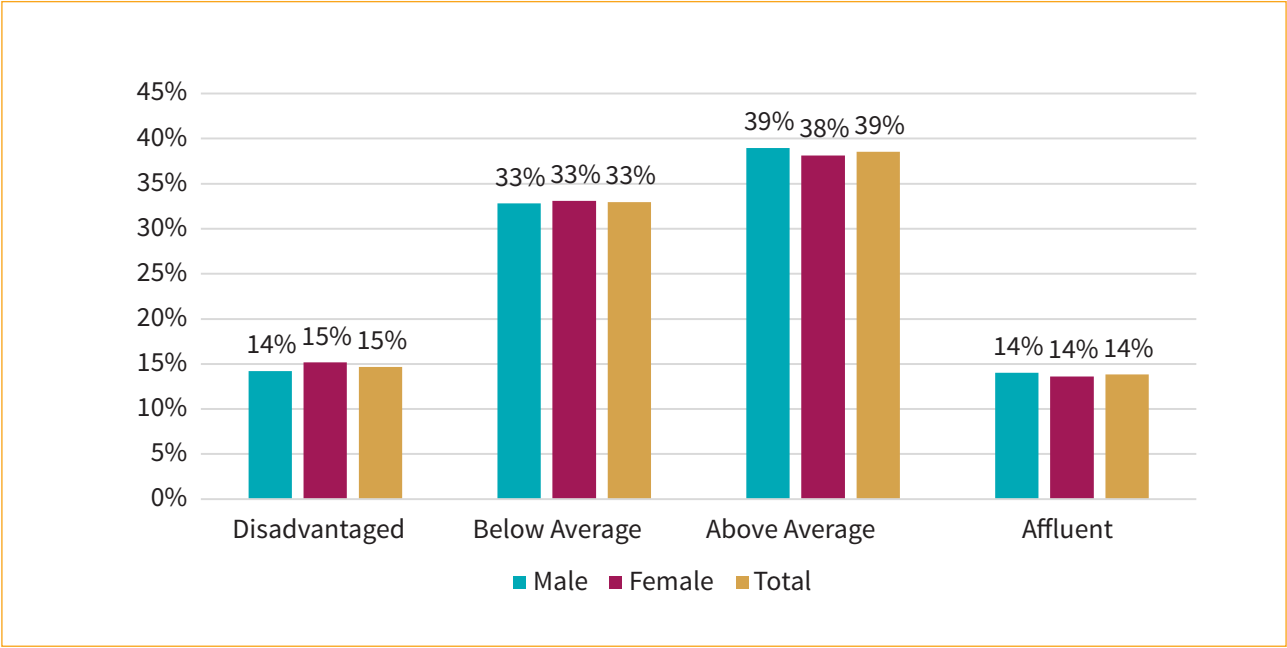
	Male	2018/2019 Female	Total	Male	2018/2019 Female	Total
Disadvantaged	1,350	1,685	3,035	8.7%	9.8%	9.3%
^ Extremely Disadvantaged						
^ Very Disadvantaged	199	264	463	1.3%	1.5%	1.4%
Disadvantaged	1,151	1,421	2,572	7.4%	8.3%	7.9%
Below average	4,534	5,351	9,885	29.2%	31.2%	30.2%
Above average	6,655	7,060	13,715	42.8%	41.2%	42.0%
Affluent	3,013	3,039	6,052	19.4%	17.7%	18.5%
Affluent	2,857	2,894	5,751	18.4%	16.9%	17.6%
^ Very Affluent						
^ Extremely Affluent	156	145	301	1.0%	0.8%	0.9%
Total	15,552	17,135	32,687	100%	100%	100%

^ Due to low numbers in the ‘extremely disadvantaged’ and ‘extremely affluent’ categories, figures are not reported separately. Excludes ‘unknowns’, who account for 2% of the new entrant (aged 18–21) population.

To estimate transition rates from second level to higher education, we used DIS data from the DoE Post-Primary Online Database (P-POD) on the Leaving Certificate population. As shown in Figure A6, 14.7% of school leavers in 2019 were from disadvantaged areas (3% were ‘extremely’ or ‘very’ disadvantaged and 12% were ‘disadvantaged’). Females account for 50% of the Leaving Certificate population.

Figure A6: Leaving Certificate Population In 2019 By Gender and DIS Categories (%)

Note: Excludes ‘unknowns’, who account for 5% of the Leaving Certificate (2019) population.



For a full breakdown of the Leaving Certificate population by gender and DIS categories for 2019 and 2018, including numbers, see Tables A8 and A9.

Table A8: Leaving Certificate Population in 2019 By Gender and DIS Categories (No. and %)

	Male	2019 Female	Total	Male	2019 Female	Total
Disadvantaged	3,687	3,933	7,620	14.2%	15.2%	14.7%
^ Extremely Disadvantaged						
^ Very Disadvantaged	755	866	1,621	2.9%	3.3%	3.1%
Disadvantaged	2,932	3,067	5,999	11.3%	11.8%	11.6%
Below average	8,519	8,582	17,101	32.8%	33.1%	32.9%
Above average	10,111	9,896	20,007	38.9%	38.1%	38.5%
Affluent	3,643	3,535	7,178	14.0%	13.6%	13.8%
Affluent	3,453	3,333	6,786	13.3%	12.8%	13.1%
^ Very Affluent						
^ Extremely Affluent	190	202	392	0.7%	0.8%	0.8%
Total	25,960	25,946	51,906	100%	100%	100%

^ Due to low numbers in the 'extremely disadvantaged' and 'extremely affluent' categories, they are not reported separately. Note: Excludes 'unknowns', who account for 5% of the Leaving Certificate population.

Table A9: Leaving Certificate Population in 2018 By Gender and DIS Categories (No. and %)

	Male	2018 Female	Total	Male	2018 Female	Total
Disadvantaged	3,637	3,943	7,580	14.5%	15.7%	15.1%
^ Extremely Disadvantaged						
^ Very Disadvantaged	807	844	1,651	3.2%	3.4%	3.3%
Disadvantaged	2,830	3,099	5,929	11.3%	12.3%	11.8%
Below average	8,343	8,369	16,712	33.3%	33.2%	33.3%
Above average	9,490	9,473	18,963	37.9%	37.6%	37.8%
Affluent	3,560	3,406	6,966	14.2%	13.5%	13.9%
Affluent	3,387	3,221	6,608	13.5%	12.8%	13.2%
^ Very Affluent						
^ Extremely Affluent	173	185	358	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%
Total	25,030	25,191	50,221	100%	100%	100%

^ Due to low numbers in the 'extremely disadvantaged' and 'extremely affluent' categories, they are not reported separately. Note: Excludes 'unknowns', who account for 5% of the Leaving Certificate population.

A8 Transition rates and target setting for disadvantaged students

Estimated transition rates for those who transferred directly from second level to higher education by DIS category are shown for the 2018 and 2019 cohorts in Table A10. These rates are calculated by dividing the number of full-time new entrants (aged 18–20) in each of the relevant deprivation categories by the number of Leaving Certificate students in the same category. The analysis is based on aggregate data from both sources. While it is preferable to link microdata at individual level to enable the tracking of students from second level to higher education, this is not currently possible. We expect such data linking to take place over the course of this National Access Plan, and so we will review transition rates and the associated targets as data becomes available.

It is important to note the proportion of students in the ‘unknown’ categories in 2019 and 2018. In 2018/2019, 5% of the Leaving Certificate population and 2% of the new entrant population (aged 18–20) could not be categorised according to DIS. This compares to 5% of the Leaving Certificate population and 4% of the new entrant population in 2019/2020. Due to fluctuations in the proportion of ‘unknowns’ over time, it is important to consider transition rates for both 2019 and 2018 cohorts when developing targets.

The findings show that there is an overall transition rate of 63% from second level to higher education in both 2018/2019 and 2019/2020. This figure corresponds to analysis carried out by the DoE (2020) on transition rates from post-primary to higher education, in 2018, using a different methodology⁵². The transition rate for disadvantaged students is 40% in 2018/2019 and 42% in 2019/2020. This compares to 87% and 81% respectively for those from affluent backgrounds.

Table A10: Estimated Transition Rates from Second Level to Higher Education By DIS, 2018 And 2019

	2018/2019			2019/2020		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Disadvantaged	37%	43%	40%	38%	46%	42%
Below Average	54%	64%	59%	53%	64%	59%
Above Average	70%	75%	72%	67%	74%	70%
Affluent	85%	89%	87%	79%	83%	81%
Unknown	18%	21%	20%	50%	57%	54%
Total	60%	66%	63%	60%	67%	63%

To increase the participation levels of disadvantaged students in higher education, a target transition rate of 54%⁵³ will be set for this group for the duration of the Plan. This target aims to increase the transition rate between education sectors by around two percentage points each year.

52 <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/117558/ef43dc12-56c3-4f5a-9e78-bafce7ef9764.pdf#page=null> (DoE, 2020, p. 24). The transition rate from post-primary to higher education in a given year is a measure of the percentage of students from the previous five academic years who ultimately entered HE in that year.

53 In numerical terms, this is an estimated increase of between 880 and 1,050 disadvantaged students from second level to higher education over the seven-year period. These estimates should be treated with caution due to unknown fluctuations in the student population over time.

A9 Setting targets for mature students who are disadvantaged

The Study of Mature Student Participation in Higher Education (2021)⁵⁴ recommends that access targets and supports focus on mature students from disadvantaged communities. Mature students are defined as people who are 23 years or over on 1 January in their year of entry to higher education.

Table A11 provides a summary of first-time mature new entrants as a proportion of all new entrants by DIS category in 2018/2019 and 2019/2020. In 2019/2020, 7% of full-time new entrants were mature compared to 8% in 2018/2019. Overall, in 2019/2020, 11% of mature new entrants were from disadvantaged backgrounds (as % of all new entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds) compared to 13% in 2018/2019.

Table A11: Participation in Higher Education by First-Time Mature Students as a % of All New Entrants by DIS Category, 2018/2019

	2018/2019			2019/2020		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Disadvantaged	13%	13%	13%	11%	11%	11%
Below Average	8%	8%	8%	8%	7%	8%
Above Average	7%	6%	6%	6%	6%	6%
Affluent	5%	6%	6%	6%	6%	6%
Total	8%	8%	8%	7%	7%	7%

Note: Excludes 'unknowns', who account for around 9–13% of the mature new entrant population as a proportion of all new entrants over both time periods

To increase the participation of disadvantaged mature students in higher education, we set a target of 20%⁵⁵. This aims to increase participation of these students by around 1.3 percentage points each year.

⁵⁴ Indecon (2021) *Study of Mature Student Participation in Higher Education. What are the Challenges? Recommendations for the Future*. Dublin: HEA/DFHERIS. Available at: https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2021/06/FINAL-Study-of-Mature-Student-Participation-in-Higher-Education_June-2021.pdf

⁵⁵ In numerical terms, this is an estimated increase of approximately 560 mature students from disadvantaged areas over the seven-year period. These estimates should be treated with caution due to unknown fluctuations in the student population over time.

A10 Students with disabilities and target setting

The HEA collects data on students with disabilities from two data sources: the number of students supported by the Fund for Students with Disabilities and the number of students reported as having a disability from the Equal Access Survey, a voluntary set of questions asked of first years in higher education each year.

Three underrepresented groups among the disability community were focused on in the last two Access Plans – those with physical, sensory and multiple disabilities. For this National Access Plan, there will be a continued target set for the proportion of students with a disability using the EAS. However, given the importance of monitoring all disability groups rather than sub-categories of disability, we will include as a performance indicator and review the number of students receiving FSD over the course of this Plan.

Setting targets for students with disabilities is challenging due to various definitions of ‘disability’, as well as issues with estimating prevalence rates across educational sectors. Also, the nature of a person’s special educational need or disability can change or develop over time.

At post-primary level, it is estimated that 17.9% of 13-year-olds have some form of special educational need (SEN)⁵⁶. Census 2016 found that, in total, 643,131 people had a disability, meaning that 13.5%, or one in seven, of the population has a disability of some kind.

The NDA (2018)⁵⁷ estimates that by 2028, the number of people with a disability will increase by 20%. One-third of this increase is due to the increased size of the population and two-thirds to the ageing of the population. Based on these projected figures, it is estimated that by 2026, 14.8% of the overall population will have a disability. In AHEAD’s (2021)⁵⁸ analysis of 2019/2020 data, there has been consistent year-on-year growth in the numbers of students with disabilities registering with support services in higher education – an increase of over 220% in the last 11 years.

Based on the increased prevalence rates of SEN/disability across all education sectors, and the anticipated impact of the pandemic on the wellbeing of students⁵⁹, this National Access Plan will target to increase the proportion of higher education new entrants with a disability to 16%⁶⁰, over the seven-year period. This target aims to increase the participation of students with disabilities in higher education by between 0.5 and 1 percentage points each year.

Figures A7 and A8 present a trend in disability figures (2011/2012 to 2020/2021) both for new entrants and enrolments based on a recent review of the records in the SRS. It is important to note the following caveats:

- Disability records were returned in anonymous format for one institution in 2017/2018 which does not allow for data verification. These students have been added to the number of students with disabilities.

56 <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/03263-NCSE-EdExps-Children-SEN-FINAL-UPLOAD.pdf>

57 <http://nda.ie/resources/factsheets/nda-factsheet-1-disability-statistics-briefing-information.pdf>

58 https://www.ahead.ie/userfiles/files/AHEAD_Research_Report_21_digital.pdf

59 For example, OECD (2021) Tackling the mental health impact of the COVID-19 crisis: an integrated, whole-of-education society response. Available at <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/tackling-the-mental-health-impact-of-the-covid-19-crisis-an-integrated-whole-of-society-response-0ccafa0b/>

60 In numerical terms, this is estimated to be approximately 1,645 extra students with a disability over the seven-year period. However, these estimates should be treated with caution due to unknown fluctuations in the student population over time.

- Due to data protection issues, EAS data was not collected in 2018/2019. As a result, the 2019/2020 enrolment figures are likely to underestimate the number of students with disabilities as the methodology is reliant on linking new entrant data to student enrolment records.
- Due to the nature of data linking and changes in SRS reporting criteria over time, these figures will not necessarily correspond to previously published figures outlined in the previous National Access Plan. We intend to use these figures as the new baseline data for the duration of this National Access Plan.

There has been a gradual increase over time in the proportion of students indicating a disability in the Equal Access Survey. In 2011/2012, 5.4% of new entrants indicated a disability compared to 12.4% in 2020/2021. The enrolment figures stem from a recent review of disability data which linked new entrant to enrolment data. The findings show an increase in the proportion of full- and part-time students with a disability across all years of study, with 3.6% of enrolments indicating a disability in 2011/2012 compared to 6.2% in 2020/2021.

Figure A7: New Entrants Indicating a Disability on Entry to Higher Education (Number and % of New Entrants), 2011/2012 To 2020/2021

**Note: Data is not available for 2018/2019; 2019/2020 figures are likely to be an underestimate due to missing new entrant data for previous year; counting one disability only.*

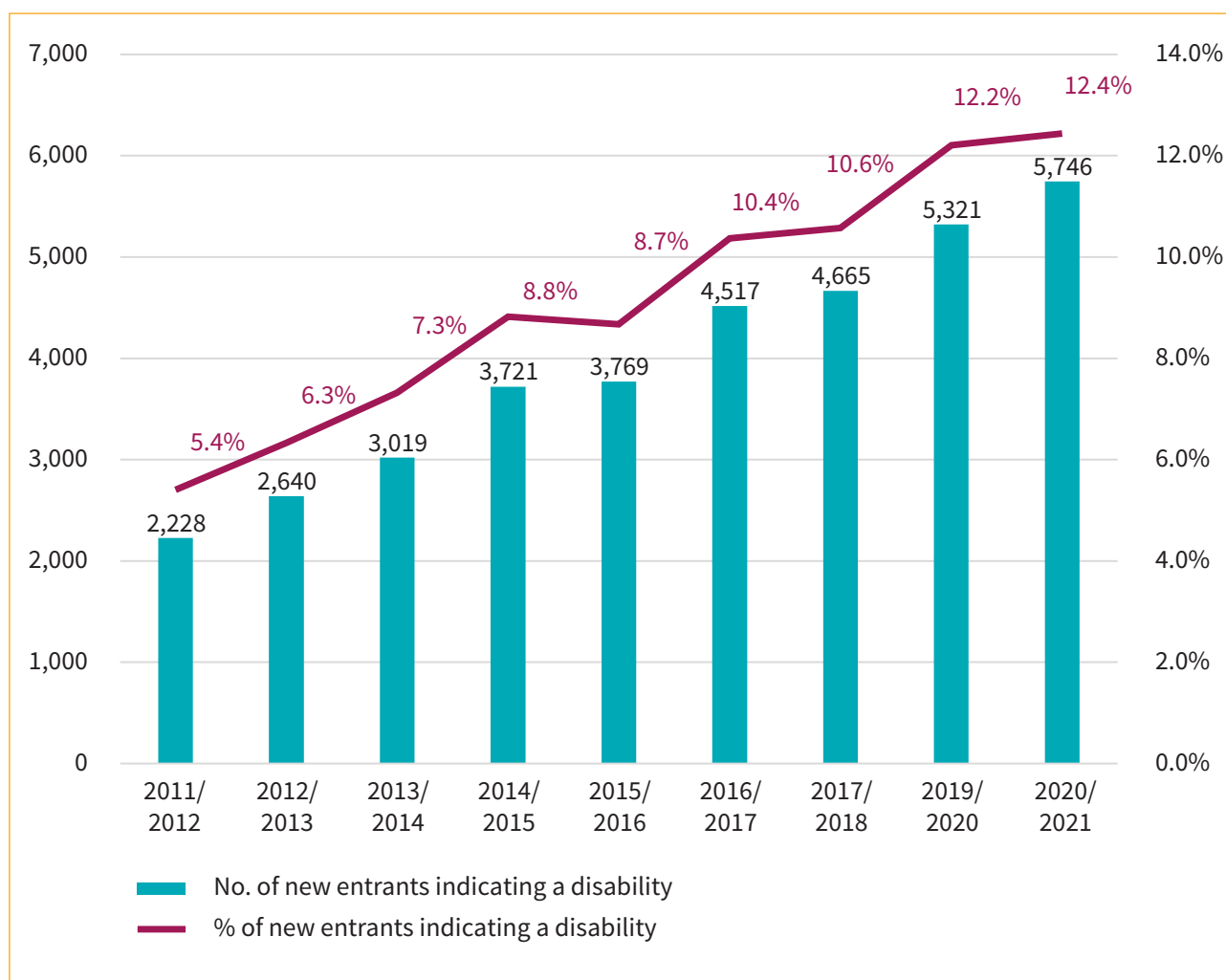
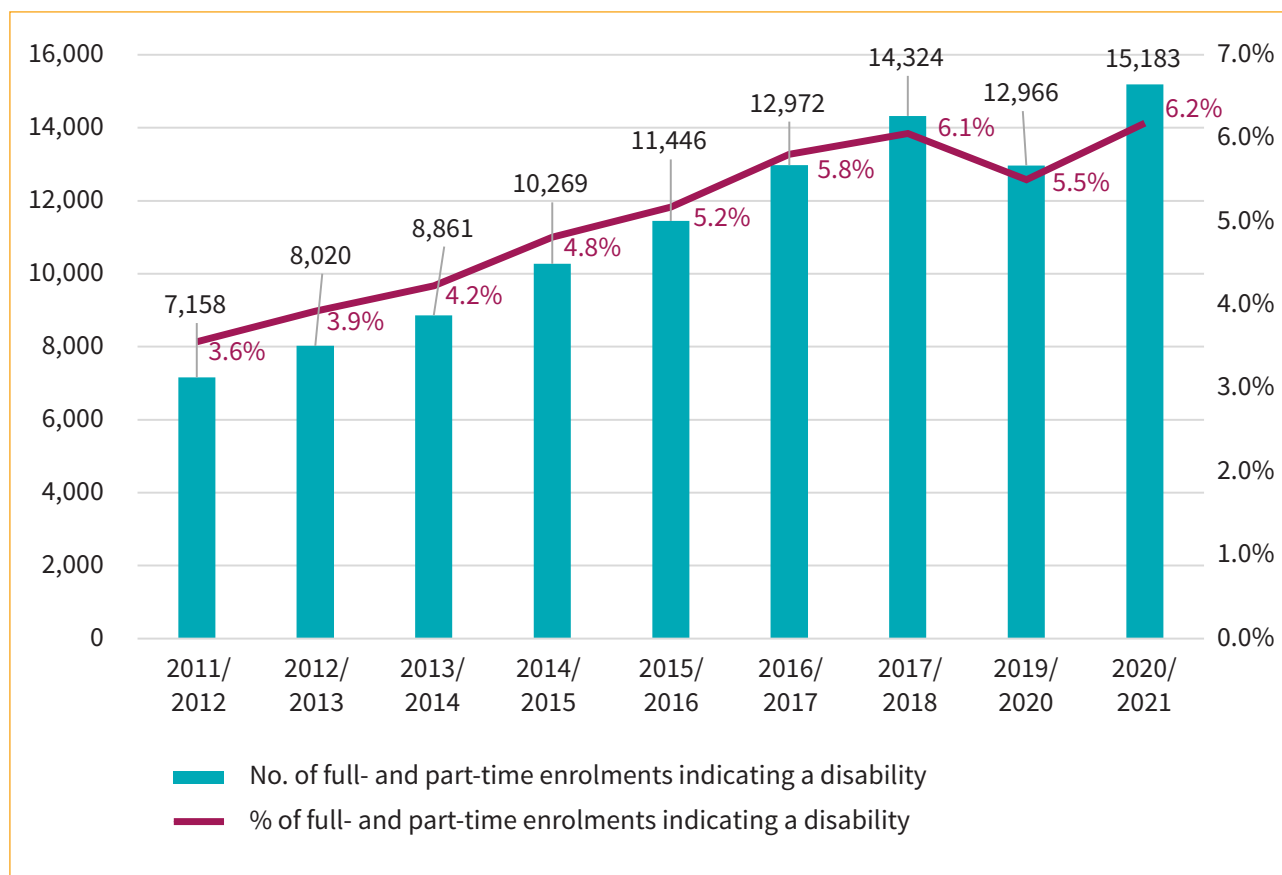


Figure A8: Full- and Part-Time Enrolments Indicating a Disability on Entry to Higher Education (Number and % of New Entrants), 2011/2012 To 2020/2021

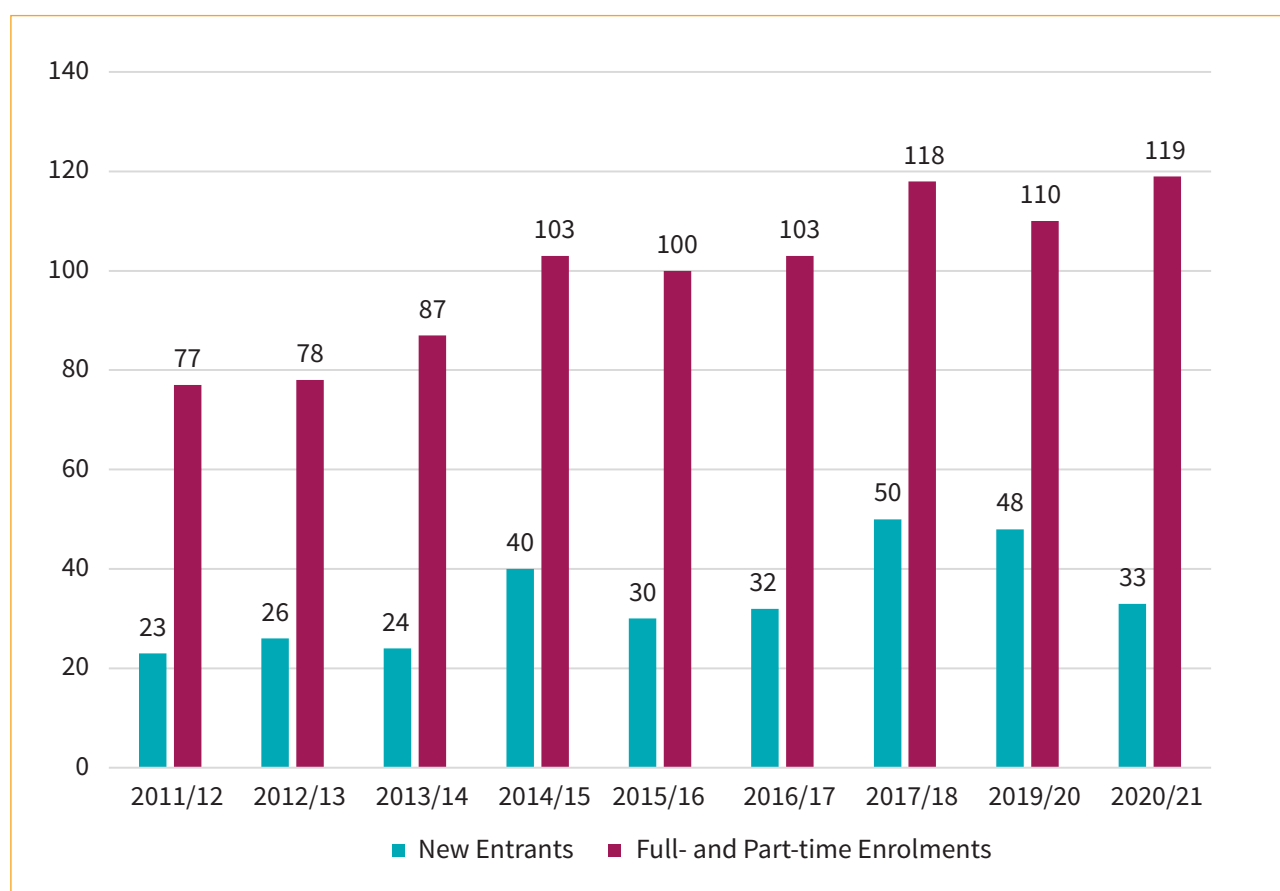
**Note: Data is not available for 2018/2019; 2019/2020 figures are likely to be an underestimate due to missing new entrant data for previous year; counting one disability only.*



A11 Setting targets for students from Irish Traveller and Roma communities

The number of Traveller students in higher education comes from the Equal Access Survey. A review of data on Irish Travellers shows that there has been a modest rise in the number of Traveller new entrants over time, increasing from 23 in 2011/2012 to 48 in 2019/2020, with a subsequent decline to 33 in 2020/2021. Similarly, there has been a modest increase in the number of Traveller enrolments during the same period, increasing from 77 in 2011/2012 to 119 in 2020/2021 (see Figure A9). As noted in the DoE recent report on Education Indicators for 2021⁶¹, the Covid-19 pandemic is most likely impacting on transition to, and progression within, higher education for certain cohorts of students, including Traveller and Roma students.

Figure A9: Number of Traveller New Entrants and Enrolments in Higher Education, 2011/2012 To 2020/2021



In 2016, there were 18,018 young Travellers in Ireland, representing 1.15% of the total population aged 0–24⁶². There were 3,074 Travellers aged 15–19 and a further 2,631 aged 20–24 identified in Census 2016, representing 1.03% and 1% of the population respectively.

Figures from Census 2016 show that educational attainment among Travellers is significantly behind that of the total population⁶³. Among Traveller females, 13.3% were educated to upper secondary level or above, compared with 69.1% of the total population. Nearly 6 in 10 male

61 See Education Indicators 2021 <https://assets.gov.ie/212247/a97b6e7c-92bb-4039-938f-1eda1736fb99.pdf> for more information.

62 DCYA (2020) Young Travellers in Ireland <https://assets.gov.ie/72732/824dc1d2acaf4e5a93d88e640ae1ef0f.pdf>

63 <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2017pressreleases/presstatementcensus2016resultsprofile8-irishtravellersethnicityandreligion/>

Travellers (57.2%) were educated to primary level only, compared with 13.6% of the total population. Only 1% (or 167) of Travellers had a third-level qualification compared to 42% of the total population⁶⁴.

For this National Access Plan, a goal will be set to increase the current number of Traveller new entrants from 33 to 150. This target represents around 0.32% of the new entrant population (see Table A12). While it is important to acknowledge that Traveller participation in higher education should be much higher, this target is reasonable given the current baseline data. The target will be reviewed (with a view to increasing it) over the lifetime of the Plan⁶⁵.

Table A12: Target Participation in Higher Education for New Entrants from the Traveller Community

	Current	Target
No. of Traveller new entrants	33	150
% of Traveller new entrants (as a % of all new entrants)	0.07%	0.32%

This National Access Plan is committed to supporting students from the Roma community. However, at present, only limited data on young people in Roma communities in Ireland exists. For the first time, Census 2022 will include ‘Roma’ as an option category in its ethnicity question. In line with this, the HEA has adopted similar categories in its EAS from 2020/2021 onwards. Given the unavailability of baseline data, it is not possible to set targets for Roma students accessing higher education. This will be reviewed over the course of this National Access Plan as data becomes available.

64 <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp10esil/p10esil/>

65 This target will be looked at again at the mid-term review of the Plan in 2025. By then, it is expected that ethnicity data will be available from P-POD and linked to HEA SRS data, which will determine whether it is necessary to revise this target.

A12 Additional data

Table A13 provides a breakdown of the socioeconomic profile of 2019/2020 new entrants by all fields of study.

Table A13: Socioeconomic Profile of 2019/2020 New Entrants by Field of Study

Field of Study	Affluent	Marginally Above Average	Marginally Below Average	Disadvantaged
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	9.7%	44.3%	40.3%	5.7%
(0811) Crop and livestock production	8.3%	47.6%	40.1%	4.0%
(0819) Agriculture not further defined or elsewhere classified	3.4%	38.8%	49.7%	8.2%
(0841) Veterinary	14.0%	44.1%	33.8%	8.1%
(0888) Interdisciplinary programmes and qualifications involving agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinar	5.7%	46.2%	47.2%	0.9%
Arts and humanities	17.5%	42.2%	29.4%	10.9%
(0210) Arts not further defined or elsewhere classified	18.3%	42.3%	29.1%	10.3%
(0211) Audio-visual techniques and media production	16.0%	41.3%	31.0%	11.7%
(0212) Fashion, interior and industrial design	20.5%	42.0%	24.9%	12.6%
(0213) Fine arts	16.3%	41.6%	32.0%	10.1%
(0215) Music and performing arts	18.8%	43.3%	25.9%	12.0%
(0220) Humanities (except languages) not further defined or elsewhere classified	12.0%	40.8%	36.4%	10.8%
(0230) Languages not further defined or elsewhere classified	14.5%	41.1%	31.4%	13.0%
(0231) Language acquisition	21.9%	41.3%	26.0%	10.8%
(0232) Literature and linguistics	14.7%	52.0%	25.5%	7.8%
(0288) Interdisciplinary programmes and qualifications involving arts and humanities	15.2%	43.1%	30.3%	11.4%
Business, administration and law	19.5%	42.2%	28.4%	9.9%
(0410) Business and administration not further defined or elsewhere classified	23.1%	44.7%	24.7%	7.6%
(0411) Accounting and taxation	13.3%	38.4%	34.4%	13.9%
(0412) Finance, banking and insurance	19.1%	42.7%	28.7%	9.6%
(0413) Management and administration	16.7%	40.0%	31.3%	12.0%
(0414) Marketing and advertising	19.5%	42.8%	28.3%	9.4%
(0421) Law	16.6%	41.1%	31.4%	10.9%
Education	12.5%	43.0%	35.2%	9.3%
(0112) Training for pre-school teachers	14.3%	40.9%	30.4%	14.3%
(0113) Teacher training without subject specialisation	14.3%	45.0%	34.4%	6.4%
(0114) Teacher training with subject specialisation	10.1%	43.3%	38.3%	8.3%
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	16.6%	43.7%	30.9%	8.8%
(0710) Engineering and engineering trades not further defined or elsewhere classified	23.1%	46.3%	25.3%	5.3%
(0713) Electricity and energy	11.8%	41.7%	34.6%	11.8%
(0714) Electronics and automation	15.7%	39.5%	34.5%	10.2%
(0715) Mechanics and metal trades	10.3%	39.9%	36.3%	13.6%
(0716) Motor vehicles, ships and aircraft	11.2%	53.0%	25.0%	10.8%
(0721) Food processing	19.2%	44.9%	29.9%	6.0%
(0730) Architecture and construction not further defined or elsewhere classified	11.5%	40.1%	36.9%	11.5%
(0731) Architecture and town planning	24.4%	40.3%	25.7%	9.6%
(0732) Building and civil engineering	8.5%	43.1%	37.9%	10.5%

Field of Study	Affluent	Marginally Above Average	Marginally Below Average	Disadvantaged
Generic programmes and qualifications	7.0%	19.6%	48.3%	25.2%
Health and welfare	14.1%	38.6%	33.7%	13.6%
(0910) Health not further defined or elsewhere classified	13.0%	36.2%	35.0%	15.8%
(0911) Dental studies	13.6%	36.4%	42.4%	7.6%
(0912) Medicine	36.7%	40.0%	18.0%	5.2%
(0913) Nursing and midwifery	11.3%	42.4%	33.3%	13.0%
(0914) Medical diagnostic and treatment technology	18.9%	43.1%	31.3%	6.7%
(0915) Therapy and rehabilitation	18.8%	44.1%	29.9%	7.2%
(0916) Pharmacy	15.5%	38.2%	36.8%	9.5%
(0922) Child care and youth services	7.1%	31.0%	40.1%	21.9%
(0923) Social work and counselling	10.2%	33.6%	36.8%	19.4%
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	16.4%	41.8%	29.1%	12.7%
(0610) Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) not further defined or elsewhere classified	19.2%	41.6%	26.0%	13.3%
(0611) Computer use	20.7%	42.9%	22.9%	13.5%
(0612) Database and network design and administration	7.9%	43.0%	41.2%	7.9%
(0613) Software and applications development and analysis	10.6%	42.4%	34.4%	12.6%
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	17.2%	43.1%	30.2%	9.5%
(0510) Biological and related sciences not further defined or elsewhere classified	14.3%	41.9%	31.9%	11.8%
(0511) Biology	10.2%	42.6%	39.0%	8.1%
(0512) Biochemistry	25.9%	45.5%	21.3%	7.3%
(0521) Environmental sciences	9.8%	42.9%	37.6%	9.8%
(0530) Physical sciences not further defined or elsewhere classified	24.7%	42.7%	24.7%	7.9%
(0531) Chemistry	19.4%	39.5%	29.8%	11.4%
(0533) Physics	18.7%	48.2%	24.4%	8.8%
(0541) Mathematics	19.1%	54.5%	21.5%	4.9%
(0588) Interdisciplinary programmes and qualifications involving natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	23.2%	39.5%	28.0%	9.3%
Services	11.5%	38.1%	34.1%	16.2%
(1013) Hotel, restaurants and catering	11.7%	39.4%	31.6%	17.3%
(1014) Sports	8.8%	37.5%	35.9%	17.8%
(1015) Travel, tourism and leisure	21.0%	37.0%	32.5%	9.5%
Social sciences, journalism and information	25.9%	41.6%	23.6%	9.0%
(0310) Social and behavioural sciences not further defined or elsewhere classified	23.7%	42.4%	23.8%	10.1%
(0311) Economics	46.7%	39.7%	11.2%	2.3%
(0312) Political sciences and civics	26.6%	45.2%	20.9%	7.3%
(0313) Psychology	21.1%	41.3%	27.1%	10.5%
(0314) Sociology and cultural studies	25.9%	36.9%	25.9%	11.4%
Grand Total	17.0%	41.7%	30.5%	10.8%

Please note: Fields of study with less than 100 students in total have been removed from this table.

Table A14 summarises the proportion of new entrants receiving the special rate of the Student Grant Scheme for HEA-funded HEIs in 2020/2021 and 2019/2020. SUSI provided the HEA with the number of students who were awarded non-adjacent and adjacent grants in year one at undergraduate level.

Table A14: Proportion of new entrants receiving the special rate of the Student Grant Scheme, 2020/2021 and 2019/2020

Athlone Institute of Technology	22.3% 13.1% Non-adjacent 9.2% Adjacent	19.6% 13.0% Non-adjacent 6.6% Adjacent
Dublin City University	9.2% 4.2% Non-adjacent 5.0% Adjacent	7.6% 4.0% Non-adjacent 3.7% Adjacent
Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design & Technology	9.8% 3.5% Non-adjacent 6.3% Adjacent	10.5% 5.3% Non-adjacent 5.3% Adjacent
Dundalk Institute of Technology	15.1% 5.8% Non-adjacent 9.3% Adjacent	14.4% 5.7% Non-adjacent 8.7% Adjacent
Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology	17.2% 11.4% Non-adjacent 5.9% Adjacent	16.8% 12.4% Non-adjacent 4.4% Adjacent
Institute of Technology Carlow	18.2% 9.5% Non-adjacent 8.7% Adjacent	18.1% 9.6% Non-adjacent 8.5% Adjacent
Institute of Technology, Sligo	19.4% 14.5% Non-adjacent 4.9% Adjacent	20.2% 14.3% Non-adjacent 6.0% Adjacent
Letterkenny Institute of Technology	23.5% 12.5% Non-adjacent 11.0% Adjacent	23.6% 11.6% Non-adjacent 11.9% Adjacent
Limerick Institute of Technology	17.1% 8.7% Non-adjacent 8.5% Adjacent	16.3% 6.8% Non-adjacent 9.5% Adjacent
Mary Immaculate College	8.6% 5.9% Non-adjacent 2.7% Adjacent	8.0% 5.2% Non-adjacent 2.8% Adjacent
Maynooth University	12.7% 5.8% Non-adjacent 6.9% Adjacent	11.8% 5.9% Non-adjacent 5.9% Adjacent
Munster Technological University Cork	13.0% 4.9% Non-adjacent 8.1% Adjacent	12.9% 4.9% Non-adjacent 8.0% Adjacent
Munster Technological University Kerry	14.5% 5.7% Non-adjacent 8.8% Adjacent	11.4% 4.3% Non-adjacent 7.1% Adjacent

HEA-Funded HEI	% of New Entrants receiving the Student Grant Scheme in 2020/2021	% of New Entrants receiving the Student Grant Scheme in 2019/2020
National College of Art & Design	9.9% 5.3% Non-adjacent 4.6% Adjacent	12.8% 6.6% Non-adjacent 6.2% Adjacent
National University of Ireland, Galway	10.8% 7.6% Non-adjacent 3.2% Adjacent	9.8% 7.2% Non-adjacent 2.6% Adjacent
Royal College of Surgeons Ireland	4.4% 1.2% Non-adjacent 3.2% Adjacent	1.6% 0.9% Non-adjacent 0.6% Adjacent
St Angela's College	8.6% 8.2% Non-adjacent 0.4% Adjacent	7.8% 5.6% Non-adjacent 2.2% Adjacent
Trinity College Dublin	7.4% 2.8% Non-adjacent 4.6% Adjacent	6.4% 2.7% Non-adjacent 3.7% Adjacent
TU Dublin – Blanchardstown Campus	21.8% 4.1% Non-adjacent 17.8% Adjacent	20.2% 3.7% Non-adjacent 16.5% Adjacent
TU Dublin – City Campus	9.9% 3.1% Non-adjacent 6.8% Adjacent	11.1% 3.5% Non-adjacent 7.7% Adjacent
TU Dublin – Tallaght Campus	17.6% 3.6% Non-adjacent 13.9% Adjacent	16.7% 1.9% Non-adjacent 14.8% Adjacent
University College Cork	8.4% 4.0% Non-adjacent 4.4% Adjacent	6.9% 3.8% Non-adjacent 3.2% Adjacent
University College Dublin	6.8% 3.2% Non-adjacent 3.7% Adjacent	5.9% 2.8% Non-adjacent 3.1% Adjacent
University of Limerick	10.2% 7.4% Non-adjacent 2.8% Adjacent	9.8% 6.6% Non-adjacent 3.1% Adjacent
Waterford Institute of Technology	17.2% 10.2% Non-adjacent 7.0% Adjacent	16.1% 10.0% Non-adjacent 6.1% Adjacent
Grand Total	12.0% 6.0% Non-adjacent 6.0% Adjacent	11.2% 5.7% Non-adjacent 5.5% Adjacent

Appendix B: Consultation Process

B1 Key dates and events

Table B1: Key dates and events

Key dates	Date
Publication of Consultation Paper	16 April 2021
National Access Forum	23 April 2021
Advertisements in national newspapers	24 April 2021
Student Consultation Event	7 May 2021
Consultation session with National Access Plan Steering Group	28 May 2021
One-to-one consultations (HEA and DFHERIS)	May 2021 to May 2022
Deadline for written submissions	18 June 2021

B2 Written submissions

Some of those who made submissions have asked not to be identified.

Table B2: Organisations and Networks

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• AHEAD• AONTAS – Irish National Adult Learning Organisation• AsIAm• Aspire2 Youth Advisory Panel and Alumni• ASTI – Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland• CAO – Central Applications Office• CETB – Cork Education and Training Board• Communiversity Network• CONGRESS – Irish Congress of Trade Unions• Cork Access Network• Cork Alliance Centre• Cork City Traveller Education Inter-Agency Group• Cork Prison and the Dillon’s Cross Project• DAI – Dyslexia Association of Ireland• DAWN (Disability Advisors Working Network)• DCU – Educational Disadvantage Centre• DEPTH Study• DFI – Disability Federation of Ireland• Down Syndrome Ireland• Drogheda City Status Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dublin Learning City• Education Futures Group• Engage in Education• EPIC – Empowering People in Care• ETBI – Education and Training Boards Ireland• FET Colleges Ireland• Foróige• HEA – International Education• HECA – Higher Education Colleges Association• Ibec• IHREC – Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission• Intellectual Disabilities Focus Group – TU Dublin Blanchardstown• Involve CLG• Irish Refugee Council• Irish Rural Link• ISSU – Irish Second-Level Students’ Union• Irish Traveller Movement• IUA – Irish Universities Association• KITE (Keep in Training and Education) and Literacy/Numeracy networks• Labour Party
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- Longford Women's Link
- Maynooth University DACE – Department of Adult and Community Education
- NALA – National Adult Literacy Agency
- Nasc – Migrant and Refugee Rights
- NCBI - National Council for the Blind of Ireland
- NFETL – National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education
- National Traveller MABS
- NCADSU – NCAD's Students Union
- NCGE – National Centre for Guidance in Education
- NCSE – National Council for Special Education
- NDA – National Disability Authority
- National Traveller Women's Forum Ireland (NTWF)
- Ógra Fianna Fáil – Cavan, Offaly, Kilkenny
- One Family
- Pavee Point
- QQI – Quality and Qualifications Ireland
- Royal Irish Academy
- RPL Practitioners Network
- SIPTU – Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union
- Social Justice Ireland
- Society of Saint Vincent De Paul
- South Cluster SOAR Project
- St Patrick's Mental Health Services
- TCPID – Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities
- TUI – Teachers' Union of Ireland
- THEA – Technological Higher Education Association
- Trinity Ability co_op
- Trinity Green Campus Education Subcommittee
- USI – Union of Students in Ireland
- WISE – Western Institute for Studies in Education

Table B3: Higher Education Institutions

- Carlow College
- Dublin City University (DCU)
- Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology (IADT)
- Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT)
- Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT)
- Griffith College Dublin (GCD)
- Hibernia College
- Institute of Technology Carlow
- Institute of Technology Sligo
- Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LyIT)
- Marino Institute of Education (MIE)
- Mary Immaculate College (MIC)
- Maynooth University (MU)
- Munster Technological University (MTU)
- National College of Art & Design (NCAD)
- National College of Ireland (NCI)
- Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, University of Medicine and Health Sciences
- St Angela's College
- Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin)
- Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest – Athlone Institute of Technology and Limerick Institute of Technology
- Trinity College Dublin (TCD)
- University College Cork (UCC)
- University College Dublin (UCD)
- University of Limerick (UL)
- Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT)

B3 One-to-one consultation with stakeholder organisations

Table B4: One-to-one Consultations with Stakeholders

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- Children in Care and the Education System National Working Group, DCU Educational Disadvantage Centre
 - Disabilities Advisors Working Network (DAWN)
 - Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth
 - Department of Education
 - Department of Health
 - Department of Housing
 - Department of Justice
 - Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
 - Department of Rural and Community Development
 - Department of Social Protection
 - Down Syndrome Ireland
 - Dr Vivian Rath
 - EPIC
 - Inclusion Ireland
 - Inclusive National Higher Education Forum (INHEF)
 - Irish Prison Service
 - IUA
 - National Disability Authority
 - National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education
 - QQI
 - SOLAS
 - THEA
 - TU Dublin
 - Tusla
-





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