

# REPORT ON THE SIXTH ANNUAL NATIONAL ACCESS FORUM 2023

27<sup>th</sup> April 2023



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

HEA

HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY  
AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS



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# Introduction

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On April 27th the Access Policy team at the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in partnership with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) organised the sixth annual National Access Forum at the Spencer Hotel in Dublin.

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The Forum marked the first in-person event since 2020 and the first forum since the launch of the National Access Plan: A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-2028 (NAP) in August 2022.

This year's Forum focused discussion on the implementation of the National Access Plan 2022-2028 and brought together policymakers and stakeholders to share best practice and approaches to delivering the objectives of the National Access Plan. Forum participants included HEI professionals, students from NAP priority groups, and DFHERIS and HEA officials. Approximately 130 attendees participated in the Forum.

To ensure accessibility, live captioning and ISL interpreting were provided at the Forum, and the agenda was made available in easy-to-read format.

The event was divided into three sessions:

1. Presentations
2. Student Panel
3. Table Discussions and Feedback.

The Forum concluded with a closing speech by Mr Simon Harris TD, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

A summary of the sessions follows. A list of speakers, presentations slides, and glossary of terms are available in the appendices.

# 1 | Session One

## Presentations

### 1.1 Opening by Mr Keith Moynes, Assistant Secretary, DFHERIS

The Forum was opened by Keith Moynes, Assistant Secretary of DFHERIS. Mr Moynes emphasised the importance of collaboration between the HEA, HEIs and the DFHERIS in promoting an ambitious agenda for access and inclusion. Building on the progress already made and integrating stakeholder feedback, particularly the student voice, is seen as crucial for shaping the future direction of national policy implementation.

Inclusion and diversity are fundamental aspects of higher education policy. Ambitious targets are set in the NAP to increase the number of new entrants from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, mature students, students with disabilities and students from underrepresented groups, in particular students from the Traveller community for which participation rates have not yet increased to the same level as other groups.

Mr Moynes highlighted that the NAP also focuses on several new priority groups who are underrepresented and marginalised including students with intellectual disabilities, members of the Roma community, students with experience of the care system, individuals who have experienced homelessness or the criminal justice system, survivors of domestic abuse, carers, second chance learners, migrants, and refugees. It was emphasised that particular attention must be paid to the intersectionality across these groups.

Mr Moynes thanked attendees for their commitment to Access and Inclusion and to delivering the supports and services in their institutions.

## 1.2 National Access Plan – Overview and Plans for 2023/24

Caitríona Ryan, Head of Access Policy at the HEA shared the progress made on the new NAP and plans on the delivery of NAP's student-centred goals, four targets and nine key performance indicators.

The ambition of the NAP is that inclusion encompasses the whole higher education experience. From access to progress and participation, the whole student experience needs to be inclusive, including institutions' environment, be it teaching and learning environment, built environment, student support environment, etc.

It was also highlighted that the new HEA Act came into effect in November 2022 and with the Act, Access, Participation and Lifelong Learning are enshrined in legislation, requiring the HEA to prepare a National Access Plan for DFHERIS. The Act also requires institutions to have access strategies and to report on the implementation of those through the HEA.



### 1.3 PATH 4 Phase 1 – Case Study

Maureen Haran from the UDL Centre of Excellence at ATU shared the progress on the National Charter for Universal Design in Tertiary Education, a cross-sectoral project currently funded under PATH 4 Phase 1 Universal Design.

The collaborative team working on the project is committed to ensuring the National UD Charter represents tertiary education in Ireland as the sectors continuously evolve. The charter aims to create a shared tertiary understanding of what UD means, to improve consistency of learner experiences within and between further education and training and higher education institutions, and to provide tools to support HEIs and ETBs to holistically embed UD in their organisations.

It is envisaged that on completion of the project, institutions would be encouraged to formally adopt the charter as something they are working towards, and that organisations like AHEAD could play an important national role in supporting institutions to adopt and work towards it. The project team also envisages this output being important in the future shaping of institutional policies regarding student success and UD. One important challenge highlighted in the feedback from the IUA Registrars consultation is that while Registrars are very supportive of UD in theory, in practice the proposed UD Charter does not have continued funding to enable its objectives to be achieved. Furthermore, the recommended action is that the sector needs to work together to secure the funding to enable this to happen.

This project involves updating the existing UCD Toolkit for Inclusive Higher Education Institutions (under revision in tandem with this project) as the background to this development to give it a more tertiary focus. The accompanying Toolkit will support ETBs and HEIs to measure their progress against 4 pillars and create a reflective action plan for future development in this area. The pillars in the toolkit address teaching & learning, student services, physical- built environment and IT/ Digital accessibility. The charter/toolkit will also address the systems and policies which underpin these pillars, and the output will clearly demonstrate how the implementation of universal design supports ETBs and higher education institutions to align with other national targets such as those concerning retention and learner success.

The National Charter for Universal Design in Tertiary Education is due to be launched in conjunction with the AHEAD conference in Spring of 2024.



## 2 | Session Two

# Student Panel

The core of the Forum was the student panel discussion, chaired by Dr Áine Ní She, Registrar and Vice President for Academic Affairs, MTU Cork campus. The panel was comprised of students from across four of the NAP priority groups. Students from a range of priority groups were also present in the audience.



The panel offered insights into the unique needs and challenges of students and aimed to foster a better understanding of how students can be supported and how barriers to higher education can be removed. The audience members had the opportunity to ask questions to the panellists. **Key themes discussed included:**

## 2.1 Importance of Early Disability Assessment

Disability assessments and supports should be available to students early in their educational journey, and there is a need for consistency and cooperation across the sectors. Students report a considerable difference in their confidence in their academic abilities once assessment and treatment are in place.

Panellists acknowledged the issues surrounding the lack of funding and staffing in access offices, resulting in waiting times for an assessment.

## 2.2 Transitions from the Care System into Higher Education

Care-experienced students face unique challenges including the lack of family support, stigma and stereotypes, which can adversely affect their self-esteem and confidence in their academic abilities. Representation/role models with experience of the care-system in higher education can have a positive impact on the journey and self-confidence of care-experience students. EPIC Youth Council, which advocates for people in the care system, was praised for its support.

## 2.3 Students with Intellectual Disabilities

People with intellectual disabilities are often excluded from further and higher education opportunities with most courses not suitable for them. Course provision need to be made available at different NQF levels, and students with intellectual disabilities could benefit from accessing parts of a course or individual modules.

## 2.4 Traveller Inclusivity

The lack of acknowledgement of Travellers, their identity, history and culture, as well as low expectations and the lack of support impact on transition, participation and outcomes for Travellers in higher education. The inclusion of Travellers as a target group in the new NAP is noted as a positive and differences are already being made in terms of the outcomes of the NAP. However, it is felt that there is still a policy implementation deficit and more work is needed.

## 2.5 Application Process for the 1916 Bursary

The 1916 bursary was noted as a lifeline that offered both financial assistance and a sense of stability, providing much-needed help along one's academic journey. While recognising the value of the support that the bursary provided and the limited

budget, panellists reported the application process for the 1916 Bursary to be challenging. Students generally feel compelled to highlight the most difficult aspects of their life and “sell their trauma” to secure the support, which clashes with the principle in advocating for one’s own capabilities and independence.

## 2.6 Accessible Information

Despite initiatives to provide technology, the digital divide and digital literacy, particularly among Travellers (60% having no access to internet), are a matter of concern and directly impact on the ability of some groups to access information.

Panellists emphasised the importance of accessibility, using visual aids and simple language, as well as more targeted information i.e., pamphlets directed to Traveller community, to care experienced community, LGBT community, disability community.

Notice boards in schools and distributing pamphlets with comprehensive information for parents, students and teachers were suggested as possible avenues. It is important to provide culturally sensitive and appropriate information to the community. Having conversations with parents whose children have been diagnosed with a disability, to help them understand the available structures and resources, and provide reassurance is very important.

Students highlighted that pathways to aid transition from FE to HE and the supports available to students to make these transitions should be better advertised and more accessible.

## 2.7 What Could Be Done Differently?

In response to an audience member’s question about what one thing institutions could do differently, the students responded as follows:

- > Need for mandatory **cultural competency training** for staff members in institutions.
- > Importance of institutions fulfilling their **obligations under the Public Sector Duty**.
- > A regular **check-in system** regarding academic progress, well-being, and any difficulties students might be facing.
- > A non-judgemental **support system** to address issues like bullying and assessment of underlying disabilities or learning difficulties.
- > Ability to **access mainstream courses or modules** of a course, with the option of obtaining a certificate or gaining practical knowledge and experience.

## 3 | Session Three

# Table Discussions and Feedback

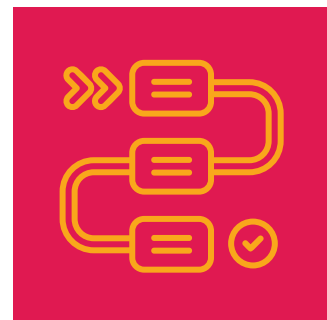
The audience was asked to discuss the following questions in groups:

1. **What is currently working in the system?**
2. **What needs to be prioritised for the NAP objectives to be achieved?**
3. **What would be the recommendations going forward?**

The feedback from the audience was as follows:

### 3.1 What is currently working in the system?

- > The **partnerships** and **friendships** among colleagues
- > The positive impact of **student engagement** with access and disability services
- > The **flexibility of Path funding**. The funding allowed to embed and mainstream inclusive practices across the institution and to engage the external community. The recommendation, which may fall outside of the remit of the HEA, is that **supports should be extended to deaf staff and academics** and that inclusive environment is made more seamless.
- > The **Kickstart programme** is a great success, and it was suggested that more **scholarships** and more national programmes of this kind **should be prioritised**, and pathways broadened to more courses.
- > **PATH 4** is recognised as a great initiative; there is a strong **focus on universal design** in higher education. It was recommended to prioritise **continued funding for universal design** projects, with a focus on the **whole institution** and **whole system approach** to inclusion based on principles of universal design.



### 3.2 What needs to be prioritised for the NAP objectives to be achieved?

- > The **insufficient staffing levels in the HE sector** are falling significantly behind OECD and EU averages. **Allocation of adequate funding** for services and support for students is crucial for educational futures and to fulfil the goals of the NAP.
- > The **collaboration between the government departments**, their engagement with access services and wider stakeholders.
- > **Collaboration and inter-agency work concerning Traveller organisations.** Liaising with ETBs along with emphasis on community development, which is supported by the presence of **Traveller employees** in the projects. There is a need to ensure continued trajectory and **progression** for individuals **from different starting points** into and through higher education.
- > A **big challenge for widening participation are barriers** faced by access students seeking to enter professions such as **teaching**. Staff need to support access students through work with unions and communities of practice, and it is important to **change cultures and attitudes** about what it means to be a teacher, what a teacher looks like, particularly in very homogenous areas like primary school teaching.
- > **Intersectionality** - It is essential to develop programmes that **recognise and support the diverse backgrounds of students**, ensuring that they are not solely identified as “access students” but fully integrated members of the college community. There have been instances where students had to choose between different support services, which limited their ability to fully integrate.
- > Supports should be provided for **placements** which are required as part of a course. This is particularly important, as there are high levels of unemployment among people with disabilities and yet there are country-wide skill shortages.





### 3.3 What would be the recommendations going forward?

- > An **accessibility first approach** is crucial. Printed materials, slides, event venues, etc. should be considered through the lens of accessibility.
- > **Traveller education strategy** across primary, post primary and third level should be published to advance the rights of this community. It should include key actions, outcomes, timeframes, accountability and key indicators, detailing the process in line with the human rights framework and intercultural approach.
- > The conceptualisation of **the tertiary education sector**, particularly the new National Tertiary Office has made a big difference. However, there are still some **anomalies** between the component parts at the national structure level which need to be addressed. For example, if students are **progressing** from Leaving Cert to higher education, they can apply for HEAR and DARE, but if they enter Further Education, this route is not available.
- > It was considered that greater **compliance with the EU Directive on Web Accessibility** for FE and HE websites is needed. Colleagues were encouraged to advocate for improved compliance within their organisations.



## 4 | Closing Remarks

The sixth annual National Access Forum concluded with a closing speech by Mr Simon Harris TD, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. Minister Harris thanked the student panellists for their testimonials and the inspiration they provide to colleagues in their work. Their testimonies serve as motivation for further action.

The Minister thanked everyone in DFHERIS and the HEA for their efforts to advance the promotion Access, Inclusion and Equality in education. He emphasised the Government's commitment to creating equitable educational opportunities for all, regardless of age, gender, socioeconomic background or disability. The National Access Plan is a vital tool in advancing this policy, outlining a fair and inclusive education system with measurable targets. Minister Harris recognised the significant impact of improving access to education, extending beyond individual students to families, communities and society as a whole. He commended the attendees for their dedication to enhancing the educational system and urged everyone to continue challenging themselves and sharing best practice.

Highlighting the provision of funding to embed universal design, he noted that more funding as well as sharing of good practice will be required in the future. It is hoped that this funding will give an opportunity to accelerate the good progress that is underway at a local level.

The Minister also drew attention to the establishment of PATH 4 and the allocation of a specific fund for developing programmes catering to individuals with intellectual disabilities. He emphasised the need for a continued dialogue regarding individuals with disabilities and their right to education and realising their potential.

The Minister acknowledged that students are not a homogenous group and that their journeys differ. It is important to eliminate the cliff edge that some students may face after second level education. He emphasised the need for a flexible system that accommodates every individual's unique journey, regardless of their background.

The Minister expressed confidence in the access officers, advocates and other colleagues present, recognising their expertise in generating policy initiatives and tools necessary to achieve desired outcomes. He conveyed optimism about the progress that can be achieved, citing past successful interventions. The Minister concluded by thanking everyone for their efforts.

## Summary

The annual National Access Forum 2023 provided an opportunity for a broad spectrum of stakeholders to meet face-to-face for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The presentations, students' testimonials and discussions identified important issues and measures that could be taken to improve access to higher education for students from a broad range of backgrounds, experiences, and abilities.

The Forum showcased the dedication and collaborative approach of colleagues as well as the strong commitment of the sector to address access issues.

Overall, the event provided a platform to exchange ideas, share experiences, and propose initiatives that can support the delivery of the ambitions of the National Access Plan 2022-28.



# Appendix A

## Speakers

### Presenters

- > **Mr Simon Harris T.D., Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science**
- > **Mr Keith Moynes** – Assistant Secretary, DFHERIS.
- > **Ms Caitríona Ryan** – Head of Access Policy, HEA.
- > **Ms Maureen Haran** (PhD(c), SFHEA) – Lecturer, Universal Design for Learning, UDL HE Centre of Excellence in affiliation with the Teaching & Learning Department (ATU Sligo); Programme Chair, & Lecturer - Post Graduate Certificate in Teaching, Learning & Assessment; Programme Chair & Lecturer - Post Graduate/ MA in Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

### Student Panel

- > Chaired by **Dr Áine Ní Shé**, Registrar and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Munster Technological University – Cork Campus.
- > **Students:**
  - > **Ms Danya Ateya (UCD)**
  - > **Mr Kai Brosnan (TU Dublin)**
  - > **Ms Niamh Cronin (MTU - Kerry Campus)**
  - > **Mr David Friel (ATU Sligo)**

# Appendix B

## Presentation Slides

National Access Plan 2022-2028. Work Programme for 2023 and Data Updates

Presentation by Caitríona Ryan, Head of Access Policy, HEA

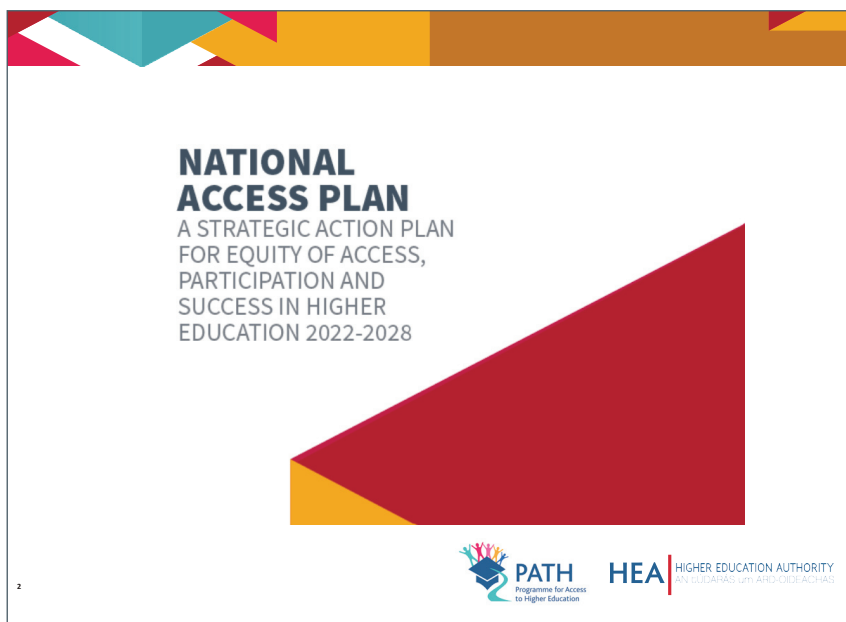


**NATIONAL ACCESS FORUM 2023**  
OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS AND PLANS FOR 2023/24

Caitríona Ryan  
Head of Access Policy  
27 April 2023



1

 **PATH** Programme for Access to Higher Education  **HEA** HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY AN ULDARAS UM ARD-OIBEA CHAS



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

2

 **PATH** Programme for Access to Higher Education  **HEA** HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY AN ULDARAS UM ARD-OIBEA CHAS

[HEA Act, 2022]

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**PART 5 - Access, Participation and Lifelong Learning**

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**National Access Plan**

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**HEI Strategies**

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**Annual report on implementation of NAP**



[AMBITION]

The ambition for our Higher Education system is:

***“that the higher education student body entering, participating and completing higher education, at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland’s population,***

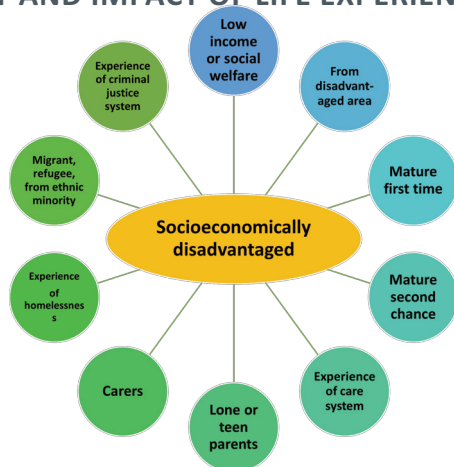
and

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

[PRIORITY GROUPS]



**[ INTERSECTIONALITY AND IMPACT OF LIFE EXPERIENCES ]**



**[ STUDENT-CENTRED GOALS ]**



**[ Goal 1: Inclusivity ]**

Universal Design – PATH 4 phase 1

Students with Intellectual Disabilities – PATH 4 Phase 2

Postgraduate Study

Diversity in teachers - PATH 1

## [Goal 2: Flexibility]

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**PATH 2 1916 Bursaries**

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**SAF and FSD Guidelines**

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**Input to SUSI Student Grant Scheme review:**  
Part-time challenges

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**Community of practice opportunities**  
(Covid, PATH projects)



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## [Goal 3: Clarity]

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**PATH 2 Centralised Facility**

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**Home School Liaison Training**

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**Input into Career Guidance reviews**

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**Review of studentfinance.ie planned**



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## [Goal 4: Coherence]

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**Whole of Education Approach**

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**Consultation**

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**PATH Projects – PATH 3 and PATH 5**

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**Membership of the National Access Plan Steering Group**

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**Establishment of National Tertiary Office**



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## [Goal 5: Sustainability]

PATH Impact Assessment

PATH 2 Structures and additional bursaries

European Social Fund

Establishment of PATH 5

Future Funding of Higher Education



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## [Goal 6: Evidence-Driven Approach]

Developing the Evidence Base

Deprivation Index Data

Eurostudent Report

HEA Progression and Completion Reports

Graduate Outcomes Reports

Access Data Plan



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## [NATIONAL TARGETS FOR 2022 - 2028]

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

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## [ KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS ]

Nine performance indicators will be monitored in parallel with targets to assess progress and trends over the period of this Strategic Action Plan.

Part-time/flexible learners	Further education award holders	Postgraduate study among selected priority groups
Student diversity across selected fields of study	Students supported by FSD	Entry to higher education from students attending DEIS schools
Lone parents	Completion and progression	Graduate outcomes

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## [ DATA UPDATES - 1 ]

### Areas of progress in 2021/22



Socioeconomic profile of new entrants to initial teacher education courses.



New Entrants with a Disability.



New Entrants from the Traveller Community.



Socioeconomic profile of new entrants to selected fields of study.

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## [ DATA UPDATES - 2 ]

### Areas for improvement



Participation of Flexible Learners.



Entry to higher education for students attending DEIS schools.



New Mature Entrants from Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Areas.



Progression from further education to higher education.



Proportion of new entrant parents receiving a lone parent allowance.

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## **[Goal 5: Sustainability]**

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**PATH Impact Assessment**

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**PATH 2 Structures and additional bursaries**

European Social Fund

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**Establishment of PATH 5**

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**Future Funding of Higher Education**

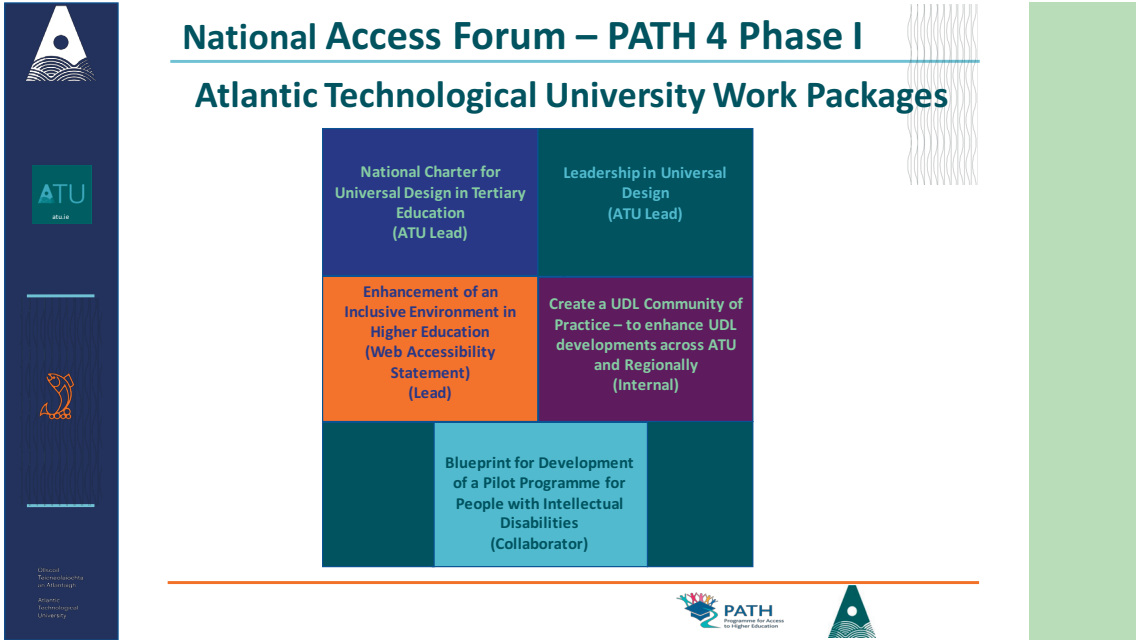
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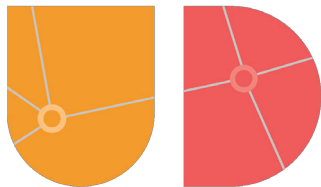
# Path 4 Phase 1 Universal Design Case Study

An Overview of National Charter by Maureen Haran, Lecturer, UDL Centre of Excellence, Atlantic Technological University



The diagram illustrates the work packages for the National Access Forum – PATH 4 Phase I at Atlantic Technological University. It features a central grid of five colored boxes, each representing a specific work package. To the left is a vertical dark blue bar with the ATU logo and university name. To the right is a vertical light green bar. At the bottom are the PATH logo and the ATU logo.

National Charter for Universal Design in Tertiary Education (ATU Lead)	Leadership in Universal Design (ATU Lead)
Enhancement of an Inclusive Environment in Higher Education (Web Accessibility Statement) (Lead)	Create a UDL Community of Practice – to enhance UDL developments across ATU and Regionally (Internal)
Blueprint for Development of a Pilot Programme for People with Intellectual Disabilities (Collaborator)	



## The National Charter of Universal Design for Tertiary Education

Placing Human Diversity at the Heart of Tertiary Education Design



# What is Universal Design (UD)?

## Universal Design

“means the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. – UNCRPD Article 2”

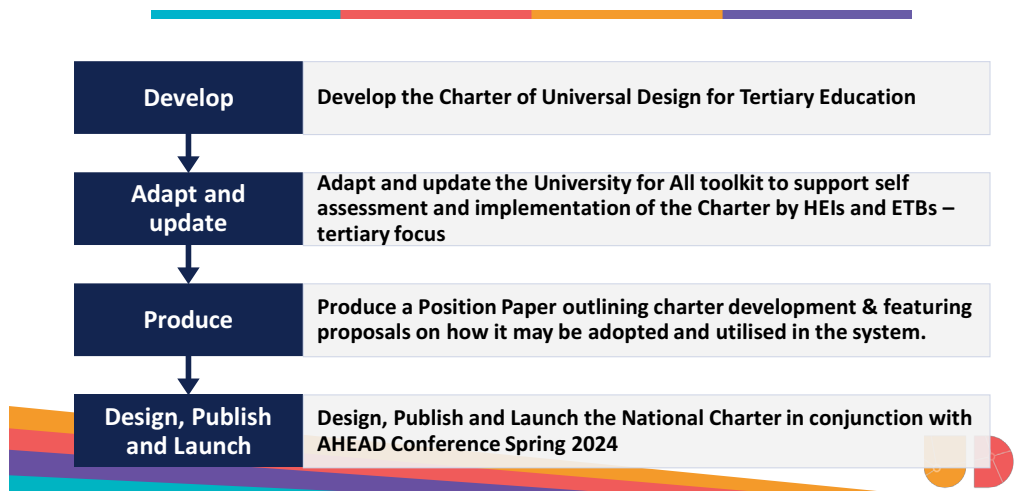


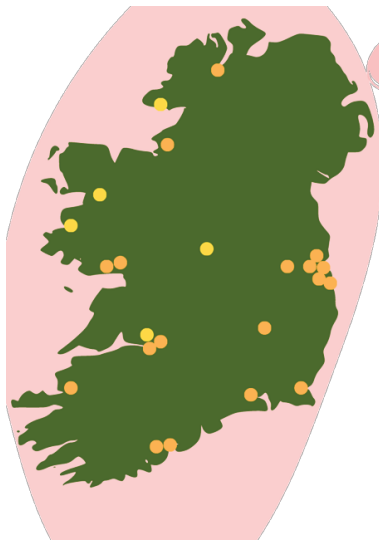
## UD Charter Project Goals

- **Create shared tertiary understanding** of what UD means, & incentives for implementation
- **Improve consistency of learner experience** within & between FET and HE institutions
- **Provide tools to support** HEIs and ETBs to **holistically embed UD** in their organisations
- **Generate greater links between FET and HE** to encourage sharing of good practice **regarding UD and inclusive practice**
- **Support national FET and HE strategic goals** concerning universal design, access & inclusion



## Project Outputs





**National Collaborators**

- AHEAD (Lead Collab)
- Education & Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)
- Irish Universities Association (IUA)
- National Tertiary Office
- SOLAS
- Technical Higher Education Association (THEA)

**Official Partners and Regional Collaborators**

- ATU (Lead)
- MTU (Partner)
- UCD (Partner)
- UoG (Partner)

- DCU (Collab)
- IADT (Collab)
- MU (Collab)
- MIC (Collab)
- SETU (Collab)
- TCD (Collab)
- TUD (Collab)
- TUS (Collab)
- UCC (Collab)
- UL (Collab)

**More ETBs coming shortly**

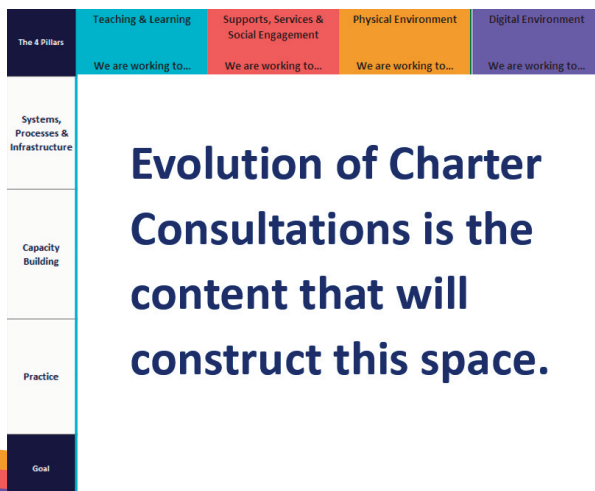
**Who's Involved?**

**Introducing the 4 Pillars of UD in Education**



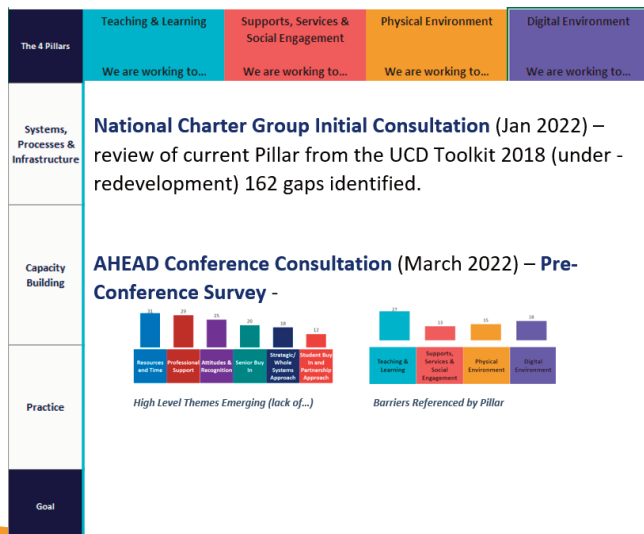
(Burgstahler, 2020)

**What are we working towards?**



**Evolution of Charter Consultations is the content that will construct this space.**

What are we working towards?



What are we working towards?

AHEAD All Conference Consultation focused on identifying the challenges and solutions and synthesis.

## THE METHOD

Dialogue Process, Adapted for Hybrid

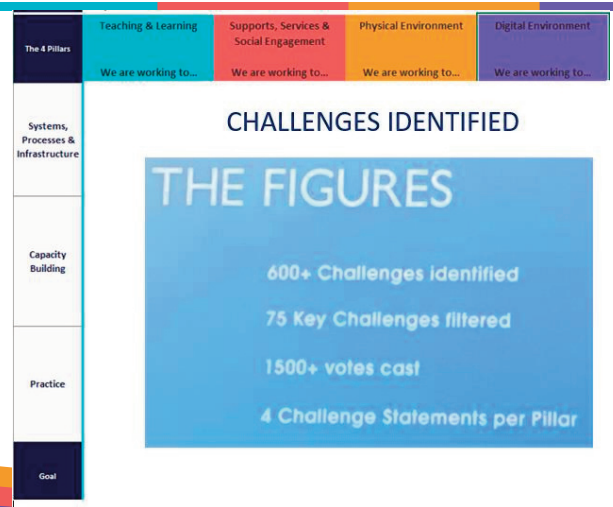
### STAGES

1. Individual idea generation & assimilation (Silent writing & reflection)
2. Group sense-making & idea filtering (Group discussion in breakouts / at tables, host-led input to SLIDO of top 3 challenges)
3. Whole Conference Voting (all select 3 most important to address under each pillar)
4. Challenges/Solutions Synthesised into Pillar Based Statements by Facilitators

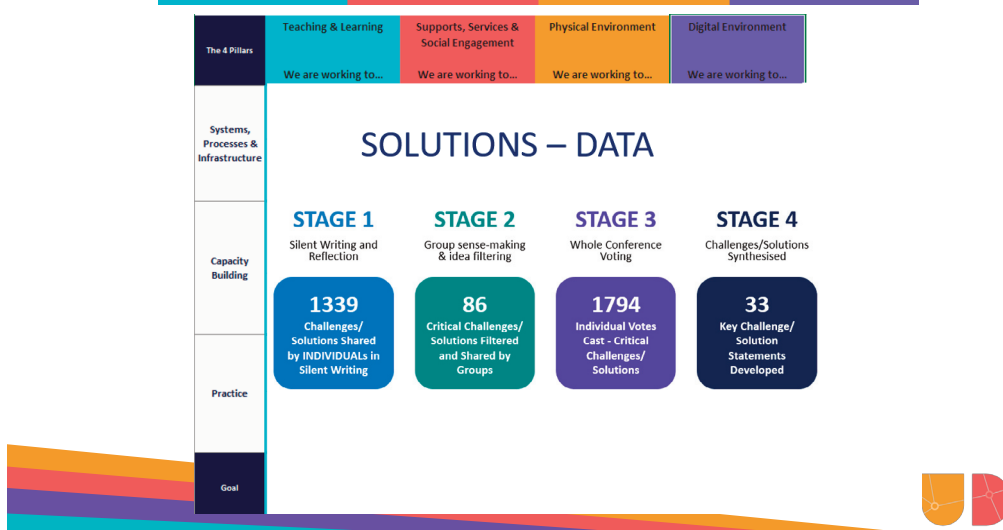
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What are we working towards?



## What are we working towards?



## Stakeholder Consultation

- IUA Registrars (January 2023)
- ETBI – Inclusion & Strategy Committee (February 2023)
- SOLAS (February 2023)
- NTO – Dr. Fiona Maloney (March 2023)
- DAWN Network (March 2023)
- THEA Registrars (April 2023)

## What's next?

- Staff & Student Consultation within all project group institutions.
- Charter redraft based on consultations
- Position Paper progression
- Continuous consultation with UCD Toolkit redevelopment project team.
- Final Draft consultations with relevant stakeholders.
- Design, Publish and Launch the National Charter in conjunction with AHEAD Conference Spring 2024

## Appendix C

# Glossary of Terms

**CAO (The Central Applications Office)** processes applications for undergraduate courses in Irish Higher Education Institutions.

**DARE (Disability Access Route to Education)** – a third level alternative admissions scheme for school leavers whose disabilities have had a negative impact on their second level education. DARE offers reduced points places to school leavers who, as a result of having a disability, have experienced additional educational challenges in second level education.

**DFHERIS (The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science)** is a department of the Government of Ireland. It is led by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

**FE (Further Education)** – is education and training that happens after second-level schooling, but which is not part of the third-level system.

**HE (Higher Education)** in Ireland is provided by universities, technological universities, institutes of technology and colleges of education. Also, several other third-level institutions provide specialist education, in fields such as art and design, medicine, business studies, rural development, theology, music and law.

**HEAR (The Higher Education Access Route)** – is a higher education admissions scheme for Leaving Certificate students (under 23) whose economic or social background are underrepresented in higher education.

**Higher Education Authority (HEA)** – officially **An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas**, is the statutory body providing policy advice for higher education in Ireland.

**ISL (Irish Sign Language)** – is a recognised language used by the majority of Deaf people in Ireland and by many Deaf people in Northern Ireland.

**LCA (Leaving Certificate Applied)** is a two-year Leaving Certificate, available to students who wish to follow a practical or vocationally orientated programme. The Leaving Certificate Applied is made up of a range of courses that are structured round three elements: Vocational Preparation, Vocational Education and General Education.

**NAP (National Access Plan)** – A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-2028. The fourth National Access Plan continues and builds on the vision of previous plans and ambitions for a more inclusive and diverse student population in higher education.

**PATH (The Programme for Access to Higher Education)** is a strategic funding programme, established in 2016, for the delivery of equity of access objectives. It supports the implementation of the National Access Plan objectives by providing funding to higher education institutions (HEIs) to deliver innovative measures to improve participation and retention of specific target groups in higher education.

**QQI** – is the state agency responsible for promoting the quality, integrity and reputation of Ireland’s further and higher education system. QQI oversees the promotion, development, maintenance, and review of the NFQ as a system of levels for relating different qualifications or awards to one another.

**SOLAS** – is the State agency that oversees the building of a world class Further Education & Training (FET) sector in Ireland, developing skills to fuel Ireland’s future.

**UDL (Universal Design for Learning)** – is an educational framework based on research in the learning sciences, including cognitive neuroscience, that guides the development of flexible learning environments and learning spaces that can accommodate individual learning differences.

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