

Submission 5.09 Intellectual Disabilities Focus Group – TU Dublin Blanchardstown

TU Dublin, Blanchardstown Campus have run an inclusive education programme since 2009. This 2 year programme is a partnership with the Daughters of Charity Disability Support Service and accommodates 6 students with intellectual disabilities per annum. A strong feature of the programme is its inclusive nature with students taking modules along side their peers on Level 7 and Level 8 programmes. On 27th May 2021 we ran a focus group with three students from the programme to discuss their college experience and to agree input to the public consultation on the National Access Plan. The following are the comments from that focus group.

47

Topic 1 : What aspects of equality of access to higher education currently work or do not work from a students perspective? Student 1 : I don't have any choice in what college I go to. I am really happy that I can go to TU Dublin I'm lucky to be able to go here. Student 2 : I think I can only pick one college. Student 3 : I would need more support if I was to go to another college that is far away from my home. Student 2 : I'm worried about what happens after I'm finished college. I would like a paid job but this is hard to find. Student 3 : I like to go to college because I make friends and they can help me and I can help them.

Topic 2 : What is the biggest challenge for students in accessing higher education? Student 1 : I wouldn't have the money to go to college. It is expensive and I'm on the disability allowance. Student 3: I find it hard to travel a long distance by myself. I would need help if I wanted to go into college in town. Student 2: We don't have enough options to join in mainstream education. Our course in TUD is great because we can mix with students who go to university and that are like us.

Topic 3 : What can make a difference for students accessing and completing higher education? Student 3 : We need more support to go to a college that I choose. Student 1 : It is important to have a course in a college that I can join in and complete. The college life is important to me and mixing with people my age doing normal things is really important too. This is not an option in all colleges. Student 2 : I can't live by myself and I can't travel really far by myself either. If I was to go to another college my parents would have to drop me there. If someone could support me to go into Dublin City I could choose a different college. Student 1 : I need help on the computers to do my assignments. Student 3 : I find it hard to write and to do assignments I need help with this.

Topic 4 : How has covid 19 impacted on students? Student 2 : When covid happened all of my supports were taken away I couldn't access my college. Student 3 : I couldn't use moodle without my staff. I find it hard to use computers and I couldn't access college online. Student 1 : I was only on college campus once and I am missing the chance to feel like a real student. I don't know anyone in my college class. Student 3 : I felt like I'm on my own when I was at home and not able to go to college or have access to my support staff.