

## Submission 4.05 Irish Refugee Council

### Opening Commentary

The Irish Refugee Council acknowledge that an inclusive higher education system is a National and European priority. We are pleased to read that inclusion is one of the six strategic goals and that the Minister for the DFHERIS has prioritised the delivery of an equitable higher education system.

We commend the success of previous National Access Plans in achieving the targets set for people with physical mobility disability, deaf/hard of hearing and blind/vision impairment. It is heartening to read about this progress.

We recognise that less progress has been made in the areas of socio-economically disadvantaged students, members of the Irish Traveller Community and First-time Mature Students, however at least these categories of students have targets associated with each group against which success or otherwise can be measured.

### Ethnicity, Diversity, Migrants

In section 1.3 of your consultation paper you refer to the importance of education in breaking down cycles of disadvantage and the principles of equality and inclusion being a longstanding priority in Ireland. You also refer to the fact that higher education should be available to individuals independent of several factors including ethnicity.

It is this cohort that we advocate on behalf of. Approximately 12% of the population in Ireland is made up from people of various migrant backgrounds, and this figure is likely to rise in the coming decades. We feel it is very important that young children, first or second generation migrant, can grow up in an Ireland that does not suffer the racism we see in other countries. I feel it is very important that young children, first or second generation migrant, can grow up in an Ireland that does not suffer the racism we see in other countries. It is widely acknowledged that racism exists in Ireland and we feel that one way to tackle this is through education. Children of a migrant background need to see teachers, politicians, and lawyers as well as doctors and nurses from different ethnic backgrounds so they can follow their lead: “ see one be one”.

### Recommendation

We would like to acknowledge the progress that has been made in the area of access to Further and Higher Education by Minister Harris during the past year, particularly in the area of Protection Applicants and Refugees. The areas we recommend to be specifically addressed in the 2022-2026 National Action Plan include:-

1. English Language – while ESOL is provided, we recommend that each person can access a pathway to move from no English, to everyday spoken English, through to academic English where required. The lack of a clear plan for English is one of the biggest barriers to progress and the cause of exclusion.
2. Recognition of Prior Learning – we recommend that if prior learning (undergraduate) cannot be proven to the satisfaction of the HEIs in order to gain access to postgraduate study that the student be deemed eligible to start again in Ireland with state funding (SUSI/ Student Support Scheme) for one undergraduate degree.

3. Targets – we would like to recommend that targets are set for the migrant community in representation in Higher Education, as they are for the other cohorts mentioned in your consultation paper, to keep pace with the % of the population at large. Diversity cannot be truly achieved in Ireland unless and until it includes people of colour.

Lastly, we have recently undertaken research in collaboration with College Connect (funded by the HEA) into the barriers faced by migrants in accessing Further and Higher Education. The research is complete and the report should be available in a month . It was a peer research project and the peer researchers would be happy to meet with you to discuss these barriers first hand if you feel that would benefit your planning.