Submission by D10 Keep in Training and Education (KITE) and Literacy & Numeracy Group to the National Access Plan Consultation 2022-2026

Introduction

In this submission of the Kite and Literacy and Numeracy group for Dublin 10 to the National Access Plan Consultation, we explain who we are as a group, what our aims and objectives are and how we fit into the overall D 10 Education Task Force. We then outline our response to the National Access Plan Consultation.

KITE and Literacy & Numeracy Group

The KITE/ Literacy and Numeracy group is an amalgamation of two subgroups of the D10 Education Task Force (ETF). D10 EFT is a group of Education providers across primary and secondary schools, Community Training Centres (CTCs) YouthReach, the ETB Adult Literacy Service, Further Education and Training (FET) and the non-statutory education sector in working collaboratively towards 'equality of outcome in education' for residents in Dublin 10. Its aims and objectives are as follows:

Aims:

- To provide a forum for effective communication, co-operation and collaboration for local education providers in Dublin 10.
- To provide an effective lobbying vehicle for key education issues in Dublin 10.

Objectives:

- To encourage & enable area wide approaches to common educational issues.

- To support the development of creative and innovative local responses to the educational needs of the residents of Dublin 10.

- To further enable & support the linkage between the formal and the non-statutory education sector in Dublin 10.

- To acknowledge the wide range of good practice in existence locally & elsewhere and to facilitate the sharing of learning regarding same.

- To disseminate information regarding local Education responses and innovative collaborative projects.

- To advocate the ethos of 'equality of outcome' in the work of the Task Force and in the wider community.

More information about D10 ETF can be obtained [here].

Digital Poverty

Digital poverty is a major issue in our local area; clients who have the skills may not necessarily have access to the necessary devices. The local Partnership has two desktop computers in reception area and complementary photocopying, which are normally in constant use, but have been unavailable to the local community during lockdown. The digital divide has become more apparent as a result of Covid. The laptop loan scheme was a welcome intervention and of great benefit to our local students. The loss of public study spaces such as the local library and inexpensive coffee shops had a major impact on students who have no access to a quiet study space at home.

Abbreviations

CAO	Central Applications Office
EPIC	Employment for People from Immigrant Communities
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
ETF	Education Task Force
FET	Further Education and Training
HE	Higher Education
KITE	Keep in Education and Training
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
PUP	Pandemic Unemployment Payment
SUSI	Student Universal Support Ireland

How can pathways between further education and training and higher education be better developed?

In line with Education and Training Board Ireland's (ETBI's) Vision for Tertiary Education, we would like to see more integration of FET and HET. In particular, we would like to see:

- Places in HET ring-fenced for people coming through FET in courses that are nominated progression options
- International models of community colleges should be explored as options to adapt and adopt for the Irish context. These community colleges could facilitate the first and second years of a university degree, from which a student could progress into third level. This would mean, for example, that students with level 6 or level 7 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) in a subject-specific area, e.g. nursing skills, would be accepted on to the second year of a degree in Nursing. Taking the community college route would reduce the cost of the overall degree for the student and ensure that the FET students gained the academic supports they needed before progressing to HET.
- An increase in the availability of and a decrease in the cost of access courses in universities and Its (some but not all University Access Courses are free)
- Blended learning options that obviate the need for people to pay prohibitively expensive rents in the cities where universities and ITs are located.

What challenges has Covid-19 presented in relation to an inclusive higher education system how can they be addressed?

Covid-19 has presented several challenges for people. The housing crisis has left many living in overcrowded circumstances with older siblings still living in the family home. The pandemic has restricted people to their homes for the most part, so restricted them in overcrowded situations.

The movement of courses online has disadvantaged those in digital poverty. Digital poverty is complex and requires parsing. For some, it means a lack of a device, for others it is a lack of Wi-Fi either because of financial constraints or because of the location of the student. Others may be digitally excluded due to complex domestic circumstances.

Those for whom working to support their education is an absolute necessity have been at a significant disadvantage. Although students received the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP), the restriction on their ability to earn money during the lockdown made it difficult to make ends meet.

We suggest the following solutions:

- Opening public libraries to students, restricting access to students and timetabling that access, even during lockdown.
- Government developing effective policies to address the housing crisis.
- A long-term loan of devices for people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.
- A grant or other financial support for payment of Wi-Fi connections.
- Digital hubs where physical distancing rules are applied in towns for people living in rural areas where broadband is unavailable
- A re-instalment of the PUP payment for students at risk of poverty without it.

Who are the target groups that should be specified in the next National+ Access Plan? How do we ensure that vulnerable members of our society are included (e.g. learners currently in care or who have an experience of being in care)?

Target groups should include the following:

- Travellers who are woefully under-represented at third level.
- Other ethnic and religious minorities
- Disabled people, including those with hidden disabilities
- People living with chronic illness or chronic pain
- People who are carers
- Single parents
- Ex-offenders
- Ex-substance misusers
- People living in care
- Unemployed people
- People living in socio-economic disadvantage, including those in low-paid employment
- Students coming from asylum/refugee situations: We find we have an increasing number of students from this cohort seeking advice about how to access further and higher education. With the expected closure of Direct Provision centres in 2024 and a move towards community integration, we would anticipate a larger number of students in need of additional supports.

We suggest the following solutions:

- Engage with Traveller advocate groups including The Irish Traveller Movement and Pavee Point to understand how best to ensure Traveller transferral to HET and to best avoid attrition.

- Engage with anti-racism organisations including Irish Network Against Racism to understand the challenges facing ethnic and religious minorities

- Engage with disability representative groups including Disability Ireland. Continued supports. There have been improvements in supports for

- Consult organisations advocating for people with chronic conditions. Examples include Migraine Association of Ireland Endometriosis Association of Ireland and Chronic Pain Ireland

- Engage with Education and Training Boards' local Adult Literacy Services to understand how best to address the unmet literacy needs of undergraduates and potential undergraduates

- Enact the recommendation made to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Social Protection in August 2016 to allow lone parents to access both the SUSI grant and the Back to Education Allowance for full-time **and** part-time courses.

- Evaluate and, if successful, replicate the Unlocking Potential Maynooth-Mountjoy initiative to ensure the inclusion of prisoner and former prisoners in third-level

- Ensure that there are supports in HE institutes for people in recovery from addiction.

- Consult with Care Leavers Ireland to understand what financial and social supports may be necessary to enable care-leavers both to transition to HE and to complete their courses.

- Continue with supports to care leavers until they reach 26. Also evaluate, and if successful, replicate the upcoming pilot project in Munster Technical University and EPIC to support care-leavers in third level. Assistance with paperwork is essential (SUSI requires additional documentation for Learners in Care).

- For both people living in socio-economic disadvantage who are working or whose parents are working and for unemployed people and the children of unemployed people we recommend the following:

  - Increasing the threshold for grants to reflect cost of living rather than inflation
  - The non-adjacent maintenance grant should be reviewed and updated to take into account increased and increasing rent prices.
  - The SUSI grant should be available for part-time courses to enable people to work full-time while studying.

➢ Place a value on diversity of experience including diverse ethnicities, abilities, confessional adherences and socio-economic cultural differences. This will require staff training and perhaps a review of cannon and curriculum

We further recommend the following:

➢ **Pre-Entry:** Mentorship including college visits to become familiar with campuses

➢ **Post-Entry: A** whole institution approach is essential. Often students will meet with administrative staff first, especially if their fees are paid by a third-party organisation or a non-governmental charity. It is important the administration staff are trained to make this process dignified, and to treat sensitive situations as such.

➢ Clearly sign-posted supports are important as information can be difficult to access in large universities.

How can a whole-of education approach to widening participation in higher education be achieved?

- Intervention at an early age is key. Further and Higher Education should be introduced as a viable option from primary school onwards.
- Academic supports while undertaking courses are also of great benefit. Academic writing classes and study skills workshops help to fill skill gaps that may not have been addressed at second level.

At Further and Higher Levels:

- Including Level 5 and Level 6 courses on the CAO
- Fee supports from SUSI for Level 5 and Level 6 courses
- More accelerated entry routes from Level 6 Courses to Degree Courses where appropriate
- Interventions under (Path 1) 'Access to Teacher Education' have had a positive impact on our local area. Similar initiatives in high-point fields such as medicine could perform the same function. Initiatives which address an imbalance in terms of social capital would also be of benefit; we find many local students follow similar routes and stick to the same subject areas (Arts and Humanities, Community Development, Healthcare).

How can current funding programmes be better utilised to further the objectives of the National Access Plan?

- Fee supports from SUSI for Level 5 and Level 6 courses
- 1916 Bursary: A great support for students but the opening and closing dates for application need to be clear for students.
- Inclusion of grant for fees for part-time courses for those who need to work full-time, but who are on low incomes.

Strides have been made over the past four years in widening participation in further and higher education. The KITE and Literacy/Numeracy Network feel this progress can be built upon to ensure a student body which reflects the diversity of Ireland.

We would welcome any feedback on this report and are happy to clarify any points made.

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