

Submission 4.42 [NTWF and Pavee Point](#)

The following short note outlines some principles which might usefully inform and frame the new Plan, as well as attempting to reflect the current situation and its implications, in particular for Travellers and Roma, but also for the groups the Plan may need to consider. It is informed by our experience of ongoing Traveller education disadvantage and discrimination at all levels, our engagement with measures to address it, including the current Plan and our engagement with and participation in higher education institutions and with policy makers.

Challenges, opportunities and recommendations

Aware that this input is required immediately, we send the points below as an initial contribution which we would be happy to discuss or to extend:

In addition to being founded on Irish education policy, we believe the new plan should be framed by our International Human Rights obligations, naming the most relevant ones at the outset while also listing the Abidjan Principles as a backdrop.

Our associated EU responsibilities including under the Equality Directives, to NTRIS actions as part of the EU 2030 Roma Participation Framework, the 2020/2025 Action Plan on Racism, and the EU Social or Poverty Charter

The plan needs to seek to reach into HEI and HE culture to begin transformation to a culture which explicitly links excellence with equality, provides data and research to support this, demands action beyond Access Offices in each department and through linking its targets and actions with overall funding.

Management principles acknowledge the need to measure in order to manage. We commend the progress to date towards disaggregated data in support of equity of access but call for the efforts to be stepped up – both immediately in order to inform the new plan and its marginalised and minority group priorities, and on an ongoing basis to reliably track its progress. The new plan needs to use Ethnic Equality Monitoring supported by human rights compliant disaggregated data collection, all carried out (as our research indicates is possible) in GDPR compliant ways.

Consultation for the new plan needs to be cognisant of but not bound by the outcomes, engagements and actions of the current plan: for instance, it needs to reach beyond Access personnel and HEI leaderships to whole-of-institution engagement, and undertake direct community and community-of-interest sectors consultation

The new plan needs to mandate HEIs to develop and implement, with associated dedicated resources and monitoring mechanisms, institutional action plans for its actions (in line with those currently being sought for the Dormant Accounts funding).

Traveller inclusion with targets in the current plan and associated Traveller Action Plan has led to improvements, albeit from a low base, in Traveller Higher Education participation (see Appendix). Travellers - and also Roma who are not named in the current plan need to be explicitly named in the new plan to maintain this progress now threatened by the consequences of COVID.

Traveller and Roma engagement in Higher Education – and that of other target groups – cannot be disaggregated from educational experience at all other levels, and in particular at moments of transition and progression. These need to be integrated into the plan with associated outreach actions.

Over half of all Travellers enrolled in post primary schools are not in DEIS schools. This needs to be borne in mind in initiatives to address disadvantage, and to disseminate information about transferring to HE/FE.

Given the history and current picture of Traveller education, the particular needs and interests of part-time and mature Traveller and Roma students, including their particular resource requirements in order to make participation feasible, need to be prioritised. This student group, its members often community leaders, have been failed by the system. They and all deserve full access to education and lifelong learning.

The plan should also seek from the outset to take a holistic approach, making robust and implementable connections with other education and training strategies as well as with associated ones — such as the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, the forthcoming literacy strategy, the National Women's Strategy, the Strategy for Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities, and the actions for implementation of the White Paper on Direct Provision.

The current plan commendably lists equity of access to higher education as a fundamental principle of Irish education policy. In our view the next plan needs to go beyond access to give direct consideration to, and contain actions focused on, participation and outcomes. Access alone was never enough, and this has been exacerbated by differential effects of COVID (see the report on our Forum of last year) for Travellers and other marginalised groups.

The new plan needs to strengthen the bridge between Higher Education and Further Education and Training, but not confuse them. Equally the plan needs to create conditions which facilitate national v regional access for the target groups to the programmes of their choice (if the picture painted in the recent HEA study is to be modified).

This means allocation of resources in line with student needs and interests - funding following the student.

Resources, their scarcity and the bureaucracy still associated with accessing them, remain huge education barriers for Travellers and other marginalised groups. In the scheme of medium to long term recovery and resilience generous allocations are a good national investment in a sustainable future. Direct student resourcing inaccessible ways needs to be immediately stepped up.

Access initiatives, in particular HEAR and DARE, need to expressly include Travellers, as we understand will be a recommendation of the HEAR Review. Clear accessible information and access pathways need to be widely disseminated among potential and actual Traveller students and Traveller organisations.

Associated initiatives such as Path need to target each institution, making each responsible for their own targeting and outcomes. The cooperative dimensions of current clusters can be built on but the associated clumsy overall and ill-targeted thematic and financial allocation needs to be obliterated and any overall institutional accountability for meeting targets removed.

It is an abuse of the rights of students self-identifying as Travellers when applying for supports such as the 1916 bursary, to be asked to provide further proof of their ethnic identity beyond self-identification.

The current Steering Group works well, but a space needs to be found for the very important perspectives emerging from the Ad hoc Group on Mitigating COVID Education Disadvantage (with which there is some crossover). Given the feared and 'long' education effects of COVID now appearing, the further articulation of these disadvantages is urgent. Integration with the associated steering of the future plan, and meantime with completion and planning for the next one, seem to be realistic options to avoid loss of crucial dimensions.

Traveller education ambition remains high but needs to be accompanied by appropriate qualifications and associated employment outcome measures if it is to be maintained and nurtured. The few and limited public service models (including the Pavee Point/Maynooth University/HSE initiative which sees eight Travellers now completing the first year of a four year part-time professional degree with ongoing associated employment at the end) need considerable extension, individual tailoring and targeted mainstreaming.