

# Progress Review of the **National Access Plan** and Priorities to 2021



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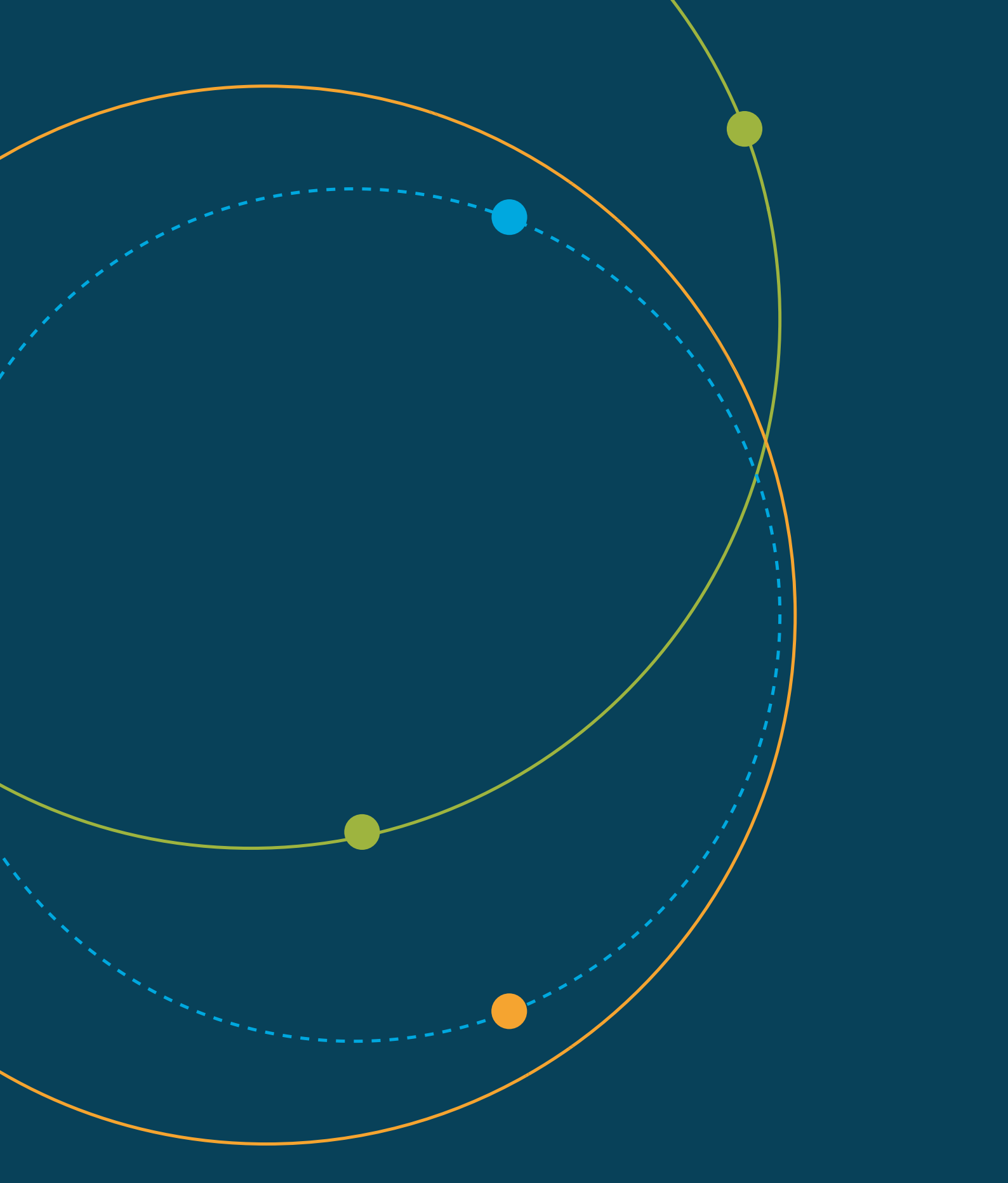
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Education and Skills

**HEA**

**HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY**  
AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS



DECEMBER 2018

# FOREWORD, MINISTER OF STATE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Equity of access to higher education continues to be a national priority for the Government and the Department of Education and Skills. The publication of the *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019* was a key development and statement of commitment to this and built on previous national access plans. The Government's Action Plans for Education also reflect the importance of supporting learners at risk of educational disadvantage and learners with special educational needs.

I therefore welcome the publication of this Progress Review of the National Access Plan as it gives Government, policymakers, higher education institutions and indeed students themselves the opportunity to reflect on progress to date, the challenges that remain and the work to be done for the future.

In particular I welcome the significant number of key achievements to date. These include increases in participation across a number of target groups, particularly for students with disabilities and among socio-economically disadvantaged groups. Indeed in some cases, targets have already been exceeded. Other key milestones include the development of an Access Data Plan to support an evidence-based approach to policymaking in this area and the incorporation of the concept of 'student success' into the Higher Education System Performance Framework.

A major element of both progress to date and the future implementation of the Plan has been the increased investment in new access initiatives since the original publication of the National Access Plan. The Government has committed more than €16m in funding over three years as part of the Programme for Access to Higher Education Fund (PATH). Its three strands with their distinct focus on initial teacher education, bursaries for the most socio-economically disadvantaged students and building relationships between higher education institutions and regional community partners are a tangible commitment on the part of Government and the higher education system to supporting and further developing equity of access to higher education. The impact of PATH will be long-lasting and ensure better targeting of the most disadvantaged groups in Irish society. It will help set up new pathways to higher education, enhance supports for students and embed models of sustainable community engagement.

Notwithstanding these important achievements, key challenges remain including difficulties in meeting targets set for mature students and Irish Travellers. Much work also remains to be done in improving pathways from further education to higher education and in enhancing the partnerships between further education and higher education institutions to develop access and foundation courses.

Improving equity of access to higher education is an ongoing piece of work and I wish to thank all stakeholders for their contribution and commitment to achieving the goals set out in the National Access Plan. This Progress Review highlights the major progress to date and the work that remains to be done. I am confident that both these achievements and challenges will only serve to focus efforts to realise a truly diverse and equitable higher education system.

**Mary Mitchell O'Connor, T.D.**

*Minister of State for Higher Education*

## PREFACE, CHAIRMAN OF THE HEA

As a country, Ireland can be rightly proud of its higher education institutions. In recent decades we have seen the expansion of the higher education system, including more and more students entering higher education for the first time. As an example, the numbers attending third level studies at the time the HEA was founded in 1971 was about 25,000, today it is nearer to 250,000. However success in this area cannot be measured by the number of students attending higher education alone. We must also be conscious of the composition – the make-up – of the student population in order to ensure it reflects the diversity of Irish society today. Indeed the HEA's founding legislation from 1971 refers to the HEA promoting "the attainment of equality of opportunity in higher education". This Progress Review of the *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019* is critical in allowing us to pause and evaluate our performance as a higher education system in relation to meeting the targets set out in the plan.

The Progress Review provides welcome news that objectives set for participation rates among a number of target groups have been met or even exceeded. The HEA also welcomes the additional funding for access that has been provided by Government in recent years, most notably the Programme for Access to Higher Education Fund (PATH). Reflecting higher education landscape reform, including regional clusters and the structural changes to Initial Teacher Education (ITE), PATH further facilitates regional approaches to supporting access to higher education and to the profession of teaching.

As a system, we have to ensure that we identify those cohorts of students who may be at risk of not entering higher education or not considering higher education as an option and once they do enter, also ensure that they are supported and mentored from their day of registration through to graduation day. Therefore in the coming years and as the duration of the National Access Plan is extended until 2021, a priority for the HEA is developing robust sources of data on access in order to better inform policymaking. Embedding 'student success' has become a system priority and requires institutions to take a 'whole-of-institution' approach to equity of access. This reflects the informing principle of the NAP that access is 'everyone's business'. Mainstreaming the delivery of equity of access in higher education is challenging to the system and in recognition of this, the next phase of implementation of the NAP will involve the Department of Education and Skills and the HEA prioritising the provision of guidance to higher education institutions on how to achieve this important goal. While challenges remain, the positive progress to date is testament to the commitment of all stakeholders and strongly suggests that these challenges can be addressed and overcome.

On behalf of the Board and Executive of the HEA, I wish to thank the Department of Education and Skills, the higher education institutions and other stakeholders for their valuable inputs into this progress review. Using its findings and recommendations and continuing to work together in partnership, we can continue to move forward to ensure that our student population truly reflects the richness and diversity of Ireland's population.

**Michael Horgan,**  
*Chairman, Higher Education Authority*

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# 1 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

# 1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

## 1.1 NATIONAL ACCESS PLAN FOR EQUITY OF ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION, 2015-2019

The *National Access Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education, 2015-2019* (NAP)<sup>1</sup> was published in December 2015. Equity of access to higher education is a national priority for the Government and the Department of Education and Skills (DES). The current *Action Plan for Education*<sup>2</sup> prioritises equity of access across all levels of education and has at its core the drive to break the cycles of disadvantage that can prevent some from fulfilling their full potential. Promoting equity of access to higher education has been fundamental to the role of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) since its foundation in the early 1970s. The HEA acts as a driver for change in the higher education system, including widening participation by underrepresented groups. Successive governments have prioritised and invested in access to higher education. For several decades the student grant system of the Department of Education and Skills, which now supports circa 80,000 students, has been the main support from the State for students in financial need and is a mechanism for the delivery of increased equity of access. Since the early 1980s, a range of State funded targeted initiatives<sup>3</sup> have been put in place to address the particular needs of students from certain groups to support their participation in higher education. The HEA has collected data on participation by underrepresented groups and managed targeted funding initiatives such as the Student Assistance Fund (SAF) and the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD). Core funding includes support for an access infrastructure both within the HEA and the higher education institutions, particularly in the last 15 years.

Over this sustained period of investment in access, there have been significant increases in participation from groups that historically had very low higher education participation rates. However, there remain some considerable gaps and some groups continue to be under-represented in higher education. In particular students from unskilled socio-economic groups and students who are Travellers have continued to have low participation rates. Building on successive national access plans, the current NAP was developed following a major stakeholder consultation process which sought to deepen our understanding of the barriers and identify potential innovative interventions for these groups that had persistently low participation rates. It contained a commitment to undertake a review of progress in the course of the Plan's implementation and this report presents the outcome of this as a Progress Review.

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1 HEA (2015), *National Access Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education, 2015-2019*

2 DES (2018), *Action Plan for Education 2018*

3 Such initiatives include the Millennium Partnership Fund (2000) and the Strategic Innovation Fund (2007).

## 1.2 CHANGING HIGHER EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT

Since the NAP was published in December 2015, there have been wider changes in the higher education and economic environment that have impacted on the NAP's implementation. There have been significant increases in student numbers since the commencement of the NAP. There were 41,413 new entrants to higher education in 2012/13 and 43,569 new entrants in 2016/17<sup>4</sup>. The number of students entering higher education is projected to grow considerably within the next decade based on an analysis of national demographics. The rising student numbers place increased demand on the higher education system and demonstrate the importance of targeted policy interventions to ensure that the student body reflects the diversity of the population.

The higher education funding environment, though still challenging, is more positive and there has been an opportunity for increased funding for equity of access both through core institutional budgets and also through targeted funding, including in particular the newly established Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) Fund. Additional funding for access measures was secured in Budget 2016 (€2.7m additional), Budget 2017 (€8.5m additional) and Budget 2018 (€4m additional) to support access to higher education. In December 2017, the Government allocated €2 million for lifelong and flexible provision to increase the capacity for flexible provision within the higher education system. This should assist in enabling increased participation by the target groups and sub-groups identified in the NAP, including ethnic minorities and lone parents. The increased funding reflects the importance of equity of access as a national priority and will drive progress towards the access targets embedded within the PATH initiatives and in the new System Performance Framework 2018-2020.

The higher education landscape changes are also becoming more rooted and embedded, for example the development of clusters and the structural changes in initial teacher education. Such developments have facilitated the establishment of regional and partnership approaches to supporting access and enable greater capacity to deliver increased diversity within our student body in higher education. A core priority for the regional clusters is developing pathways to higher education and SOLAS is a key stakeholder on the DES-led Transitions Reform Sub-Group, which is working on developing the overall framework for FET-HE transition.

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4 HEA (2014), *Key Facts and Figures 2012/13*; HEA (2018), *Key Facts and Figures 2016/17*



## 1.3 IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURES

Following the launch of the NAP the Department of Education and Skills established a Steering Group to oversee its implementation. The Terms of Reference for this group are:


- To monitor progress towards implementation of the National Access Plan for 2015-2019.
- To advise the Department of Education and Skills and the Higher Education Authority on challenges and opportunities that arise during implementation of the Plan.
- To ensure a coordinated approach to the implementation of the Plan.
- To assist in the development of specific actions and targeted initiatives contained in the Plan.
- To participate in sub-groups that may be established to progress work on specific aspects of the Plan.
- To assist in the planning of the National Access Forum that will be held on an annual basis to report on progress under the Plan.

More detail on the NAP implementation structures are included in Appendix 1.

## 1.4 TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE PROGRESS REVIEW

The Terms of Reference for the Progress Review (referred to as a Mid-Term Review in the NAP) were agreed in advance by the NAP Steering Group, and the methodology employed has addressed the Terms of Reference. The Terms of Reference for the Review covered two areas:

- a) A review of progress in respect of the goals, objectives and actions in the NAP, and
- b) A review of progress in respect of the targets for increased participation set out in the NAP.



**2** REPORT  
STRUCTURE AND  
METHODOLOGY

## 2. REPORT STRUCTURE AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 REPORT STRUCTURE

The Report of the Progress Review is structured as follows:


- Section 1 explains the context for this Progress Review.
- Section 2 describes the methodology applied in the Review.
- Section 3 presents an overview of the findings in relation to progress on the implementation of the objectives and actions set out in the NAP.
- Section 4 examines the targets in the NAP and compares them to the outcomes for the groups at the time of this Review.
- Section 5 sets out the conclusions from the Review and proposes recommendations for the remaining period of the NAP.
- Section 6 presents an implementation plan arising from the recommendations of the Review.

### 2.2 METHODOLOGY

The Progress Review was conducted according to the following staged methodology:

1. A review of all documents and papers to date that are associated with NAP implementation.
2. A consultation process was facilitated by KHSK Consultants involving a number of elements:
  - A stakeholder consultation process involving all participants in the Annual Access Forum. Participants at the Forum were also afforded the opportunity to input written comments on a stakeholder questionnaire.
  - A student consultation event that elicited the experience of students from the NAP target groups in relation to accessing and participating in higher education.
  - One-to-one consultation meetings with key stakeholders in NAP implementation.
3. A review of progress in relation to each of the objectives specified in the NAP. This review was informed by the analysis and consultations in stages 1 and 2 above.
4. An analysis of the up-to-date statistical data on participation by the access target groups and an assessment of progress towards the targets set in the NAP. This up-to-date statistical data was prepared by KHSK Consultants in partnership with the HEA Statistics Unit.
5. An identification of the key issues and challenges arising from the analysis in stages 1-4 and the development of recommendations for the remaining period of NAP implementation.

The contribution of Dr Kevin Hannigan of KHSK Economic Consultants and Dr Dawn Carroll of the HEA Statistics Unit to this Progress Review is gratefully acknowledged.



**3** HIGH-LEVEL  
FINDINGS ON  
NAP OBJECTIVES  
AND ACTIONS

## 3. HIGH-LEVEL FINDINGS ON NAP OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

### 3.1 OVERVIEW

The NAP identified five priority goals for delivery over the period of the NAP. Within each goal there are a specific set of objectives and actions that will contribute to the delivery of each goal. An important finding during the stakeholder consultation process was that stakeholders regarded the priority goals as appropriate and recommended that they should continue to drive equity of access policy, albeit with some requirements for greater clarity which are detailed in the recommendations of this Review.

This Progress Review indicates a number of significant positive developments since the commencement of the NAP including increased participation by members of the target groups and considerable investment in access initiatives. There is evident progress in respect of every goal and action under the National Access Plan, and Appendix 2 sets out a detailed assessment of progress in relation to each of these objectives and actions. Some challenges remain in the area of progression from further education to higher education and mainstreaming. Below is a discussion of the key achievements since the commencement of the NAP, and the key challenges for the next phase of its implementation.

### 3.2 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

The first phase of implementation of the NAP is broadly characterised by a period of achievement and investment.

- The data demonstrates positive findings with increases in participation rates across a number of the target groups, with particularly high increases for students with disabilities and among socio-economically disadvantaged groups. The complete data analysis is discussed in Section 4.
- There has been significant additional investment in new access initiatives since the commencement of the NAP. The Government has committed more than €16 million over three years via the Programme for Access to Higher Education Fund (PATH) to increase access to higher education by the target groups identified in the NAP.

PATH 1 funding amounts to approximately €3 million and is supporting access to initial teacher education by the target groups. The focus on the profession of teaching is crucial, and is informed by the understanding of the power of teachers as role models and influencers in raising the aspirations of young people and encouraging the realisation of potential. The second strand of PATH allocates €6 million to awarding bursaries of €5,000 per annum for the duration of undergraduate study to the most socio-economically disadvantaged students from the target groups accessing higher education for the first time. €7.5 million of PATH 3 funding is dedicated to building and enriching relationships between higher education institutions and regional and community partners to enable better targeting of students

This level of investment illustrates the commitment of the Government to equity of access and the vision of the NAP. PATH initiatives are provided through the centres of teaching excellence and the regional clusters, and are therefore supporting the contribution of the NAP to the delivery of wider higher education structural and landscape reform.

- Funding for the higher education sector has also increased. The rise in funding for the sector has been informed by the *Review of the Allocation Model for Funding Higher Education Institutions (RFAM)*<sup>5</sup>. The implementation of the recommendations of this Review will result in higher allocations in respect of access as access weightings will be applied to part-time students, students with disabilities, and students from target socio-economic groups.  
In addition, there have been enhancements to existing access initiatives. The reviews of the Student Assistance Fund<sup>6</sup> and the Fund for Students with Disabilities<sup>7</sup> have produced recommendations to ensure updated and improved allocation models to support students. Reflecting the need to support students from the target groups throughout higher education, the SUSI maintenance grant has been restored to postgraduate students.
- An Implementation Group chaired by the Department of Education and Skills has been established to progress the recommendations arising from the *Independent Review to Identify the Supports and Barriers for Lone Parents in Accessing Higher Education and to Examine Measures to Increase Participation*<sup>8</sup>. This Review, coupled with the reviews of the Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities have also affected policy changes. Government investment of €3 million from 2017 to 2019 has enabled the extension of the Student Assistance Fund to part-time students, with lone parents prioritised for this funding
- The development of the *Access Data Plan*<sup>9</sup> is a landmark achievement and will enable a new framework for evidence-based policy making. The new Data Plan will provide a more sophisticated and nuanced dataset that will inform the direction of future access policies and the setting of targets in respect of equity of access.
- A key area of work has been student success for the target groups in higher education. The work around student success arose from the need to address issues contributing to non-completion in higher education, particularly among the underrepresented target groups. The use of the term 'student success' is significant and is a recognition of the importance of language and the need to move away from the negative connotations associated with non-completion. Effective measures to tackle non-completion for the target groups will benefit all students and help to ensure the success of all students. To date, there have been numerous outcomes from detailed scoping exercises and student engagement. A central requirement of the new System Performance Framework 2018-2020 is for higher education institutions to have a Student Success Strategy in place by 2020 which will embed whole-of-HEI approaches to institutional access strategies. The HEA will monitor progress as part of the Strategic Dialogue process, and ensure that the goals, objectives, and targets of the NAP are included in the compacts agreed between the HEA and each higher education institution.

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5 HEA (2017), *Review of the Allocation Model for Funding Higher Education Institutions*

6 HEA (2016), *Review of the Student Assistance Fund*

7 HEA (2017), *Review of the Fund for Students with Disabilities*

8 Byrne, Delma and Cliona Murphy (2017), *An Independent Review to Identify the Supports and Barriers for Lone Parents in Accessing Higher Education and to Examine Measures to Increase Participation*

9 Haase, Trutz and Jonathan Pratschke (2018), *A Data Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education*

Engagement with students and prospective students is a central action within the NAP. As key stakeholders, students participate in the Annual Access Forum, the Student Success scoping study and other consultation processes including those conducted as part of this Progress Review. In addition, students are involved in the reviews of the financial supports to access students. This meaningful engagement with students is invaluable, as students are best placed to advise on aspects of policy that are working and areas that require further consideration and attention. This informed feedback is critical to ensuring that access initiatives remain responsive to student needs as the higher education environment evolves and develops.

### 3.3 KEY CHALLENGES

The environment of the higher education system has altered considerably since the NAP was developed. Progress is evident in respect of all actions of the NAP, but timeframes in respect of some actions are impacted by these developments. The scale of PATH funding was not anticipated at the commencement of the NAP. Therefore resources have prioritised the processes associated with establishing the PATH funding strands and enabling the projects supporting students to commence and prospective students to participate. Inevitably some actions have been delayed as a result of this prioritisation.

Significant landmark achievements in the implementation of the NAP to this juncture such as the development of the Access Data Plan will now enable progress in respect of other actions that are tied to or reliant on its development and the associated learnings.

In spite of the foregoing, there are key challenges as we approach the second phase of the implementation of the NAP and there are also some important actions where progress needs to be accelerated if the goals of the NAP are to be achieved:

- The extent of progress in respect of pathways from further education and training to higher education is not as advanced as is preferable at this stage in the implementation of the NAP given the important role that further education and training plays in enhancing the educational outcomes of students. Data collated as part of this Progress Review indicates that the rate of increase in the number of students entering higher education on the basis of a QQI-FET award is slow. While links between PLCs and higher education institutions are well established with in excess of 1,200 linkages and there is a significant number of students in higher education with a QQI-FET award<sup>10</sup>, challenges remain in establishing transparent supporting structures for building coherent pathways from FET to HE. The establishment of FET-HE Transitions Sub-Group is however a key development in building a consistency of approach in terms of overall national policy on transition from FET to HE.

<sup>10</sup> It is indeed the case that there is a much larger number of students in higher education with QQI-FET qualifications than recorded in this Progress Review, and data provided by SOLAS indicates that 15% of CAO applicants in 2017 had both Leaving Certificate and QQI-FET qualifications. The baseline data and target set in the current NAP, included in the *Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019* published by SOLAS in 2014 and in the *Action Plan for Education 2018*, are based only on the number of students that enter higher education on the basis of a QQI-FET qualification. The Progress Review outcome is calculated using the same metrics. The purpose of monitoring students that enter higher education on the basis of a QQI-FET award only is to enable a focus on students who may not have completed post-primary education to Leaving Certificate level or whose Leaving Certificate does not meet the entry requirements for higher education. A candidate is offered a higher education place on the basis of either a Leaving Certificate score or a QQI-FET score, not both. A focus on wider students with QQI-FET qualifications would not serve the purpose of the NAP and its focus on the target groups.

- Progress is limited in respect of the development of access and foundation courses. More substantive collaboration and partnership is required between further education and training and higher education institutions. Further education and training plays a critical role in preparing students for higher education and ensuring student success and better educational and labour market outcomes. This action surrounding pathways requires more sustained engagement between QQI, FET, and HEIs.
- The monitoring and evaluation processes and procedures embedded within the PATH funding strands will pose challenges, including at a resource level within higher education institutions. It is central that the learnings from each stage of PATH inform the next phases of their implementation and that the target increases expected from the PATH investment are achieved. It is also important that the infrastructure supporting disadvantaged students is connected and integrated strongly and reflects mainstreaming objectives.
- Progress is evident in respect of many of the actions under the mainstreaming goal. However, the consultation process conducted as part of this Progress Review highlighted that there is uncertainty in higher education institutions as to the meaning of mainstreaming and its operation in practice. It is clear that the mainstreaming ambition is not a well understood strategic priority within the higher education sector, and progress in implementing access champions within faculties has been limited.
- The communication of information on supports to students, particularly in relation to post-entry supports, is an area that requires further attention. Practices differ among higher education institutions, and better consistency in the dissemination of information is central to ensuring increased participation and progression of underrepresented groups. Greater clarity in the communication of information surrounding course content and skills requirements is also needed to ensure higher retention and completion rates for all students.
- Increased flexibility has been introduced in relation to the supports for students from the target groups, evident in the extension of the Student Assistance Fund to part-time students, and in the eligibility criteria for the PATH 2: 1916 Bursary Fund. However, greater flexibility at a system level is required to ensure student success and drive progress in relation to participation and progression. For example, the strict timeframes surrounding change of mind processes can be regarded as a key barrier to progression, as is the difficulty in transferring to another course within and between higher education institutions. However, it is recognised that these issues are beyond the scope of this Review and require a stronger systemic response.
- The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) poses some challenges in the collection of socio-economic group data and will have implications for future reporting on this specific target at the conclusion of this NAP. In addition, the GDPR is likely to impact on timeframes for the implementation of the Access Data Plan and on the advancement of the data sharing arrangements. Nonetheless, the necessity to expedite the implementation of the Plan and ensure the collection of robust data in respect of access is recognised, and an Implementation Group has been established to advance progress in respect of this.



- The realisation of targets in respect of certain target groupings will prove more difficult, including mature students, and Travellers. As is evident from the data presented in the next section, wider social, cultural and economic factors impact significantly on the higher education sector, and progress in respect of targets must be considered within this pervading context. For example, the target for full-time mature students will be impacted by a full employment economy, and the number of Traveller students that participate in higher education will be affected by the number of Traveller students that leave the post-primary school system before completion of the senior cycle. It is equally the case that these factors often lie beyond the control of the higher education sector, and so interventions to react to these factors may be required at an earlier phase of the education cycle.



# 4 PROGRESS ON NATIONAL TARGETS

## 4. PROGRESS ON NATIONAL TARGETS

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The NAP identified six priority groups who have been underrepresented in higher education and set quantitative targets for each of these groups. These are:

- Entrants from socio-economic groups that have low participation in higher education
- First time, mature students
- Students with disabilities
- Part-time/flexible learners
- Further education and training award holders
- Irish Travellers

The NAP also indicated subgroups that require particular support, including lone parents, teen parents, and ethnic minorities.

### 4.2 PROGRESS SINCE THE LAUNCH OF THE NATIONAL ACCESS PLAN

There has been a marked increase in overall student numbers, and in participation rates by students from a number of the target groups, including socio-economic groups and students with disabilities. In 2012/13 there were 41,413<sup>11</sup> new entrants to higher education, and this figure rose to 43,569 new entrants for the Progress Review year of 2016/17<sup>12</sup>. This is an important framing context in considering the progress in respect of targets to date and suggests that increases in participation should also be assessed on the basis of the overall increase in student numbers, as percentage values may provide an incomplete picture of the scale of the increase.

Table 1 presents the progress for each of these target groups, with a supplementary table presenting estimated participation rates by socio-economic groups provided in Appendix 3.

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11 HEA (2014), *Key Facts and Figures 2012/13*

12 HEA (2018), *Key Facts and Figures 2016/17*

**Table 1: Progress Review Outcomes for the Target Groups**

Target Group	NAP Base Data <sup>13</sup>	Progress Review outcome <sup>14</sup>	NAP target for 2019
<b>Participation in higher education by people disadvantaged by socio-economic barriers (as a % of 18-20 age cohort)<sup>15</sup>:</b>			
Non-manual worker group	23%	27%	30%
Semi/unskilled manual worker group	26%	36%	35%
<b>Participation in higher education by "first-time" mature students (as a % of all new entrants)<sup>16</sup>:</b>			
Full-time mature entrants to higher education	13%	9%	16%
Full-time and part-time/flexible (combined) mature entrants	19%	16%	24%
<b>Participation in higher education by people with disabilities<sup>17</sup>:</b>			
Students with disabilities as a % of all new entrants to higher education	6%	10%	8%
Number of students with physical/mobility disability	390	667	570
Number of students who are deaf/hard of hearing	210	306	280
Number of students who are blind/have a visual impairment	140	174	200
<b>Participation in part-time/flexible higher education<sup>18</sup>:</b>			
% of students studying on a part-time or flexible basis (undergraduate and postgraduate)	19%	19.8%	22%
<b>Progression to higher education by holders of further education qualifications<sup>19</sup>:</b>			
% of new entrants to higher education whose basis for admission is a further education and training qualification.	6.6%	7.3% <sup>20</sup>	10%
<b>Participation in higher education by Irish Travellers<sup>21</sup>:</b>			
Number of Irish Travellers in higher education (full and part-time undergraduate new entrants)	35	41	80

13 Data refers to 2012/13. Source: HEA Student Record System unless otherwise indicated.

14 Data refers to 2016/17. Source: HEA Student Record System unless otherwise indicated.

15 Source: Equal Access Survey 2011/12 and Census 2011 for base data, and Equal Access Survey 2016/17 and Census 2016 for Progress Review Outcome. Data refers to father's SEG. Only students on full-time courses who identified Ireland as country of residence are included.

16 Mature Student new entrants aged 23 or over on 1 January of year of entry to HE.

17 The percentage figure is derived from the Equal Access Survey. Data in relation to categories of disability is based on the number of full-time students in receipt of the Fund for Students with Disabilities.

18 Source: Student Record System, HEA. Figures are based on enrolment data.

19 Source: CAO.

20 Based on 2017/18 figures. A notable increase is evident from the 6.7% figure in 2016/17.

21 Source: Equal Access Survey.

## 4.3 ADDITIONAL INDICATORS

The NAP also identified a number of additional indicators that help to inform progress on NAP implementation and the delivery of increased equity of access. These include entry to higher education from students who have attended DEIS schools, students in receipt of the special rate of grant, and data based on postcodes.

### ***Entry to higher education from students who have attended DEIS schools:***

At the commencement of the NAP, there were 3,959 new entrants to higher education from DEIS schools<sup>22</sup>. This equates to a figure of 12% when expressed as a percentage of the total number of new entrants to higher education from DEIS and non-DEIS schools. Employing the same methodology, the Progress Review shows that the number of new entrants to higher education from DEIS schools for the 2016/17 academic year was 4,468, an increase of 509 students<sup>23</sup>. This corresponds to 13.5% when expressed as a percentage of the total number of new entrants to higher education from DEIS and non-DEIS schools. This represents an increase of 1.5% since the commencement of the NAP.

While these increases may appear marginal, they should be seen in the context of the increase in the overall number of new entrants to higher education during this period from 40,865<sup>24</sup> to 43,569<sup>25</sup>. It is anticipated that the pre-entry activities that are taking place as part of PATH funding initiatives will help to increase the level of participation by students from DEIS schools, in addition to the requirement in the new System Performance Framework 2018-2020 that every DEIS school will participate in a HEI-led access programme. Performance in respect of the goals of the Framework is actively monitored by the HEA via the Strategic Dialogue process.

### ***Students in receipt of the special rate of grant:***

At the outset of the NAP, SUSI and the HEA were working on the development of new mechanisms for sharing and analysing data. It was agreed that it is important to monitor the number of students entering higher education who are on the special rate of grant and are likely to be from backgrounds with long-term social protection dependency. At the time of the Progress Review, the data were not considered robust enough for publication, but it is expected that the implementation of the *Access Data Plan* will address this concern and ensure that these indicators can be reported on in the final review of the NAP. From 2019, HEIs will be required to return SUSI grant codes for each student in the Student Record System (SRS). This will ensure the collection of robust data to inform policy decisions and interventions.

### ***Data based on postcodes:***

Table 2 shows the participation rate by county both at the time of the commencement of the NAP and at the Progress Review stage.

Data by Dublin postal code is not available due to changes in the approach by the CSO to producing population data by age cohort for the traditional Dublin postal code districts. More advanced analysis and targeting of rates of participation by Small Area will be facilitated through the implementation of the *Access Data Plan*.

22 HEA, Student Record System, 2011/12

23 HEA, Student Record System, 2016/17

24 HEA (2013), *Key Facts and Figures 2011/12*

25 HEA (2018), *Key Facts and Figures 2016/17*

**Table 2: Estimated Participation Rates by County<sup>26</sup>**

	NAP Base Estimated Participation Rate (%) <sup>27</sup>	Progress Review Estimated Participation Rate (%) <sup>28</sup>
Carlow	55	59.7
Cavan	46	51.7
Clare	59	57.4
Cork	58	63.9
Donegal	41	50.9
Dublin	47	50.6
Galway	60	59.3
Kerry	54	63.7
Kildare	47	52.3
Kilkenny	53	56.1
Laois	41	45.9
Leitrim	60	61.5
Limerick	51	62.0
Longford	50	50.0
Louth	46	48.3
Mayo	60	61.9
Meath	49	51.3
Monaghan	54	57.7
Offaly	45	55.3
Roscommon	59	62.0
Sligo	58	68.4
Tipperary	51	57.3
Waterford	56	55.1
Westmeath	51	53.0
Wexford	49	53.1
Wicklow	53	52.5
<b>State Total</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>55.3</b>

26 New entrants aged 18 to 20, excluding new entrants to HEIs in Northern Ireland. As these participation rates do not include students who may be studying in HEIs in NI, it is likely that some counties (particularly border counties) may have somewhat higher participation rates than are shown in the above table.

27 First-time undergraduate new entrants aged 18 to 20 in 2011/12 academic year and population data from Census 2011.

28 First-time undergraduate new entrants aged 18 to 20 in 2016/17 academic year and population data from Census 2016.

## 4.4 COMMENTARY ON PROGRESS IN RESPECT OF NATIONAL TARGETS

### **Increases in Participation**

There have been significant increases in participation rates since work began on implementing the National Access Plan in December 2015. Participation in higher education across the State has increased from 51% to 55.3%, with a marked improvement in percentage points in almost every county. Participation in counties Dublin, Kilkenny, Roscommon, and Wexford respectively largely mirrors the State average increase of circa 4%, while counties Kerry, Limerick, Offaly, and Sligo each returned considerable increases of approximately 10%. It is noteworthy that significant increases in participation rates are evident in both rural and urban centres.

Increases are also evident in participation among the socio-economically disadvantaged target group. Of particular note is the substantial increase in participation amongst the semi/unskilled manual worker group from 26% to 36%. The target of 35% for the lifetime of the NAP has been exceeded with a 10% increase in participation by this target group since the commencement of the Plan. The non-manual worker group has also experienced gains, increasing from 23% to 27%. While progress has been more modest in respect of this category, the increase does suggest that the targets of 30% for the non-manual worker group will be achieved within the lifetime of the National Access Plan.

The most considerable progress toward realising the targets of the National Access Plan has been achieved amongst the disabilities target group. The target of 8% that was set for the lifetime of the Plan has been exceeded by the Progress Review stage. The overall participation rate has increased to 10%, and targets have equally been surpassed in respect of two of the three categories of disability. There has been a 71% increase in participation by students with physical or mobility disabilities, while participation rates by deaf students or those hard of hearing has increased by 46%. Participation by students that are blind or that have a vision impairment has increased by 24%. It is reasonable to expect that the target for 2019 in respect of students who are blind or have a vision impairment will be achieved over the lifetime of the Plan. In relation to the categories of disability prioritised in the NAP, the overall target for 2019 is an additional 310 students. Currently in the higher education system, there are an additional 407 students with the categories of disability prioritised in the NAP, an overall increase of 55% on the figure at the commencement of the Plan.

## Challenges remaining

As is to be expected at the mid-point of any initiative, there is still progress to be made in terms of increasing participation by some of the target groups. In particular, mature student participation has experienced a decline since the commencement of the implementation of the Plan. Participation has fallen from 13% to 9% for full-time students, and by 3% for full- and part-time students. This decline coincides with a period of economic recovery and labour market reactivation that was not foreseen when the targets for the National Access Plan were being set and this may be an influencing factor in the declining number of mature students. The targets surrounding mature student participation will be challenging to achieve within the lifetime of the Plan. However, it is anticipated that the implementation of PATH initiatives will help to offset this decline and contribute to an increase in mature student participation.

Closely aligned with this target group, it appears that the target of 22% surrounding part-time and flexible provision will pose a challenge to achieve, despite a marginal increase since the commencement of the implementation of the Plan. It is nonetheless expected that the extension of financial supports to part-time students such as the Student Assistance Fund will accelerate progress in this regard. In addition, in December 2017, €2 million in funding was allocated to lifelong and flexible learning initiatives in higher education, which will also assist in creating greater capacity in the system for flexible provision.

A marginal increase has also been recorded in respect of participation rates by holders of further education and training qualifications. The scale of the challenge to realise the 10% target for 2019 is significant. However, PATH 3 partnerships between higher education institutions and further education institutions should help the achievement of this target in the second phase of implementation of the NAP. It is also anticipated that the work being undertaken by the Transitions Sub-Group in mapping pathways from further education to higher education will drive progress in respect of this target.

Progress in relation to targets for Traveller students is less advanced than desirable at this stage in the implementation of the Plan. However, the gathering of precise data in respect of Traveller students is complicated by the reliance on self-identification. Drawing on data provided by Pavee Point, the *National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021*<sup>29</sup> indicates that the number of Traveller children who progress to higher education represents just 1% of the Traveller community. Census data from 2016 records the number of Irish Travellers at 30,987 and the number of Irish Travellers with higher education qualifications at 167, almost double the figure of 89 recorded in Census 2011. Combined with anecdotal evidence provided by higher education institutions, it is reasonable to conclude that it is likely that there are more Traveller students in the higher education system than are formally recorded. It is hoped that the PATH initiatives targeting participation by Traveller students will accelerate progress toward the realisation of the target set for the lifetime of the Plan. It is also hoped that the positive influence of these initiatives will encourage a higher degree of self-identification by Traveller students within the higher education system. In addition, the implementation of the Access Data Plan will also provide an opportunity to explore other means to collect data on Traveller participation.

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29 Department of Justice and Equality (2017), *National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021*







**5** CONCLUSIONS  
AND PROPOSED  
PRIORITIES  
FOR THE NEXT  
PHASE OF NAP  
IMPLEMENTATION

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSED PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT PHASE OF NAP IMPLEMENTATION

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The vision of the NAP is “to ensure that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland’s population”. The mid-term analysis of the data shows that substantial progress is being made towards the realisation of this vision. Challenges remain and there is work to be done. However, the findings of this Progress Review demonstrate evidence of a higher education system that is becoming more diverse and more equitable.

It is important that the outcomes reported in the Progress Review are considered within the wider context of the higher education system and wider social inclusion policy. The National Access Plan was developed and in the early stages of implementation during a period of significant financial distress for the higher education sector. The publication of the *Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education (Cassells Report)*<sup>30</sup> in 2016 highlighted the unsustainability of the higher education system continuing to operate in an environment of significant fiscal constraint and increasing student numbers. This straitened environment inevitably impacts on the capacity of HEIs to deliver, and in particular the Report emphasised the difficulty that arises in achieving national policy priority goals in areas such as access. The recent increases in budget allocation for higher education and the investment in access initiatives through PATH funding are therefore very welcome developments. The significant contribution that the HEIs have made to delivering ambitious national targets over the first phase of NAP implementation is lauded in this Progress Review.

Stakeholders communicated clearly in the consultations for the Progress Review that the NAP is a good plan and that the five priority goals are the right priorities and continue to be fit for purpose. At a high level, the initiatives of the NAP are working well. These findings demonstrate the value of the lengthy consultation process that informed and underpinned the development of the National Access Plan.

As part of the consultation process for the Progress Review, many stakeholders expressed the view that the National Access Plan is nonetheless highly ambitious. It is considered that the Plan may perhaps be too ambitious to be achieved within the remaining timeframe.

In addition, there are environmental factors outside of the control of the higher education sector that may impact on the delivery of the NAP goals and objectives. For example, the significant developments in European data protection regulation confer heightened responsibility in terms of data sharing arrangements, and ensuring compliance with GDPR will potentially decelerate the process of implementing some of the strands of the Access Data Plan.

Considering the findings from the Progress Review, sixteen recommendations across seven themes are proposed for the second phase of NAP implementation.

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30 Cassells, Peter (2016), *Investing in National Ambition: A Strategy for Funding Higher Education - Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education*

## 5.2 PROGRESS REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

### I. Demonstration and Evaluation of Impact of New Initiatives

#### 1. PATH evaluation:

- It is recommended that priority is given by the HEA to the monitoring and the evaluation of the three strands of PATH. Focus should be concentrated on measuring the impact of the initiative across higher education institutions in the short-, mid-, and long-term using qualitative and quantitative indicators. Higher education institutions must report on the additionality created by the initiative, the experience of students supported by PATH funding and academic and employment outcomes.

#### 2. Part-time students:

- The *Review of the Allocation Model for Funding Higher Education Institutions (RFAM)*<sup>31</sup> recommended that amended weightings should be applied to part-time students with disabilities, along with Travellers and students from targeted socio-economic groups on a pro-rata basis within the state grant allocations. The independent *Review of the Fund for Students with Disabilities*<sup>32</sup> also recommended that the Fund be extended to part-time students. It is important that their impact, when implemented, is monitored and evaluated to ensure that the targeted successful participation by part-time students alongside the other identified groups is achieved.
- It is recommended that an evaluation of the utilisation of new financial supports by part-time students through the Student Assistance Fund and PATH 2 is conducted at the conclusion of the period of the National Access Plan.

### II. National Targets and Target Groups

#### 3. National Targets:

The Review demonstrates the need to re-examine the targets in the *National Access Plan* to reflect the current landscape, goals contained within the new System Performance Framework, and the targets in relation to the PATH Fund.

- Socio-economically disadvantaged groups: It is recommended to increase these targets to reflect the progress to date, and the expected rise in participation by these groups on the foot of PATH initiatives.

31 HEA (2017), *Review of the Allocation Model for Funding Higher Education Institutions*

32 HEA (2017), *Review of the Fund for Students with Disabilities*

- Mature students: Rates of participation by mature students have declined since the commencement of this National Access Plan due in part to an economic upturn, the scale of which was unforeseen. However, it is recommended that the target set in the National Access Plan is retained. The more flexible approach within higher education that is being supported by increased Government investment should assist in the realisation of the original target. More effective means of promoting lifelong learning in line with the *National Skills Strategy 2025*<sup>33</sup> is also required. As reflected in the *Higher Education System Performance Report 2014-2017*<sup>34</sup>, it is imperative that we better communicate on a national level the opportunities provided by educational participation.
- Students with disabilities: Targets have been exceeded in respect of students with disabilities, and it is recommended to revise these targets upwards. However, given the scale of the increase in participation by this target group, it is suggested that the new targets are proportionate and attainable.
- Part-time/flexible learning: While the target in the NAP remains a challenge, it is recommended that this target is maintained. There is evidence that the rate of progress is accelerating and reaching the target will be assisted by initiatives including PATH and wider investment in flexible provision.
- Further education award holders: Progress has been slow in relation to the progression of further education award holders to higher education on the basis of their QQI-FET qualification. The target for this group should be retained at the NAP figure, as this is a recognised priority area for the next phase of NAP implementation.
- Irish Travellers: A significant challenge remains in achieving the target in respect of the Traveller target group. There is a difficulty in measuring the number of Traveller students in the higher education system, as self-identification is the only mechanism by which this information is captured. Self-identification problematises the capturing of accurate student data across a range of target groups, but is more pronounced in the case of the Traveller target group. It is hoped that the numerous initiatives under the strands of PATH funding aimed at increasing Traveller participation will assist in the realisation of the target and enhance understanding of the barriers that exist in respect of access to higher education by Traveller students.

#### 4. Clarity of existing targets and new indicators:

- More precision is needed surrounding targets in future national access plans. For example, the current *National Access Plan* includes a target to increase participation by first-time mature students. This should more explicitly indicate that the target refers to increasing participation by first-time mature students from the target groups. Equally the target in respect of part-time and flexible provision should more clearly underline a focus on participation by first-time mature students.
- It is also recommended that future plans identify more indicators that higher education institutions should report on in the strategic dialogue process, for example, pre-entry activities and numbers impacted, and relationships with DEIS schools and community organisations.

33 DES (2016), *National Skills Strategy 2025 – Ireland's Future*

34 HEA (2017), *Higher Education System Performance Report 2014-2017*

## 5. Target Groups:

- Arising from a Programme for Government commitment, a review of the barriers to lone parents accessing higher education was published in 2017<sup>35</sup>. The Review noted that lone parents are included as a sub-group in the current NAP. In the light of the Review, the inclusion of lone parents as a discrete target group in the *National Access Plan* should be considered. To facilitate consideration of this, baseline data should be collected in respect of lone parents accessing higher education. This is essential to enabling the development of appropriate targets.
- There should be scope for flexibility in the introduction of additional sub-groups within the target groups over the lifetime of the NAP, with attention paid to the emerging needs of students in DEIS schools. Children in care have particular needs and challenges in accessing higher education and their status as a sub-group within the overall target groups should be recognised.

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## III. Policy Implementation Priorities

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### 6. Mainstreaming:

- The consultation process with stakeholders from the HEIs highlighted a degree of ambiguity surrounding the concept and practice of mainstreaming. While the actions under this priority goal have largely been delivered, there is some uncertainty in respect of mainstreaming and how it should function within the context of a higher education institution. It is recommended that clear information on mainstreaming in practice and universal design is communicated to higher education institutions. The next phase of NAP implementation should develop a vision of what mainstreaming means so that there is a shared understanding across the higher education sector. Included in this work should be consideration of the feasibility of some actions, for example access champions in every faculty.

### 7. Pathways from FET to HE:

- It is recommended that progress in building coherent pathways from further education and training and fostering other entry routes to higher education is monitored as part of the Strategic Dialogue process. However, it must be acknowledged that higher education institutions are not the only stakeholders within the NAP and that the further education and training sector and the community education sector also have a key role in its successful implementation. There must be an emphasis on improving transparency for learners and ensuring that there is greater visibility surrounding progression options to higher education. In this respect, the establishment of the SOLAS led FET-HE Transitions Sub-Group under the Transitions Working Group is a welcome development.

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35 Byrne, Delma and Cliona Murphy (2017), *An Independent Review to Identify the Supports and Barriers for Lone Parents in Accessing Higher Education and to Examine Measures to Increase Participation*

## 8. Access and Foundation Courses:

- More work is needed in advancing progress in relation to the development of access and foundation courses by higher education institutions for delivery through further education institutions. While it is a stated national policy, it does not appear to be a policy that is being aspired to across the sector. This is a challenging action involving collaboration between further and higher education institutions and QQI.

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## IV. Communications

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### 9. Dissemination of information by HEIs:

- The engagement sessions with students as part of the Progress Review suggested that information on supports for students could be better communicated post-entry. The students referred to financial support as an enabling mechanism in accessing higher education. All participants were however unanimous in emphasising that academic and personal supports are fundamental to their continued participation in higher education. Participating students referred to peers that required support but that lacked awareness of relevant supports and how to access them. Knowledge of supports for students was far higher among those that entered higher education directly after school. A more structured and enhanced approach to reaching members of target groups that are outside the school system is required such as students in further education and community education programmes. It is recommended that higher education institutions review their practices around the communication and dissemination of information to ensure that all students are aware of the support infrastructure that is in place. This also places a responsibility on the DES and the HEA to advise HEIs of supported initiatives within the earliest possible timeframes so that HEIs can be effective in better communications to students.

### 10. Communication of information by the DES and the HEA:

- Greater clarity needs to be provided in communications surrounding access, particularly in respect of guidelines and eligibility. An example for the DES and the HEA to consider is the guidelines for the PATH 2 1916 Bursary Fund. It is recommended that the DES and the HEA review feedback in relation to PATH 2 in the first year of implementation and incorporate the learnings into the drafting of guidelines for subsequent years.

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## V. Period of NAP

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### 11. Extension:

- It is recommended that the term of the National Access Plan be extended by 2 years to 2021. This is necessary to allow for the implementation of the Access Data Plan and to ensure that the targets for the new National Access Plan are set based on the new data. Sufficient time needs to be provided for baseline data to be collected and verified. An extension of the term would also enable initiatives such as PATH to be more fully implemented and evaluated, and allow the learning outcomes to be used to inform the next National Access Plan.

**12. Prioritisation:**

- It is recommended that priority is given to actions that are related to the challenges identified for the second phase of implementation of the NAP and where progress is less advanced. It is suggested that particular priority is given to the building of pathways between further education and training and higher education, the embedding of access and foundation courses within further education, and to the clarification of the mainstreaming ambition.

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## VI. Capacity Issues

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**13. Resourcing:**

- Expectations for the remainder of the term of the National Access Plan should be cognisant of the capacity of higher level institutions to deliver additional new activities. While the PATH initiative has been embraced by the higher education sector, it is important to remain aware of the challenges of implementing the three strands of the funding and establishing the associated initiatives across clusters. Sufficient time must be afforded to the higher education institutions to deliver on their initiatives, and to embed new relationships and partnerships with community organisations. The positive effect of the bursaries awarded under PATH 2 are immediately apparent, but it will require time for the long-term impact in terms of retention and progression to be realised and measured. Higher education institutions are also involved in implementing new data requirements under ESF for the Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities. Policy needs to be cognisant of the capacity of higher education institutions to absorb significant new demands and deliver.

**14. Access Infrastructure:**

- Linked to recommendation 13 is the need for greater clarity on the infrastructure in place across the higher education system in individual institutions. The extension of supports and initiatives to part-time students necessitates an understanding of the capacity of the access infrastructure within individual higher education institutions to facilitate part-time students. Access services within higher education institutions were largely established to support full-time students and it is important that they are resourced to accommodate flexible learners. The HEA and the DES require a high-level understanding of the resources that higher education institutions are directing at access. This will facilitate better dissemination and sharing of good practices, such as mentoring programmes and student success initiatives.



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## VII. The Wider Higher Education System and the Education Life-Cycle

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### 15. Wider Higher Education System:

- It is suggested that consideration is given to creating greater flexibility within the higher education system in the consultation process for the next NAP. The strict timeframes surrounding the change of mind process and eligibility for the Free Fees Scheme, and the difficulties surrounding mobility across courses are cited as significant barriers to student success. This issue is wider than access and extends across the entire higher education sector.

### 16. Whole of education approach:

- The whole of education approach that informs the National Access Plan would be further enhanced by a wider Equity of Access to Education Plan. Such an education-wide plan would encompass policy strategies in respect of all levels of education and ensure that all policy interventions are working consistently with each other. This recommendation is rooted in the understanding that participation in higher education is inextricably bound to other societal and cultural challenges, which higher education institutions alone cannot address. Intervention at an early stage in the educational cycle is crucial to build aspiration toward higher education, and so a more holistic approach to access to education is required that also takes account of informal and invaluable networks such as community education.

A whole of education approach supports the sharing of data so that students are not required to provide data on the occasion of every transition. This has the benefit of relieving respondent burden and also overcoming the difficulties posed by reliance on self-identification to measure participation by specific target groups.

The background features a complex abstract graphic of overlapping white circles and lines on a green field. Some circles are solid, while others are dashed. Small white dots are placed at various points where the lines and circles intersect, creating a network-like structure. The overall design is clean and modern.

# 6 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN ARISING FROM THE PROGRESS REVIEW

## 6. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN ARISING FROM THE PROGRESS REVIEW

### I. Demonstration and Evaluation of Impact of New Initiatives

Recommendation	Action Plan	Responsibility
<p><b>1. PATH evaluation:</b></p> <p>It is recommended that priority is given by the HEA to the monitoring and the evaluation of the three strands of PATH to include short-, mid-, and long-term qualitative and quantitative indicators.</p>	<p>Centres of teaching excellence and regional clusters continue to provide bi-annual reports to the HEA on progress in the implementation of the three strands of PATH. These reports include qualitative and quantitative indicators, a report on expenditure and details of evaluation. The HEA will use these reports to make decisions regarding the continued funding of projects.</p> <p>Regular reporting on the evaluation process will continue to be provided by the HEA to the Steering Group for the NAP.</p> <p>The annual PATH Seminar (first seminar taking place in November 2018) will form part of an overall package of evaluation measures.</p> <p>An independent external impact evaluation of the PATH Fund will take place towards the end of the funding period.</p>	<p>DES/HEA/HEIs</p>

## I. Demonstration and Evaluation of Impact of New Initiatives

Recommendation	Action Plan	Responsibility
<p><b>2. Part-time students:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The Review of the Allocation Model for Funding Higher Education Institutions (RFAM) recommended that amended weightings should be applied to part-time students with disabilities, along with Travellers and students from targeted socio-economic groups on a pro-rata basis within the State grant allocations. The impact of these changes when implemented should be monitored and evaluated.</li> <li>■ The independent Review of the Fund for Students with Disabilities also recommended that the Fund be extended to part-time students. Evaluation of this measure should be embedded in its implementation.</li> <li>■ It is recommended that an evaluation of the utilisation of new financial supports by part-time students is conducted at the conclusion of the period of the National Access Plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ These recommendations are being progressed by the RFAM Review Implementation Group and will be supported by the implementation of the Access Data Plan.</li> <li>■ The principle of this recommendation is accepted and the extension of the FSD to part-time students is currently being considered by the DES and the Implementation Group for the Review of the Fund.</li> <li>■ Data on the use of financial supports for part-time students facilitated through new initiatives under PATH 2 and the Student Assistance Fund is gathered through regular reporting and will assist in the review at the conclusion of the NAP.</li> </ul>	<p>HEA</p> <p>DES/HEA</p> <p>HEA/HEIs</p>

## II. National Targets and Target Groups

Recommendation	Action Plan	Responsibility
<p><b>3. National targets:</b></p> <p>The Review demonstrates the need to re-examine the targets in the NAP to reflect the current landscape, goals contained in the new System Performance Framework, and the targets in relation to the PATH Fund.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Socio-economically disadvantaged groups: It is recommended to increase these targets to reflect the progress to date, and the expected rise in participation by these groups on the foot of PATH initiatives.</li> <li>■ Mature students: It is recommended that the target set in the NAP is retained.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Revised targets are presented in Table 3.</li> <li>■ The target in respect of non-manual worker and semi-unskilled manual worker is increased to 32% and 40% respectively, taking account of the scale of progress to date and reflecting other relevant policy interventions, such as the National Skills Strategy.</li> <li>■ The mature student target in the NAP represents a challenge, but its realisation should be facilitated by PATH initiatives. Research into participation by mature students will be commissioned to examine the key influencing factors, including challenges and barriers.</li> </ul>	DES/HEA/HEIs

## II. National Targets and Target Groups

Recommendation	Action Plan	Responsibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Students with disabilities: Targets have been exceeded in respect of students with disabilities, and it is recommended to revise these targets upwards in a proportionate manner.</li> <li>■ Part-time/flexible learning: While the target in the NAP remains a challenge, it is recommended that this target is maintained.</li> <li>■ Further education award holders: The target for this group should be retained at the NAP figure, as this is a recognised priority area for the next phase of NAP implementation.</li> <li>■ Irish Travellers: A significant challenge remains in achieving the target in respect of the Traveller target group, but the target of 80 should be retained.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ In relation to students with disabilities, the target rate for overall participation is increased to 12%. Targets in relation to students with a physical or mobility disability and students who are deaf or hard of hearing have been increased by 15% on the Progress Review outcome figure to reflect the percentage increase required to achieve the NAP target in respect of students who are blind or have a vision impairment. As this latter target has experienced the slowest rate of progress, it is suggested that the rate of increase required in relation to this category is an appropriate scale for the other categories that have experienced such significant increases to date.</li> <li>■ Ongoing initiatives including PATH and other interventions arising from the National Skills Strategy will impact positively on progress to reaching this target of 22%.</li> <li>■ Ongoing work and additional activities recommended by this Review to forge stronger collaboration between further and higher education institutions will assist in driving progress toward this 10% target.</li> <li>■ Given the view that the number of Traveller students in higher education is greater than formally recorded, the target from the NAP remains. The implementation of the Access Data Plan will enable the exploration of opportunities to better collect data on participation by Traveller students. A particular focus will be extended through PATH initiatives to increase participation by Travellers and we will seek to work with Traveller representative groups to develop an interagency approach within existing structures.</li> </ul>	<p>DES/HEA/HEIs</p>

## II. National Targets and Target Groups

Recommendation	Action Plan	Responsibility
<p><b>4. Clarity of existing targets and new indicators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ More precision is needed surrounding targets in future national access plans.</li> <li>■ It is also recommended that future plans will identify more indicators that higher education institutions should report on in the strategic dialogue process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ It is accepted that greater clarity is needed in the identification of target groups. Greater precision in target setting for the next NAP will be facilitated by the implementation of the Access Data Plan which is being overseen by a DES-led Implementation Group.</li> </ul> <p>This work of the Implementation Group includes engaging closely with stakeholders to put in place the necessary arrangements for the collection of data such as Eircodes and addresses. Future target setting will also review the data sources that underpin targets for participation by students with a disability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Extension of the NAP to 2021 will also align it with the timeframe of the current System Performance Framework which covers the period 2018-2020. This will facilitate the collation of robust baseline data, the development of new qualitative indicators, and a more integrated relationship between the informing policy context and institutional strategies.</li> </ul>	HEA/DES/HEIs
<p><b>5. Target Groups:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ In the light of the publication of the report on the barriers to lone parents accessing higher education in 2017, the inclusion of lone parents as a discrete target group in the National Access Plan should be considered.</li> <li>■ There should be scope for flexibility in the introduction of additional sub-groups within the target groups over the lifetime of the NAP, with attention paid to the emerging needs of students in DEIS schools.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ As part of the implementation of the Access Data Plan, the HEA will explore the opportunities to collect data on participation by lone parents in higher education.</li> <li>■ Consideration is being given to the linking of Access Officers and the Home School Community Liaison Officers in DEIS schools in relation to initiatives targeting children in care.</li> </ul>	HEA  DES/HEIs

III. Policy Implementation Priorities		
Recommendation	Action Plan	Responsibility
<p><b>6. Mainstreaming:</b> It is recommended that clear information on mainstreaming in practice and universal design is communicated to higher education institutions. The next phase of NAP implementation should develop a vision of what mainstreaming means so that there is a shared understanding across higher education.</p>	<p>Research will be commissioned on mainstreaming with a view to achieving clarity on what it means for HEIs in terms of structures, policies, procedures, etc. and associated capacity and expertise requirements across HEIs. The detailed terms of reference for this research need to be considered carefully and should include consideration of the importance of organisational commitment to equity of access and best practice examples of the implementation of universal design to support and enable successful outcomes for all students.</p>	DES/HEA
<p><b>7. Pathways from FE to HE:</b> It is recommended that progress in building coherent pathways from further education and fostering other entry routes to higher education is monitored as part of the Strategic Dialogue process.</p>	<p>Institutional compacts with the HEA will be finalised in quarter four of 2018. The current System Performance Framework will run until 2020, and the HEA will meet with the institutions each year over the lifetime of the compact and monitor progress in respect of this action.</p> <p>Updates from the FET-HE Sub-Group will be added as a standing agenda item for meetings of the Steering Group of the NAP.</p>	HEIs/HEA DES SOLAS QQI
<p><b>8. Access and Foundation Courses:</b> More work is needed in advancing progress in relation to the development of access and foundation courses by higher education institutions for delivery through further education institutions.</p>	<p>More work is needed to bring further and higher education providers together in the context of the access strategies in place across the regional clusters. As part of the Strategic Dialogue process, the HEA will evaluate the progress of HEIs in working with further education providers in the shared and collaborative delivery of access and foundation courses.</p> <p>Regular updates by the FET-HE Sub-Group to the Steering Group of the NAP will be provided to ensure greater knowledge sharing and the monitoring of progress in relation to the development of joint access provision.</p> <p>Based on the monitoring by the HEA and updates from the Sub-Group, the Steering Group for the NAP will make recommendations to further progress this action.</p>	HEIs/HEA DES SOLAS QQI



IV. Communications		
Recommendation	Action Plan	Responsibility
<p><b>9. Dissemination of information by HEIs:</b> It is recommended that higher education institutions review their practices around the communication and dissemination of information to ensure that all students are aware of the support infrastructure that is in place.</p>	<p>The HEA will request that HEIs review their practices to ensure information is being communicated to students and prospective students in a consistent manner.</p>	HEIs/HEA
<p><b>10. Communication of information by the DES and the HEA:</b> Greater clarity needs to be provided in communications surrounding access, particularly in respect of guidelines and eligibility.</p>	<p>The DES and the HEA will work to facilitate a reasonable lead-in time for new initiatives in order to allow HEIs to put in place appropriate systems and mechanisms for the communication of related information to students.</p> <p>The DES and the HEA revised the guidelines for the implementation of PATH 2 in 2018/19 in the light of the feedback from the clusters on implementation of the Fund in 2017/18. The DES and the HEA will work on an ongoing and collaborative basis to ensure that clarity is at the centre of all outward communications. Continued consultation with stakeholders will take place to ensure the effective communication of information.</p>	DES/HEA

V. Period of the NAP		
Recommendation	Action Plan	Responsibility
<p><b>11. Extension:</b> It is recommended that the term of the National Access Plan be extended by 2 years to 2021.</p>	<p>The term of the NAP will be extended until 2021. The extension will also enable alignment of the consultation processes for the next NAP with the next System Performance Framework.</p> <p>A stakeholder consultation process will take place in 2020 to review the current NAP and inform the development of the next NAP.</p>	DES/HEA
<p><b>12. Prioritisation:</b> It is recommended that priority is given to actions that are related to the challenges identified for the second phase of implementation of the NAP, including the building of pathways between FET and HE, the embedding of access and foundation courses within further education institutions, and to further advancement of the mainstreaming ambition.</p>	<p>These particular priorities arise from the comparatively limited progress in respect of these actions. In addition to active monitoring of progress in respect of further and higher education collaboration by the HEA, research on mainstreaming will also be commissioned. Closer and more regular engagement between the FET-HE Sub-Group and the Steering Group for the NAP will take place to ensure the alignment of policy objectives.</p> <p>Priority must equally be given to ongoing commitments including the embedding of PATH initiatives and the associated learnings, implementation of the Access Data Plan, and the development of Student Success initiatives.</p>	DES/HEA/HEIs

VI. Capacity Issues		
Recommendation	Action Plan	Responsibility
<p>13. <b>Resourcing:</b> Expectations for the remainder of the term of the National Access Plan should be cognisant of the capacity of higher level institutions to deliver additional new activities.</p>	<p>A review of access infrastructure will facilitate a more enhanced understanding of the capacity within higher education institutions.</p> <p>In addition, it is expected that the bi-annual reporting required under PATH and the external evaluation of the Programme will provide stronger insight into the scale of the challenge it posed to HEIs and the associated learnings for all stakeholders.</p> <p>The outcomes of these reviews will inform the consultation process for the next NAP.</p>	DES/HEA
<p>14. <b>Access Infrastructure:</b> The HEA and the DES require a high-level understanding of the resources that higher education institutions are directing at access.</p>	<p>Terms of reference and objectives for a review of access infrastructure will be developed and the review undertaken.</p>	DES/HEA

## VII. The Wider Higher Education System and the Education Life-Cycle

Recommendation	Action Plan	Responsibility
<p>15. <b>Wider Higher Education System:</b> It is suggested that consideration is given to creating greater flexibility within the higher education system in the consultation process for the next NAP.</p>	<p>The DES and the HEA will engage in discussions with stakeholders involved in the provision of higher education and higher education supports in order to determine how more flexible approaches to regulations surrounding student supports can be addressed.</p>	<p>DES/HEA</p>
<p>16. <b>Whole of education approach:</b> The whole of education approach that informs the National Access Plan would be further enhanced by a wider Equity of Access to Education Plan.</p>	<p>The DES will consider potential approaches to the whole of education approach through its Social Inclusion Policy Unit and the Higher Education Equity of Access Unit. The DES will also work to facilitate structural linkages with relevant national and community organisations.</p>	<p>DES</p>

**Table 3: Revised Targets 2018-2021**

Target Group	NAP Base Data <sup>36</sup>	Progress Review outcome <sup>37</sup>	NAP target for 2019	Revised target for 2021
<b>Participation in higher education by people disadvantaged by socio-economic barriers (as a % of 18-20 age cohort)<sup>38</sup>:</b>				
Non-manual worker group	23%	27%	30%	32%
Semi/unskilled manual worker group	26%	36%	35%	40%
<b>Participation in higher education by "first-time" mature students (as a % of all new entrants)<sup>39</sup>:</b>				
Full-time mature entrants to higher education	13%	9%	16%	16%
Full-time and part-time/flexible (combined) mature entrants	19%	16%	24%	24%
<b>Participation in higher education by people with disabilities<sup>40</sup>:</b>				
Students with disabilities as a % of all new entrants to higher education	6%	10%	8%	12%
Number of students with physical/mobility disability	390	667	570	767
Number of students who are deaf/hard of hearing	210	306	280	352
Number of students who are blind/have a visual impairment	140	174	200	200
<b>Participation in part-time/flexible higher education<sup>41</sup>:</b>				
% of students studying on a part-time or flexible basis (undergraduate and postgraduate)	19%	19.8%	22%	22%
<b>Progression to higher education by holders of further education qualifications<sup>42</sup>:</b>				
% of new entrants to higher education whose basis for admission is a further education qualification	6.6%	7.3%	10% <sup>43</sup>	10%
<b>Participation in higher education by Irish Travellers<sup>44</sup>:</b>				
Number of Irish Travellers in higher education (full and part-time undergraduate new entrants)	35	41	80	80

36 Data refers to 2012/13. Source: HEA Student Record System unless otherwise indicated.

37 Data refers to 2016/17. Source: HEA Student Record System unless otherwise indicated.

38 Source: Equal Access Survey 2011/12 and Census 2011 for base data, and 2016/17 and Census 2016 for Progress Review Outcome. Data refers to father's SEG. Only students on full-time courses who identified Ireland as country of residence are included.

39 Mature Student new entrants aged 23 or over on 1 January of year of entry to HE.

40 The percentage figure is derived from the Equal Access Survey. Data in relation to categories of disability is based on the number of full-time students in receipt of the Fund for Students with Disabilities.

41 Source: Student Record System, HEA. Figures are based on enrolment data.

42 Source: CAO.

43 Based on 2017/18 figures. A notable increase is evident from the 6.7% figure in 2016/17.

44 Source: Equal Access Survey.



**APPENDIX 1:  
NAP – IMPLEMENTATION  
STRUCTURES**

# APPENDIX 1:

## NAP – IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURES

Following the launch of the NAP the Department of Education and Skills established a Steering Group to oversee the implementation of the NAP. The Terms of Reference for this group are:

- To monitor progress towards implementation of the National Access Plan for 2015-2019.
- To advise the Department of Education and Skills and the Higher Education Authority on challenges and opportunities that arise during implementation of the Plan.
- To ensure a coordinated approach to the implementation of the Plan.
- To assist in the development of specific actions and targeted initiatives contained in the Plan.
- To participate in sub-groups that may be established to progress work on specific aspects of the Plan.
- To assist in the planning of the National Access Forum that will be held on an annual basis to report on progress under the Plan.

The Group is chaired by the Department of Education and Skills and the following organisations/groups are represented on the National Steering Committee:


- Higher Education Authority
- Social Inclusion Unit, DES
- Special Education Unit, DES
- Further Education and Training Section, DES
- Technological Higher Education Association (THEA)
- Irish Universities Association (IUA)
- Union of Students Ireland (USI)
- National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
- Representative of Access Officers
- Representative of Mature Student Officers
- Representative of Disability Officers
- SOLAS/Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)
- Pavee Point
- Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD)
- AONTAS

Other groups may be invited to attend meetings of the Steering Committee on particular issues or may be asked to participate in sub-groups that may be established to focus on particular issues.

The Steering Group has met seven times to date, normally three times a year. Working Groups are established to progress particular issues, for example the Working Group on Initial Teacher Education chaired by the DES and the Working Group on Student Success chaired by the HEA. Day-to-day responsibility for progressing implementation is the responsibility of the DES and the HEA.

An annual forum took place in January 2017 and in January 2018, and another is planned for 2019. The annual forum provides an important opportunity for structured reporting to stakeholders on progress under the NAP.

The Strategic Dialogue and agreement of compacts process is a primary means for the review of HEI performance on equity of access.



**APPENDIX 2:  
ANALYSIS OF PROGRESS  
ON PRIORITY GOALS  
IN THE NAP**



## APPENDIX 2: ANALYSIS OF PROGRESS ON PRIORITY GOALS IN THE NAP

### Goal 1: To Mainstream The Delivery Of Equity Of Access In HEIs

Objective	Action	Progress Review Outcome
<p><b>1.1</b> To embed whole-of-HEI approaches to institutional access strategies so that access for under-represented groups is prioritised across all faculties.</p>	<p>Each faculty to designate an 'access champion' to support and advise on implementation of institutional access strategy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Limited progress has been achieved on the designation of access champions. It is not happening across HEIs. Feedback would suggest that HEIs require more support in actioning this. It also requires greater levels of understanding and buy-in from across all areas and departments of a HEI.</li> </ul>
<p><b>1.2</b> To address issues that may arise for students from the target groups within mainstream supports and services.</p>	<p>In consultation with access services, supports (including post-entry supports) for students from target groups to be addressed primarily through mainstream student services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ There is some progress most notably in disability services where, through the work of AHEAD and DAWN on inclusive learning, there is a real drive to apply universal design principles and mainstream supports for students with a disability. However, implementation will take time and is likely to be slow. More generally, it is reasonable to state that the mainstreaming of supports is not a priority that is evident at the highest levels of planning in HEIs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>1.3</b> To reflect the goals, objectives and targets of this National Access Plan in HEI and joint institutional strategies and in the annual compacts arising from the strategic dialogue process.</p>	<p>HEI access strategies to be aligned with the policy and targets as set out in this National Access Plan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The HEA is agreeing a new round of compacts with HEIs in 2018. This is the first round of compacts agreed since the launch of the NAP. The HEA will be ensuring that the goals, objectives and targets of the NAP will be included in all HEI compacts.</li> </ul>

Objective	Action	Progress Review Outcome
<p><b>1.4</b> To address the issue of noncompletion of programmes, particularly for those in under-represented target groups.</p>	<p>A working group will consider the issues contributing to non-completion with a view to producing recommendations. The working group's deliberations will be informed by research commissioned by the HEA and progressed by the National Forum for Teaching and Learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Much progress has been made on this objective. The Department of Education and Skills High-Level Implementation Group that is overseeing the implementation of the NAP has established a Working Group on Student Success that is chaired by the HEA to progress initiatives that will support HEIs in delivering student success for all students and especially students in the target groups. Over the past 18 months this Group has overseen a detailed scoping study. Listening to, and understanding, the student perspective was core to this work which sought to identify the key issues and interventions that will contribute to further supporting student success. These include:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The use of data to inform faculty and administration so that they can better support students. The National Forum for Teaching and Learning Data-Enabled Student Success Initiative (DESSI) is working with HEIs to assist them in enhancing their use of data to support students.</li> <li>■ The implementation of a Strategy for Student Success in every HEI that involves a whole-of-institution approach. Accordingly, the System Performance Framework, 2018-2020 has now included a requirement for this Strategy in every HEI. The HEA in conjunction with the National Forum for Teaching and Learning will assist HEIs in kickstarting its development at a Strategy for Student Success Development Seminar.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Objective	Action	Progress Review Outcome
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ THEA is to commence a longitudinal study of the experience and outcomes of students who commence Level 6 and 7 programmes to identify issues that emerge for these students and that can be addressed by the HEIs.</li> <li>■ The HEA will facilitate dissemination seminars to assist HEIs in sharing good practice and student success initiatives that are being applied across the higher education system.</li> </ul>
<p><b>1.5</b> To research how teaching and related supports for students from target groups can be reflected as part of the overall strategy of each institution.</p>	<p>Seminar series and other research will be drawn on to advise on the best academic supports for students from target access groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ This issue was addressed in the scoping work discussed under 1.4. One of the outputs agreed under that work also included a commitment that the HEA would host a dissemination seminar on an annual basis to facilitate practitioners from HEIs to share information and experiences of what works well. The first seminar took place in 2018</li> <li>■ HEIs will have an opportunity to self-reflect on this issue as they prepare Strategies for Student Success in their institutions. As part of the System Performance Framework, 2018-2020 HEIs are required to put in place whole-of-institution Student Success Strategies by 2020. The HEA in partnership with the National Forum for Teaching and Learning facilitated a session in May 2018 to support HEIs in considering their approach to the development of these strategies.</li> </ul>

Objective	Action	Progress Review Outcome
<p><b>1.6</b> To extend the use of mentors and student role models beyond pre-entry stage, and to continue to support students while they are in higher education.</p>	<p>HEIs to review post-entry mentoring programmes.</p> <p>Model of how best to use mentors and student role models to be agreed and developed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The HEA hosted a seminar on mentoring programmes in 2016. It was well attended by HEIs and showcased several successful approaches to student mentoring. Following the event, it was agreed that mentoring has an important role to play in supporting students and that HEIs should work to ensure that there are opportunities available for students to be mentored. Rather than prescribing a model, the HEA should facilitate opportunities to share best practise and learning. This will be achieved as part of student success best practice seminars. Mentoring is also a feature of PATH 3 proposals.</li> </ul>
<p><b>1.7</b> To increase access by students from target groups to initial teacher education.</p>	<p>Development of access programmes and routes to teacher training. This will be informed by previous work in this area by Colleges of Education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The Minister for Education and Skills provided funding of €2.7million over three years to support projects in the Centres for Teaching Excellence to increase access by students from target groups to initial teacher education (PATH Strand 1). The HEA is managing the fund. The funding was allocated on a competitive basis and all six Centres now have projects underway. The HEA is monitoring the projects and it is expected that there will be an increase in numbers from the target groups accessing teacher education in the 2018/19 academic year. The funding of these projects will be contingent on satisfactory progress and increases in student numbers.</li> </ul>
<p><b>1.8</b> To ensure that teacher education and professional development programmes support the raising of expectations among students in relation to their higher education potential.</p>	<p>HEA will input into the current Teaching Council consultation process on CPD.</p> <p>The HEA will input into the review of the Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The HEA made a submission to the strategic planning process in the Teaching Council that addressed this issue. Future engagement with the Teaching Council and the Teacher Education Section of the Department of Education and Skills will take place over the remaining period of the NAP.</li> </ul>

## Goal 2: To assess the impact of current initiatives to support equity of access in HEIs

Objective	Action	Progress Review Outcome
<p><b>2.1</b> To review how the HEA's Recurrent Grant Allocation Model (RGAM) supports an access infrastructure in each HEI.</p>	<p>The access infrastructure in each HEI will be considered (including the extent to which the access functions are reflected across the institution); and to determine if core funding is being applied appropriately to support an access infrastructure in HEIs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The review of the RGAM was published in February 2018 and the implementation of the recommendations has commenced. The review found that equity of access is a key national priority and that it is appropriate that it is funded from within core HEI funding. Also recommended was that access metrics should be applied to part-time students in the allocation of funding. Overall the funding amounts allocated in respect of access metrics will increase.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.2</b> To review the Student Assistance Fund (SAF).</p>	<p>The HEA will commission an independent review of the SAF to determine if the fund is fit for current purpose; and to make recommendations on future policy and operation of the fund.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ This review has been completed and the HEA is chairing an Implementation Group that is overseeing the implementation of the recommendations. A key measure has been the development of the allocation model for the Fund that provides for greater funding to be allocated to HEIs with the most students in financial need.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.3</b> To review the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD).</p>	<p>The HEA will commission an independent review of the FSD which will make recommendations for the future policy and operation of the fund.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ This review has been completed and the HEA is chairing an Implementation Group that is overseeing the implementation of the recommendations. The priority will be the development of a new model of allocation that will assist HEIs in the strategic development of their disability services. Extension of the FSD to part-time students is currently under consideration.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.4</b> To examine the issue of financial supports for part-time students from underrepresented target groups.</p>	<p>The HEA and the DES will consider the potential for reviewing options for funding access to part-time studies in the context of the overall financial resources available for higher education and considering the recommendations of the Expert Group on Future Funding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ There have been very positive developments on this issue including the allocation of SAF funding for part-time students for the first time. In addition, PATH 2 bursaries (amounting to €5,000 per year for every year of study) may be allocated to part-time students.</li> </ul>

## Goal 3: To gather accurate data and evidence on access and participation and to base policy on what that data tells us

Objective	Action	Progress Review Outcome
<p><b>3.1</b> To develop an overall data strategy for equity of access.</p>	<p>Progress HEA-SUSI data sharing project.</p> <p>Explore new projects with SOLAS and other agencies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The Data Access Plan was developed with the assistance of TH Consultants and involving key stakeholders and experts – DES, HEA, CSO, SOLAS, Professor Pat Clancy. It is a landmark Plan and sets out a new framework for evidence-based policy making and target setting for equity of access. Implementation will commence under the direction of an Implementation Group chaired by the Department of Education and Skills.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3.2</b> To review current and new data to see how this may be developed to identify geographic areas with high levels of disadvantage; and to analyse rates of participation in higher education from those areas.</p>	<p>Develop model to analyse geographic patterns of access to higher education.</p> <p>Subject to the outcome of this work, review targets for participation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ This will be addressed in the implementation of the Access Data Plan.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3.3</b> To develop mechanisms to track progression, retention rates and the student experience of underrepresented target groups, including students being supported by the SAF and the FSD.</p>	<p>Further develop systems to track progression, retention rates and the student experience of target student groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ These are areas that are being considered in the context of the SAF and FSD Implementation Groups and which also need to be considered in the context of GDPR.</li> <li>■ Led by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, the Data-Enabled Student Success Initiative (DESSI) is providing support and informed guidance to HEIs to explore or seek to develop their capacity for utilising student data to support learners and learning. The initiative is central to the monitoring of progression and retention and the implementation of appropriate interventions.</li> </ul>

Objective	Action	Progress Review Outcome
<p><b>3.4</b> To review progression to employment and postgraduate studies by students from target access groups.</p>	<p>Review current and potential data sources in order to develop a methodology to track outcomes for students from target groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ A new Graduate Outcomes Survey has been developed and was piloted in 2017. It is integrated with the SRS database and the outcomes will be available later in 2018. The SUSI grant has also been restored to postgraduate students, and from 2019 SUSI grant codes will form part of SRS returns.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3.5</b> To monitor the participation and outcomes for entrants from DEIS schools.</p>	<p>Continued analysis by DES and HEA (of participation and outcomes for entrants from DEIS schools).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Work is ongoing in relation to this. Participation by entrants from DEIS schools is captured in the progression studies conducted by the HEA.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3.6</b> To consult with students and prospective students to inform the implementation and development of access policy.</p>	<p>Structured engagement with student representatives, in particular those from groups targeted by access policies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Student consultation has been a hallmark of NAP implementation to date. Key consultations that have informed policy and interventions included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Student participation at the Annual Access Forum</li> <li>■ Student participation at every stage of the Student Success Working Group scoping sessions</li> <li>■ Student consultations in the reviews of the SAF and FSD</li> <li>■ Student consultation in the development of this progress review</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>3.7</b> To share knowledge and disseminate information on effective initiatives relating to access.</p>	<p>a) Convene annual forums of access practitioners, researchers and community/voluntary groups working in higher education through the REAL network for research on access and lifelong learning.</p> <p>(b) Commission a research project to analyse existing HEI linkages and associated access-related activities with schools, and to identify and disseminate effective practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Annual access fora held in January 2017 and 2018.</li> <li>■ PATH dissemination seminar planned for November 2018.</li> <li>■ Research project on HEI linkages with schools, particularly DEIS schools, to be progressed as part of the next phase of NAP implementation.</li> </ul>

Objective	Action	Progress Review Outcome
<p><b>3.8</b> To review the qualitative indicators of progress on access already in place in HEIs, and to advise the HEA on developing a framework to support good practice.</p>	<p>a) Qualitative indicators reviewed as part of the strategic dialogue process.</p> <p>(b) A framework to support good practice will be developed based on this review and other evidence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ This action was not progressed in the first phase of NAP implementation. HEA will be better placed to progress this and develop framework after new compacts are agreed with HEIs in September 2018.</li> </ul>



## Goal 4: To build coherent pathways from further education and to foster other entry routes to higher education

Objective	Action	Progress Review Outcome
<p><b>4.1</b> To support a more coherent and systematic approach by institutions (working within their regional clusters) providing different pathways and supporting the transition to higher education.</p>	<p>As agreed in the 2014-16 compacts, each regional cluster to map and develop clear student pathways, including those between further and higher education as well as other alternative pathways.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work is ongoing. Some regional clusters are more advanced than others, but all are progressing and strengthening links and progression pathways with the FEs in their regions, including as part of PATH 3 initiatives. An FET-HE Working Group has been established under the guidance of the Transitions Reform Steering Group. Specifically, this group will map and evaluate current FET-HE transitions practice and data across the further education and training and higher education sectors and will develop proposals so that education and training qualifications from the FET sector are recognised for entry into higher education in an agreed and consistent manner.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4.2</b> To develop and implement Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy across the higher education sector.</p>	<p>All HEIs to put in place a RPL policy, and to engage with QQI in the development of an overall national RPL framework.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scoping Paper produced and initial consultation with stakeholders held.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4.3</b> To ensure further education graduates from target groups are eligible for supplementary access routes on the same basis as Leaving Certificate applicants.</p>	<p>To extend the HEAR and DARE schemes, in conjunction with stakeholders, to allow for the inclusion of further education graduates.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An FE policy group is working under the HEAR/DARE Policy Group and is looking at options for how further education entry can be better facilitated through a HEAR/DARE type model.</li> </ul>

Objective	Action	Progress Review Outcome
<p><b>4.4</b> To increase access to the professions, high-points courses and postgraduate courses by students from target groups.</p>	<p>Review evidence on access by target groups to professional disciplines and high-points courses.</p> <p>Develop recommendations to increase access by target groups to the professions and high-points courses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Access to the teaching profession has been prioritised over the first stage of NAP implementation. €2.7 million has been allocated over three years to support the Centres for Teaching Excellence to implement measures to increase access to teacher training from the target groups. The priority for the next phase of implementation will be ensuring that significant increases in participation are achieved.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4.5</b> FET and HEIs to work in partnership to develop access and foundation courses that would be delivered through further education.</p>	<p>HEIs to review access and foundation course provision in collaboration within FET as part of work to develop student pathways within regional clusters.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ HEIs and FET have not substantially progressed this policy objective. It is an area that will need renewed attention in the next phase of NAP implementation.</li> </ul>

## Goal 5: To Develop Regional and Community Partnership Strategies for increasing access to Higher Education with a Particular Focus On Mentoring

Objective	Action	Progress Review Outcome
<p><b>5.1</b> To develop strategies for increasing access to higher education in communities with low participation levels.</p>	<p>Local pilot initiatives will be established in the context of the new regional clusters and the LCDCs with a view to increasing access and participation in higher education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The PATH 3 Higher Education Access Fund amounting to €7.5 million over three years is targeted at supporting the establishment of these initiatives. The Fund is supporting innovative activities and partnerships between HEIs and community organisations. The initiatives are underpinned by the PATH 2 1916 Bursaries that assist students from particularly low participating areas to overcome financial barriers. The priority for the next phase of implementation will be ensuring that significant increases in participation are achieved.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5.2</b> To strengthen the linkages between higher education institutions and local communities.</p>	<p>Implementation by each HEI/regional cluster of civic engagement strategies. These should be included in compact objectives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ PATH 3 initiatives will support the strengthening of these links. It was evident from the PATH 2 &amp; 3 proposal evaluation process that the regional clusters are actively engaged with their communities and continually working to strengthen relationships and engagements.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5.3</b> To develop mentoring programmes and initiatives for students in second level by regional clusters in collaboration with second level schools, enterprise and community groups.</p>	<p>Regional clusters and local taskforces examine scope for increasing current provision. HEA to identify and disseminate best practice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Mentoring initiatives are ongoing throughout all of the regional clusters and many are being further supported through PATH 3 funding. Over the next phase of NAP implementation, it will be necessary to identify the various initiatives in place with a view to best practice sharing and dissemination.</li> </ul>



**APPENDIX 3:  
ESTIMATED  
PARTICIPATION RATES  
BY SOCIO-ECONOMIC  
GROUP**

## APPENDIX 3: ESTIMATED PARTICIPATION RATES BY SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUP

**Table 4: Estimated Participation Rates by Socio-Economic Group**

	Population 2011 <sup>45</sup>	Population 2016 <sup>46</sup>	New Entrants 2011 <sup>47</sup>	New Entrants 2016 <sup>48</sup>	Estimated Participation Rate 2011	Estimated Participation Rate 2016
A. Employers and managers	10,531	11,539	6,617	7,562	64%	65.5%
B. Higher professional	3,222	3,845	3,842	4,636	119%	120.6%
C. Lower professional	6,790	7,418	3,229	3,635	48%	49.0%
D. Non-manual	13,976	15,443	3,154	4,188	23%	27.1%
E. Manual skilled	7,429	7,161	3,800	3,903	51%	54.5%
F. Semi-skilled	7,531	7,937	1,840	2,147	24%	27.1%
G. Unskilled	3,064	2,997	751	1,805	25%	60.2%
H. Own account workers	1,963	1,813	2,860	2,626	146%	144.8%
I. Farmers	1,620	1,454	2,692	2,797	166%	192.4%
J. Agricultural workers	470	453	280	145	60%	32.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>56,596</b>	<b>60,060</b>	<b>29,164</b>	<b>33,445</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>55.7%</b>

45 Source: 17-19 year olds as counted in the 2011 Census. An assumption is made that this age group will be one year older entering higher education. Those with an unknown SEG are redistributed using a methodology developed for *Who Went to College in 2004* (HEA, 2006). 40% are distributed pro-rata among the non-manual SEG and 60% among the manual SEG.

46 Source: 17-19 year olds as counted in the 2016 Census.

47 Source: HEA Equal Access Survey. 18-20 first year undergraduate entrants to higher education.

48 Source: HEA Equal Access Survey. 18-20 first year undergraduate entrants to higher education.



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