An Roinn Breisoideachais agus Ardoideachais,
Taighde, Nuálaíochta agus Eolaíochta
Department of Further and Higher Education,
Research, Innovation and Science

Evidence Base for the Tertiary Sector: System Inclusion

DFHERIS Sectoral Research and Evaluation Group

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Table of Contents

1 Introduction

This paper is the third of three scoping papers proposed by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) Sectoral Research & Evaluation Group (see appendix I) and considers evidence in the area of equality, diversity and inclusion in the Tertiary sector.

The paper brings together current activity within the system to monitor and to reflect progress towards inclusion/equality targets across the Tertiary System. The evidence base will focus on 'at-risk' groups, targeted in key sectoral strategies, and issues impacting access and participation across all levels of the system. Along with the baseline papers on outcomes and transitions, this paper provides an initial outline of evidence generated within the Department and its core agencies. It is not an exhaustive compilation of relevant research and analysis in the area under consideration.

It is intended that this work will:-

- Bring together the existing evidence base which demonstrates the contribution of the tertiary system to society and to individuals.
- Provide a structure to underpin the promotion of the impacts of the tertiary sector and its component elements to policy makers, sectoral stakeholders and the public to inform decision making, both at a national policy level and to individuals seeking to determine an appropriate pathway through the tertiary system.
- Inform a sectoral research and evaluation programme, supported by a sectoral data strategy, to deliver a comprehensive evidence base for the tertiary sector.

Information contained within this paper should be considered in conjunction with the Outcomes and Transitions papers. Evidence collated within the Transitions paper demonstrates the need for robust research on potential barriers to entry to inform decision making on the development of pathways throughout the tertiary system. This is of particular importance for marginalised groups seeking to access and participate at third level. The policies and measures referenced below target a tertiary system that fosters equality, diversity, and inclusion within all sectors, offering more accessible routes to disadvantaged groups and effective supports to facilitate progression between the different sectors.

2 Policy Context

A responsive and equitable tertiary system yields significant returns at an individual and societal level. This includes returns on investment/earnings[1], social mobility in addition to health and wellbeing outcomes[2]. The strong link between educational attainment and earnings demonstrate the impact of the system, particularly on target groups and the potential to pull vulnerable groups out of poverty.

Widening access and participation has been a policy imperative for successive Irish governments. It is reflected across legislation[3], governance and performance structures, policy and other longstanding measures including an established learner support system, enabling participation of underrepresented groups.

The Unified Tertiary System policy platform emphasises the importance of equitable measures and diverse pathways for more marginalised groups in society. This involves 'approaches to develop more inclusive cultures' and additional funding targeted to growing participation from specific target groups throughout the system. Progressing the vision of a more diverse and inclusive tertiary system will require a deep understanding of these groups including their engagement with, and experience of, the sector.

In addition, the rapid pace of technological change, combined with increased diversity across Irish society demonstrates the need for a dynamic system, primed to cater for a wide range of learners and responsive to ever-changing national and international challenges. Census data showed non-Irish nationals comprised 11.6% of the population in 2016. Furthermore, in the five years since the previous census (2011) there was an 8% increase in individuals with a declared disability; a 5.1% increase in individuals from the Traveller community; alongside increased family diversity through a growth in one parent families and those undertaking caring responsibilities. Results of the 2022 census, due later this year, will offer a clearer picture of diversity across the population. Preliminary results[4] indicate a

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[1] 27% of individuals who had graduated from a tertiary-level institution were earning twice the median of workers in the country, compared to 7% of workers with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment and 6% of those with below secondary level attainment - OECD Education at a Glance, 2022

[2] ESRI The Impact of Changes in Educational Attainment on Life Expectancy in Ireland, 2012

[3] Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 places a duty on public sector bodies to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality, and protect human rights, in their daily work.

[4] Census of Population 2022 – Preliminary Results

7.6% increase in population between 2016 and 2022, with net migration accounting for over half of this increase. Further societal shifts may be anticipated, demonstrating the need for reliable and timely evidence to inform effective policy and funding decisions, and to ensure that the system remains agile and accessible to all sections of our society.

3 Key target groups

3.1 Priority groups

The priority groups, as stated previously, include those groups that are highlighted in both the National Access Plan and Transforming FET. They may be summarised into three main areas.

Learners, researchers and staff who:-

1) are socioeconomically disadvantaged. Socioeconomically disadvantaged include those who struggle financially as well as those who have experience of the care system, homelessness, and the criminal justice system; those who are survivors of domestic violence and those who are carers. This cohort also includes those from multiple disadvantaged groups i.e. from disadvantaged areas, socioeconomically disadvantaged and disabled.

2) are members of Irish Traveller and Roma communities or other migrant and minority groups including persons who have been granted refugee status, subsidiary protection or leave to remain. The National Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy emphasised the importance of including these communities in higher education. While migrant status is unknown, SOLAS data on enrolments in the FET sector in 2020[5] indicates that 0.75% of this increase were from the Traveller community[6] and 0.2% came from the Roma community[7]. In the HE sector, learners from the Traveller community represented 0.05% of total enrolments in 2020/21. The HEA has also started collecting data on learners from the Roma community, with learners representing 0.2% of new entrants in 2021/22[8]. While figures from the 2022 census are not yet published, responses to the 2016 census indicate that 1.03% of the 15-19 age cohort and 1% of the 20-24 age cohort identified as Travellers[9].

3) have disabilities including intellectual disabilities. Article 24 of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) addresses third level educational attainment of those with disabilities. The article has three key aims: (a) the full

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[5] This is FET Facts and Figures 2020
[6] FET in Numbers 2020, Traveller Community
[7] FET in Numbers 2020, Roma Community
[8] HEA facts and Figures – Access Dashboard
[9] CSO data E8043 - Irish Travellers Aged 15 Years and Over Usually Resident and Present 2011 to 2016 (cso.ie)

development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity; (b) the development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential; and (c) enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society. The National Disability Inclusion Strategy includes a commitment to ensure that "people with disabilities are encouraged and motivated to develop to the maximum of their potential, with a view to participating in further education and employment".

In terms of monitoring success, it should be noted that learners self-declare ethnicity and disability status.

3.2 Additional vulnerable groups

In addition to the key groups discussed above, other groups have been identified as vulnerable, and may be susceptible to access and participation issues.

Whilst female learner participation in the tertiary sector is relatively high, there remains an imbalance in representation in STEM disciplines. This is also evident amongst the apprentice population, and in craft areas in particular where participants are still predominantly male. In contrast, figures for 2019 show that over 60% of the FET learner population were female with participation peaking in education, health and welfare, business, administration and law and generic programmes and qualifications

Gender equality among staff in HE is supported through the HEA's Centre of Excellence for Gender Equality. The HEA's Higher Education Institutional Staff Profile by Gender reports provide insights on staff representation by gender which break down further into post held, discipline, and contract type. The IRC's review of their *Gender Strategy and Action Plan* highlighted challenges women face in research roles, including the availability of maternity/adoption leave. The plan puts forward recommendations to improve female representation in research, which includes further analysis of the number of funding applications submitted by female researchers. The *Athena SWAN charter*, which was initially established to increase participation of women across all levels of academia, has since been expanded to include support for underrepresented groups.

Cross sectoral strategies have also set targets to improve access and participation of underrepresented ethnic groups. The HEA's *Race Equality Implementation Plan* includes actions to address structural, institutional, and dimensional racism, with guidance on recruitment practices for those from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and the introduction of a national Race Equality Statement.

There is scope for further research on access and participation of individuals from the LGBT+ community. While some analysis has been included in Section 5, evidence is limited. This includes the *National Survey of Student Experiences of Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions,* which includes data from the LGBTQ+ group.

3.3 Adult Education

Adults with low levels of literacy, numeracy, and/or digital skills have significant difficulty accessing tertiary education and employment[10]. In addition, they may also struggle to meet everyday demands including management of a household budget, and supporting their children. The OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey found a direct correlation between low literacy rates and low educational outcomes. NALA's *Literacy Now* report highlights the cost of unmet literacy, numeracy, and digital skills from these three perspectives. Unmet literacy and numeracy needs are linked to lower employment opportunities, lower wages, and a lack of positive financial behaviours such as saving frequency. Similarly, unmet digital literacy needs compound these difficulties, given the rapid pace of technological advances, and changing skills demands.

The *Adult Literacy for Life* strategy aims to address adult learner needs through the provision of online training modules, the expansion of literacy supports in the workplace, development of standalone numeracy modules, and the establishment of a core skills framework aimed at highlighting skills needed for their learning path. The strategy aims to reduce the percentage of adults with unmet literacy needs from 18% to 7%, unmet numeracy needs from 25% to 12%, and unmet digital needs from 47% to 20%.

Research on the long-term impact of integrating literacy, numeracy, and digital skills into the education system for adult learners is limited. However, NALA has published data on the cost of unmet literacy, numeracy and digital skills to individuals and wider society in the Irish context[11]. The OECD's Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) holds data on the literacy, numeracy, and digital skills of Irish adults under 65 and how they compare with the OECD average. AONTAS and SOLAS published the National FET Learner Forum 2020/2021 Learner report with survey data on adult learner needs in Irish ETBs. The HEA holds data on mature learner participation in higher education, including a breakdown of data on

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[10]https://www.nala.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Adult-Literacy-for-Life-a-10-year-adult-literacy-numeracy-and-digital-literacy-strategy-for-Ireland.pdf

[11] https://www.nala.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Literacy-Now-NALA-2020.pdf

mature learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. The CSO also holds data on lifelong learning rates both by principal economic status and by age (see Sections 6 & 7 for further evidence).

4 The evidence base

Measures to support EDI in the tertiary system generally fall into two broad categories:-

- System level initiatives which support institutions to develop and implement strategies and policies for learners and staff to influence institutional behaviour and support public policy goals
- Initiatives targeted directly to learners or staff to assist with barriers to participation and successful inclusion in the tertiary sector.

Evidence supports for each of these broad themes will now be examined under a programme logic model of inputs (policy and funding), outputs (direct and immediate take-up of schemes) and outcomes as defined below.

- Inputs are legislative, policy and financial interventions designed to deliver a specific change in behaviour.
- Outputs are what are produced by a programme. In this instance, outputs may be measured as numbers of programmes, graduates/qualifications/research grants awarded or learner numbers. Generally, performance reporting aligned to the estimates process is focused on Outputs.
- Outcomes[12] may be short, medium or long term and refer to the changes that occur as a result of the intervention on society or an individual.

4.1 Mechanisms to support EDI in the tertiary sector (Inputs)

4.1.1 System level initiatives to support EDI

Further education Strategic Performance Agreements agreed between SOLAS and each of the sixteen ETBs include KPIs to support widening participation in FET by key target groups by over 10% on pre-pandemic levels by 2024[13].

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[12] Under DPER's Guidelines for Evaluating Planning and Managing Current Expenditure, immediate or short term outcomes are defined as 'Results', with the wider effects of the programme in the medium to long term from a sectoral or national perspective and including effects on the targeted beneficiaries are termed 'Impacts'.
[13] SOLAS Transforming Learning Strategic Performance Agreements: The Further Education & Training System 2022-2024

An Equity of Access subcommittee of the National Apprenticeship Alliance has been established under the Action Plan for Apprenticeship to bring forward the employment and educational factors relating to equal participation in apprenticeship. Employer financial supports have been broadened to support gender balance in apprenticeship programmes[14].

At higher education level, core institutional funding through the RGAM block grant delivers an additional weighting (of 0.33) for each learner enrolling from one of four nationally determined "access groups" (those from low-income backgrounds; first time, mature learner entrants; learners with disabilities and Irish Travellers). Approximately EUR 43 million of HEA core funding was allocated to HEIs in 2020 on the basis of access metrics. These resources are designed to finance HEIs to have an access infrastructure in place that supports learners from target groups to successfully complete higher education.

Targeted funding has been provided in recent years through the three-year Programme for Access to Higher Education Fund (PATH). The programme contains a range of targeted interventions to support participation in Teacher education, and a 2022 expansion of PATH is designed to further support inclusive universally designed environments for all learners and will also develop provision for learners with intellectual disabilities.

The Senior Academic Leadership Initiative (SALI) was launched by the then Minister for Higher Education in 2019 address gender imbalances at senior academic (professor) level, identified in a review conducted by the Gender Equality Taskforce. On foot of Taskforce's recommendations, funding for 45 new and gender-specific posts was made available over three years, targeting improved representation of women at senior leadership levels. Twenty of these posts were approved and filled in the first SALI cycle in 2020, and in November 2021, the Department for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science approved a further 10 posts at senior level under the second SALI cycle.

4.1.2 Financial supports for learners

The primary source of learner financial aid in Ireland across further and higher education, Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) provides mean-tested grants to learners from low income backgrounds. Eligibility for SUSI financial support is available for full-time undergraduates and postgraduates. Part-time learners are currently excluded from the scheme.

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[14] https://apprenticeship.ie/news-events/news/apprenticeship-gender-based-bursary

At Higher Education Level the HEA provides earmarked funding for institutions to support learners in financial need and to cover costs for equipment and services to enable access for learners with disabilities. The Student Assistance Fund directs funds to institutions, which institutional learner services departments can use to provide additional financial support to learners experiencing financial difficulties while studying.

Funding provided under the PATH programme targets supports in key areas across five strands: Strand 1 of PATH programme supports individuals from under-represented groups in initial teacher education programmes; Strand 2 provides additional bursaries to learners from low-income groups; Strand 3 supports regional and community partnership strategies for increasing access to higher education by specified groups; Stand 4 targets inclusive universal design HE environments for all and: Strand 5 includes ring fenced funding to support participation amongst learners from the Traveller community.

The Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) is specifically to help institutions to ensure learners with disabilities have the necessary assistance and equipment to enable them "access, fully participate in and successfully complete their chosen course of study".

For those learners at postgraduate level, a national review of State supports for PhD researchers is underway to examine stipend levels, wider supports, and overall equity and welfare considerations.

4.1.3 Access and non-financial support for learners

Key interventions in accessing Higher Education for underrepresented learners include access protocols for target groups. These initiatives deliver ring-fenced places at institutional level with reduced Leaving Certificate points and additional institution-level support services through the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) and Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) for learners from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and learners with a disability respectively. While HEAR and DARE offer alternative admission routes, they do not provide financial supports. However, they assist in identifying learners for targeted supports.

4.1.4 Policy interventions

Key target area	Policy intervention
Socioeconomic Disadvantage including through literacy and digital literacy disadvantage. Other groups including survivors of domestic violence, those who have experience of criminal justice system, carers, those who have experienced homelessness, mature first time learners, and lone or teen parents.	Broad policies have been implemented, such as the HEAR scheme, aimed at increasing participation among more disadvantaged learners in higher education. Programme for Access to Higher Education Fund (PATH) fund - 2022 expansion of PATH is designed to further support inclusive universally designed environments for all learners and will also develop provision for learners with intellectual disabilities. SUSI grants offer support by way of individual funding for socioeconomically disadvantaged learners who otherwise could not afford to participate in learning.
Membership of Irish Traveller and Roma communities and other migrant and minority groups including declared refugees and asylum seekers.	Previously, the Dormant Accounts Funding (DAF) for Traveller and Roma learners in Higher Education rolled out €450'000 in funding for these communities. A key objective of the funding was to prevent the widening gap in educational attainment for both communities caused by the effect of COVID-19 pandemic. This funding has since been mainstreamed under the PATH 5 initiative and is no longer funded under the DAF. The HEA's Race Equality Implementation Plan (2022-2024)[15] aims to address concerns surrounding racism by hosting a national conference to raise awareness of structural, institutional, and dimensional racism, guidance on recruitment practices targeting those from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and the introduction of a national Race Equality Statement[16].

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[15] Race Equality in the higher education sector Implementation Plan 2022-2024
[16] Education Matters – Travellers in Higher Education: Ambitions and Obstacles

	The National Access Plan (2022-2028) has set targets aimed at higher representation of these groups, with a view to increasing these targets overtime. The National Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy (2017-2021) seeks to enhance participation of these communities in higher education. The strategy contains a commitment to develop "a network of peer support and mentoring for Travellers and Roma in third level education".
Disabilities including intellectual disabilities.	The Future FET policy (2020-2024) states that the needs of individuals with disabilities will be considered a "primary focus", through expanding the fund for learners with disabilities and increasing accommodation across mainstream FET.
Gender equality	The Action Plan for Apprenticeship (2021-2025) includes a bursary for employers of apprentices in apprenticeships with a greater than 80% representation of a single gender in order to encourage gender balance across the apprenticeship system. The Athena Swan charter launched in the Republic of Ireland in early 2015. With support from the <u>Higher Education Authority</u> (HEA), it considers applications to the charter from across the higher education institutions. Engagement with the charter is a key pillar of Ireland's national strategy for gender equality with progress linked to institutional eligibility for funding from Ireland's major research agencies. All of Ireland's universities and institutes of technology and several colleges participate in Athena Swan Ireland.[17]. The SFI's Gender Action Plan (2016-2020) had similar aims in improving female representation in **research** through increasing the number of females in STEM subjects at third level, increasing

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[17] the 'Report of the Expert Group: 2nd HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions' was published in Dec 2022 and will form a key part of the gender equality actions in the HE sector in the coming period.

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	gender balance in research teams, and through integrating a gender perspective in research and innovation.
Supporting adult learners and returners to education and training	Future FET emphasises the local and community nature of FET provision, promoting vocational and access to lifelong learning. The Reach fund was launched in 2022 with the overarching aim of increasing the participation of disadvantaged learners in community education, particularly those who are undertaking literacy and skills programmes through supporting digital infrastructure. Skillnet Ireland's Skills Connect programme targets the unemployed and helps to reintegrate them into the workforce through upskilling courses.

4.2 Measurement of outputs

At a tertiary system level, equality budgeting[18] provides a framework for tracking outputs across a diverse population, reflecting the varying impact of budget measures and policies and shifting the focus on improving these aspects.

Learner numbers can be tracked through the HEA Student System and from the SOLAS PLSS system and through QQI. SOLAS, QQI and HEA have worked to ensure that appropriate learner data is readily available online, or through the open data framework.

Employee level equity data is less readily available. Work is under way to support a shared services approach for the sector through the Education Shared Business Service, a service under the Department of Education.

Recognition of the need to increase access to relevant information is reflected in current strategies, including the requirement to deliver a report on inclusion and diversity in the Irish research system (Impact 2030), the delivery of an Access Data Plan under the National Access Plan and the establishment of an Equity of Access subcommittee of the National Apprenticeship Alliance under the Action Plan for Apprenticeship.

Key output	System level data and reporting
System level outputs	DFHERIS/DoE (2023) – Education indicators for Ireland HEA (2019) - Progress Review of National Access Plan and Priorities to 2021 StudentSurvey (2021) - The Irish Survey of Student Engagement for Postgraduate Research Students National Report 2021

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[18] This includes Gender Equality Budgeting in the REV

	Other CSO (2019) - <u>Ireland's UN SDGs 2019 - Report on Indicators for Goal 4 Quality Education</u> OECD (2022) - <u>Measuring distance to the SDG targets – Ireland</u>
Socioeconomic Disadvantage including through literacy and digital literacy disadvantage	HEA (2019) - <u>A spatial & socio-economic profile of higher education institutions in Ireland</u> SOLAS (2022-2024) - <u>Transforming Learning Strategic Performance Agreements</u> **Other** Cedefop (2020) - <u>Adult population with potential for upskilling and reskilling: Ireland</u> OECD (in development) – <u>PISA VET</u> OECD (2018) - <u>PIAAC</u>
Membership of Irish Traveller and Roma communities and other migrant and minority groups including declared refugees and asylum seekers.	HEA (2019) - <u>A spatial & socio-economic profile of higher education institutions in Ireland</u> SOLAS (2021) – <u>FET in numbers (Roma Community)</u> SOLAS (2021) – <u>FET in Numbers (Traveller Community)</u> SOLAS (2021) – <u>Non Irish Nationals in FET</u> SOLAS (2022-2024) - <u>Transforming Learning Strategic Performance Agreements</u> **Other** ESRI (2022) - <u>The integration of non-EU migrant women in Ireland</u> EuroStat (2022) – <u>Migrant integration statistics - education</u>

Disabilities including intellectual disabilities.	SOLAS (2021) - FET in numbers (Learners with disabilities)
	SOLAS (2022-2024) - Transforming Learning Strategic Performance Agreements
	Other
	AHEAD (2020) - Learning from Home During Covid-19: A Survey of Irish FET and HE Students with Disabilities
	AHEAD (2021) - Interactive Data Centre - Students Registered with Disability Support Services in HE
	ESRI (2022) – Educationally maintained inequality? The role of risk factors and resilience at 9, 13 and 17 in disabled young people's post-school pathways at 20
	USI (2019) – Student Mental Health in Third Level Education
Gender	HEA (2016-2018) – Gender Equality reports
	HEA (2023) – Women in STEM
	IRC (2022) – Review of the Irish Research Council Gender Strategy and Action Plan
	SFI (2021) - Gender Dashboard
	SOLAS (2021) – Women in FET
	Other
	Eurostat (2022) – Participation in tertiary education by sex
	Times Higher Education (2022) – Impact Rankings 2022: gender equality
	UN (2022) – The Gender Snapshot 2022

Adult Education and lifelong learning	Aontas/SOLAS (2023) – <u>Lifelong Learning Participation in Ireland</u> HEA (2021) – <u>Study of Mature Student Participation in Higher Education</u> SOLAS (2021) - <u>FET in numbers (LLL)</u> SOLAS (2022) - <u>Lifelong learning among adults in Ireland, Q4 2021</u> SOLAS (2022-2024) - <u>Transforming Learning Strategic Performance Agreements</u> **Other** CSO (2023) - <u>Lifelong Learning Rate</u> ETBI (2021) - <u>Study of the Role, Contribution and Impact of Education and Training Board (ETB) Further Education and Training Provision and Support Services in Community Education in Ireland</u> EuroStat (2021) – <u>Adult learning statistics – characteristics of education and training</u> NDA (2019) – <u>Factsheet 3: Young people not in employment, education or training</u>

4.3 Information on Outcomes

The tertiary system can evidence substantial system impact for learners, in certification and completion rates but also in terms of medium to long term outcomes, such as progression to employment, attainment of transversal skills and support of overall individual lifelong learning journeys. These factors have been considered in the 'Outcomes' paper which is published alongside this paper.

The work of the SREG in the context of evaluation and assessment of impacts will focus on defined EDI measures rather than the outcomes attributable to education and learning in general.

Socioeconomic Disadvantage including through literacy and digital literacy disadvantage	AONTAS/SOLAS (2022) – National FET Learner Forum Learner report 2020

HEA (2017) - Student Assistance Fund Review

HEA (2019) - Reviews of PATH Strands 1,2 & 3

HEA (2020) - a study of progression in Irish higher education

HEA (2021) – Eurostudent survey

HEA - Path Impact Assessment Report (due for completion 2023)

HEA (2021) – Student course match analysis 2021

HEA (2021) - Progress Review of National Access Plan and Priorities to 2021

HEA (2022) - An analysis of non-progression rates in Irish higher education institutions – overview and key findings

Parliamentary Budget Office/CSO/HEA (2022) - Higher Education Access and Outcomes

NFETL (2021) - why students leave: findings from qualitative research into student non-completion in higher education in Ireland |

	SOLAS (2017) - <u>Barriers to further education and training with particular reference to long term unemployed persons and other vulnerable individuals</u> SOLAS (2022) – <u>FET learner outcomes: early leavers</u> **Other** Age Action (2021) - <u>Digital Inclusion and an Ageing Population</u> ESRI (2022) - <u>Intergenerational poverty in Ireland</u> GUI (2019) - <u>key findings: cohort '98 at 20 years old in 2018/19 no. 4 education, training and employment</u> GUI (2020) – <u>The lives of 17/18-year-olds</u> NESC (2021) - <u>Digital Inclusion in Ireland: Connectivity, Devices & Skills</u> RIA (2021) - <u>Equality, diversity and inclusion in higher education in Ireland and Northern Ireland</u>
Membership of Irish Traveller and Roma communities and other migrant and minority groups including declared refugees and asylum seekers.	Skillnet Ireland (2020) - <u>Cultural diversity challenges and opportunities in the Irish agri-food sector</u> StudentSurvey (2022) - <u>Irish Survey of Student Engagement National Report 2022</u> **Other** AONTAS (2020) – <u>COVID-19 Further Education and Training (FET) Learner Report</u> FRA (2020) - <u>ROMA AND TRAVELLERS IN SIX COUNTRIES</u>
Disabilities including intellectual disabilities.	HEA (2017) - <u>Fund for Students with Disabilities</u> **Other**

	AHEAD (2022) - <u>Students with Disabilities Engaged with Support Services in Higher Education in Ireland 2020/21</u> AONTAS (2020) – <u>COVID-19 Further Education and Training (FET) Learner Report</u> ESRI (2022) - <u>Cumulative disadvantage in post-school plans and pathways among those identified with special educational needs in Irish primary schools</u>
<u>Gender</u>	HEA/DFHERIS (2022) – <u>Surveys of experiences of sexual violence and harassment in higher education: reports and findings</u> HEA (2022) – <u>2nd HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions</u> SFI (2022) - <u>Annual Report and Accounts 2021</u> SFI (2018) - <u>Analysis of gender success rates in the SFI review process and overview of SFI's gender redressing initiatives</u> **Other** OECD (2019) – <u>Why don't more girls choose STEM careers?</u> OECD (2021) – <u>It's time to close the gender gap in research</u>
<u>EDI – Staff specific</u>	<u>HEA (2021) - Race Equality in the Higher Education Sector</u> DFHERIS/DCU Anti-Bullying Centre (2022) – <u>Report on the National Survey of Staff Experiences of Bullying in Irish Higher Education Institutions</u>

Appendix 1 Terms of Reference - DFHERIS Sectoral Research and Evaluation Group

The Sectoral Research and Evaluation Group will build on the strong knowledge exchange collaborations between the Department and its agencies and support dissemination of, and collaboration on, research and evaluation activity across the sector. Specifically, the group will:

• Provide an information sharing forum for sectoral research, evaluation work, and data availability, supported through the development of an annual register of work plans, including recent or upcoming publications, research, and analysis from across the tertiary education and research sector.

• Explore innovative approaches to informing the research agenda including new methods of stakeholder engagement.

• Consider thematic areas of focus, aligned to DFHERIS strategic priorities, around which a programme of engagement and dissemination activities will be developed to broaden awareness of system activity and outcomes from across the tertiary education and research sector.

• Identify opportunities for further collaborative activity, potential areas of overlap, and/or gaps in evaluation and research activity which may need to be addressed to provide a comprehensive view of activity and outcomes across the sector.

• Identify barriers to ongoing and planned research and evaluation work across the sector, and propose a programme of solutions to address these barriers.

• Identify key target audience(s) for the dissemination of learnings and information sharing.

• Explore further communication channels to raise awareness of agency research and evaluation activity, including – for example - circulation of promotional materials on publications or analysis linked to the suite of activities underway

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Appendix 2   DFHERIS Sectoral Research and Evaluation Group Membership

Evidence for Policy Unit, DFHERIS

Higher Education Authority (HEA)

Irish Research Council (IRC)

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

Science Foundation Ireland (SFI)

Skillnet Ireland (SI)

SOLAS

From April 2023

National Apprenticeship Office (NAO)

Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI)

Appendix 3   Sectoral Strategies/Policies on Inclusion

Key sectoral strategies/policies targeting access and inclusion of vulnerable groups across the broader system

- The DFHERIS Statement of Strategy 2021-2023, which includes a commitment to "provide supports and opportunities for learning to all, recognising the needs of vulnerable learners and the most marginalised, and assist people in access to and progression through higher and further education and training, so as to grow prosperity across communities and build social cohesion." The strategy targets specific goals to address access issues for disadvantaged groups, including a commitment to ensure that our institutions are beacons of inclusion welcoming all, with a focus on groupings that are under-represented at present", "promote female leadership in academia and research, eliminate harassment and promote the principle of consent", and actions such as "Literacy, numeracy, and digital skills" aimed at vulnerable adults.

- Future FET: Transforming Learning 2020-2024 (SOLAS), which includes a commitment to "adopt a more targeted approach to addressing barriers around participation, completion and progression for marginalised and prioritised cohorts."

- Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025 (DFHERIS), which includes an objective aimed at making sure that the "profile of the apprenticeship population will more closely reflect the profile of the general population". This includes promoting participation in apprenticeship programmes among "women, lone parents, people with disabilities, young people and older adults experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage, Travellers[19] and Roma, young people at risk of offending and former prisoners."

- 'Adult Literacy for Life'– a 10-year adult literacy strategy (SOLAS), which has the main aim "to ensure that everyone feels included and enabled to participate fully in society, in the workplace and in their daily lives". The plan is to be progressed across four key pillars which include national campaigns to raise awareness, an increasing access to technology, supporting skilled practitioners to enhance quality of service, and a prioritisation of those furthest behind in their skill development.

- National Access Plan 2022-2028 (DFHERIS/HEA), which includes "two overarching ambitions for our higher education system: 1) that the higher education student body, at all levels and across all programmes, reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population, and 2) that our higher

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[19] New initiative funding by the dormant Accounts Fund targeting Travellers in apprenticeship - €450k in 2023

education institutions are inclusive, universally designed environments which support learner success and outcomes, equity and diversity". The plan identifies three main target groups underrepresented in higher education: "students who 1) are socioeconomically disadvantaged; 2) are members of Irish Traveller and Roma communities and 3) have disabilities including intellectual disabilities."

- Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy (DFHERIS), which includes a commitment to "strengthen equality, diversity and inclusion among our researcher community". The goals to achieve this include a report on inclusion and diversity in the Irish research system, an expansion of the PATH programme to increase the number of researchers who come from underrepresented groups, and the embedment of the Athena Swan Charter across higher education institutions.

At an international level, Ireland's commitment to UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is set out in the SDG National Implementation Plan 2018-2020 published in early 2018. The provision of inclusive, equitable and quality education is targeted under SDG4. Achievement of these goals includes a commitment from both urban and rural areas. To achieve this, the EU set up its Regions 2030 programme which seeks to connect regional areas to meet the SDG goals.

Appendix 4   System indicators on inclusion

Adult Literacy

- Literacy Prevalence Percentage of people who know someone with unmet literacy, numeracy, digital capability needs. *Regular public survey*
- Reduced incidence of factors cited as barriers to accessing literacy supports. *Regular public survey*
- Numbers engaging in new one-stop-shop literacy supports. Ongoing monitoring
- Numbers engaging in literacy learning across FET. ETB FET learner database (PLSS)
- Number of people receiving English language support. ETB FET learner database (PLSS)
- Number of people engaging in numeracy learning. ETB FET learner database (PLSS)
- Provision Numbers accessing basic digital skills courses via eCollege, ETBs, libraries, employers, etc. (SOLAS and other stakeholders)
- Literacy Capability Assessment of literacy capability levels across the Irish population. (Requirement set out for a more regular tool than PIAAC)
- Level of overall investment in literacy supports. (SOLAS)
- Numbers from key priority target groups developing basic skills in FET. ETB FET learner database (PLSS)
- Digital Capability Percentage of people lacking basic digital skills/Percentage of people with at least basic digital skills. (DESI Index)
- Percentage of people with broadband access. (CSO)
- Periodic PIAAC benchmark giving comprehensive analysis of literacy levels by international standards. PIAAC (expected 2024)
- Effective structures in place with an active participation from education, health, welfare, local government and community development perspectives at national, regional and local levels. DFHERIS

Apprenticeship
- The Action Plan for Apprenticeship sets out a requirement for the apprentice population to more closely mirror the general population. It sets out a requirement for further exploration of the workplace and educational needs of learners through the establishment of baseline and target metrics for apprenticeship.

Further Education and Training[20]
National FET targets that will be delivered over the period 2022-24 as they relate to inclusion:

- Refocus on pathways within FET, growing beyond pre-COVID progression levels between NFQ Levels 1-6, and expanding FET-HE pathways by up to 25% in support of a unified tertiary system.

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[20] https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/807fb6e096/fet-system-report.pdf

- Ramp-up certification of transversal skills and widen participation of key target groups by at least 10% on pre-pandemic levels, while adding 10,000 places in support of the Adult Literacy for Life (ALL) Strategy
  - o Transversal Skills: Return certification at NFQ levels 1-3 to 2019 levels (29,328) and grow by a further 10% by 2024 (32,398)
  - o Widening Participation: Return participation levels by key target groups to 2019 levels (17,271) and resume growth (target 19,474 by 2024)
  - o Adult Literacy for Life (ALL): Increase provision for literacy and numeracy (target 7,095 by 2024)
- Grow lifelong learning participation well beyond pre-COVID levels, while doubling the scale of the Skills to Advance workforce upskilling initiative

Higher Education

Specific targets have been set in the National Access Plan for the following groups:

- New entrants (aged 18–20) from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas (54% from 42%)
- New entrants who are mature and from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas (20% from 11%)
- New entrants with a disability (16% from 12.4%)
- New entrants from the Traveller community (150 from 33; an increase to 0.32% of all new entrants up from .07%)

The National Access Plan sets out 9 performance indicators under 4 categories:

- Flexibility within higher education
  - o Participation by part-time/flexible learners
  - o Progression from further education to higher education

- Diversity across programmes and levels
  - o Postgraduate study among selected priority groups (for example, postgraduate/mature learners from disadvantaged areas, Traveller learners, learners with disabilities)
  - o Learner diversity across selected fields of study (for example, initial teacher education, medicine)

- Access and participation for priority groups
  - o Learners with a disability who are supported by FSD
  - o Learners attending DEIS schools
  - o Learners who are lone parents

- Learner success and engagement
  - o Progression and completion among selected priority groups (for example, learners and mature learners from disadvantaged areas)

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- o Graduate outcomes among selected priority groups (for example, learners from disadvantaged areas and those attending DEIS schools)

Research

- Female researchers as a % of total researchers (HC), 2020 or latest available data. HERD Survey
- Female and male FTE researchers, 2020 (HERD Survey)

Data availability

The NAP notes that baseline data is not currently available for certain priority groups including learners from the Roma community, learners with intellectual disabilities, and certain groups within the socioeconomically disadvantaged group:

- learners who have experience of the care system
- learners who are survivors of domestic violence
- learners who are migrants
- learners who have experience of the international protection process or who are refugees
- learners from ethnic minorities
- learners who have experience of the criminal justice system
- learners who are carers
- learners who have experience of homelessness.

A new Access Data Plan is to be implemented during the lifetime of the NAP to examine ways to improve data collection for priority groups.