



# Supporting Access and Widening Participation in Higher Education

## EU COST ACTION

**Dr. Carolann Bargary**

**TUS Midwest Access Service**

**May 2022**



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



# Presentation Overview

- Theoretical Framing Access
- Policy Context of Widening Participation in Ireland
- Overview of the TUS Mid-West Access Service
- Pre- Entry Community Engagement Activities and Programmes
- Challenges and Opportunities

# Access Service at TUS Midwest- Overview

**The aim of the service is to support widening access for under-represented students by delivering targeted strategies to promote, facilitate entry to and participation in the academic programmes and student life of the Institute for students who are currently under-represented in third-level education.**

These students currently include:

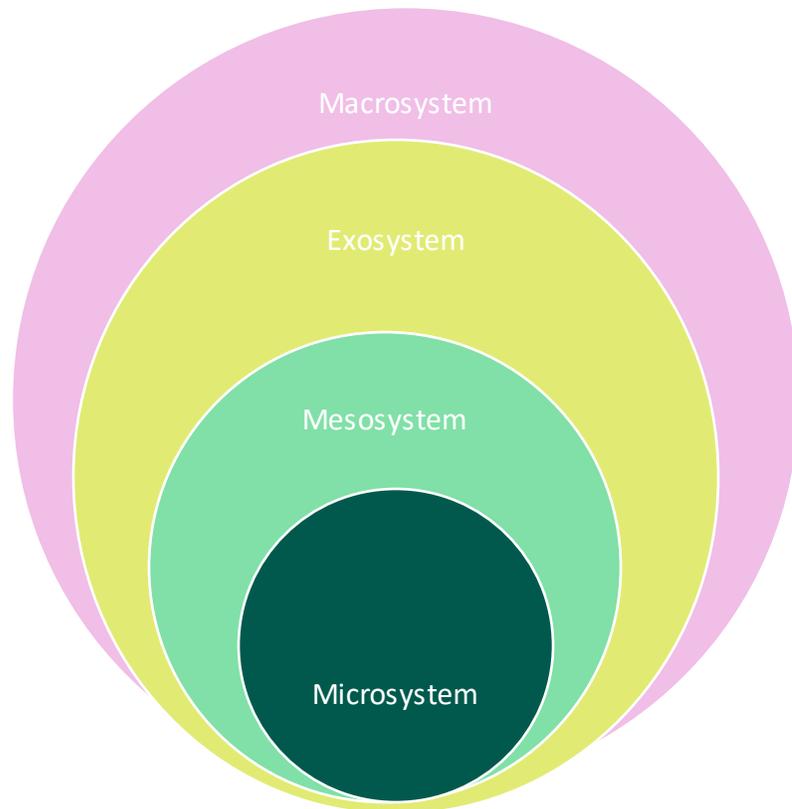
- Students who experience socio-economic disadvantage
- Students with Disability and/or Specific Learning Difficulty
- Mature Students
- Irish Travellers and other Ethnic Minorities
- Lone Parents
- QQI Entrants ( Quality and Qualifications Ireland)
- Part-Time Students

## External Committee Membership

- Access Steering Group for HEIs
- AHEAD
- DARE HEAR Practitioners' Group
- Disability Advisors Working Network (DAWN)
- GO4IT Management Committee
- Limerick Lifelong Learning Festival Organisers' Committee
- Mature Students Ireland (MSI)
- Northside Summer Camps Committee
- Northside Youth Partnership Network
- PAUL Partnership Board of Directors
- PAUL Partnership Audit and Finance Committee
- THEA Access Officers group
- 1916 THEA Representative Operations Group
- PATH 2 Steering Committee
- PATH 3 Steering Committee
- ENGAGE in Education ( Board of Directors)

## An Ecological lens to Explore Access and (Ecological Systems Theory –Bronfenbrenner (1979))

The focus of this model is both on **individual and contextual factors**. An ecological perspective is a framework that encourages ‘connecting the dots’ between microsystem phenomenon and cultural context at the level of the macrosystem’ (O’Neill 2015, p. 18).



### Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner 1977; 1979)

Four systems of interaction;  
1. Microsystem- The child,  
school, community  
2. Mesosystem-Relationships  
3. Exosystem –Policy  
4. Macrosystem-Culture,  
Finance, Economy

Bronfenbrenner  
(1979) – the  
importance of  
understanding social  
policy.

**Knowledge and analysis of social policy are essential for progress in developmental research because they alert the investigator to those aspects of the environment, both immediate and more remote, that are most critical for the cognitive, emotional, and social development of the person. Such knowledge and analysis can also lay bare ideological assumptions underlying, and sometimes profoundly limiting, the formulation of research problems and designs and thus the range of possible findings.**

**(Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 8)**

# Policy and Strategic Overview- The Exosystem

- **TUS:** The TU goal is to become an accessible, progressive and impactful technological university – a higher education institute that reflects the educational demands and economic needs of the regions and the communities served.  
(AIT-LIT Consortium 2020, p. 39)
- **Equal Status Act (2000)**-The main aim is to promote equality by forbidding discrimination in employment, vocational training, advertising, collective agreements and the provision of goods and services. **9 grounds of discrimination** are covered -gender, marital status, family status, age disability, sexual orientation, race, religion, and membership of the Traveller community.
- **Disability Act (2005)**-places a statutory obligation on public service providers to support access to services and facilities for people with disabilities

# Policy and Strategic Overview- The Exosystem

## Action Plan for Education 2019 (DES)

- **STRATEGIC GOAL 2**-We will advance the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage and learners with special educational needs in order to support them to achieve their potential
- **STRATEGIC GOAL 4**-We will intensify the relationships between education and the wider community, society and the economy

# Policy and Strategic Overview- The Exosystem

- **National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030** which describes the educational relationship as being ‘particularly important in the context of the promotion and achievement of greater equality in higher education’.
- **The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development- Access to Quality Education( SDG4)**
- **National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2015-2019)**

# Current National Access Plan 2015-2019

National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019 was published in December 2015. The overall vision informing the goals, objectives and actions of the Plan 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.

**Expected New Additions** in the next plan (2022-2026) currently in development include:

- Students who are carers
- Students who have experience of the care system
  - Students who have experienced homelessness
- Students who have experience of the prison system.

# How well are we doing nationally? ( Progress review of National Access Plan 2018)

**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
<i>Participation in higher education by people disadvantaged by socio-economic barriers (as a % of 18-20 age cohort)<sup>15</sup>:</i>			
Non-manual worker group	23%	27%	30%
Semi/unskilled manual worker group	26%	36%	35%
<i>Participation in higher education by "first-time" mature students (as a % of all new entrants)<sup>16</sup>:</i>			
Full-time mature entrants to higher education	13%	9%	16%
Full-time and part-time/flexible (combined) mature entrants	19%	16%	24%
<i>Participation in higher education by people with disabilities<sup>17</sup>:</i>			
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
<i>Participation in part-time/flexible higher education<sup>18</sup>:</i>			
% of students studying on a part-time or flexible basis (undergraduate and postgraduate)	19%	19.8%	22%
<i>Progression to higher education by holders of further education qualifications<sup>19</sup>:</i>			
% 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%
<i>Participation in higher education by Irish Travellers<sup>21</sup>:</i>			
Number of Irish Travellers in higher education (full and part-time undergraduate new entrants)	35	41	80

# Pre-Entry Initiatives and Partners

**Blitz IT Summer Camp**-This Summer Camp is aimed at second level students, with a primary focus to encourage young participants (including a focus on female participation) to consider a career in ICT and especially computing careers.

**Partner:** North West Clare Family Resource Centre Clare

**Business in the Community**- The main aim of this partnership is to positively affect educational inclusion and address key issues in areas of educational disadvantage in Ireland. The Limerick IT and Thomond Community College partnership began in 2006, when the school was St. Nesson's Community School and over the past 15 years, 312 students have been introduced to the world of work.

**Partners:** Thomond Community College and Business in the Community Ireland

**Go4IT Programme** is a collaborative initiative aimed Aim is to support young people from Limerick's Northside RAPID area who have academic potential but are from backgrounds where there is little or no tradition of progressing to third-level education.

**Partners:** Northside Family Resource Centre, Corpus Christi Primary School, Thomond National School, and Thomond Community College.

# The Go4IT Programme

**The Go4IT Programme** is a collaborative initiative with the **Northside Family Resource Centre, Corpus Christi Primary School, Thomond National School, and Thomond Community College.**

The Go4IT programme was established in 2008 in response to concerns that young people from the communities of Ballynanty, Kileely, Thomondgate and Moyross

Aim is to support young people from Limerick's Northside RAPID area who have academic potential but are from backgrounds where there is little or no tradition of progressing to third-level education.

Starts with primary school children and works with them through second level to graduation

# Go4IT ACTIVITIES

- Summer Camps
- Access to TUS Midwest Study Club
- Mentoring
- Visits to campus
- Attendance at Science Workshops
- IT Exploration and Sports Activities
- Taster Lecture – e.g. nutrition and visit to TUS Sports Hub
- Audio- Visual
- Photography

# Parental Engagement through GO4IT

Parents as significant in the learning of the child  
(Bargary-O'Neill 2021; DES 2011, 2015; Goodall 2013; Goodall 2018b; Harris and Goodall 2008)

Introduction session for parents/guardians of new participants to Go4IT

Christmas Lunch for parents of 6th class Go4IT members

Health and Wellness event

GO4IT activities with participants and their parents/guardians

Study Skills Workshops

Advice offered to parents in relation to CAO/SUSI process

Information table set up with Access Staff in attendance at the 5th & 6th year Thomond Community College parent/teacher meetings

Go4IT Graduation

## PATH –Programme for Access to Higher Education

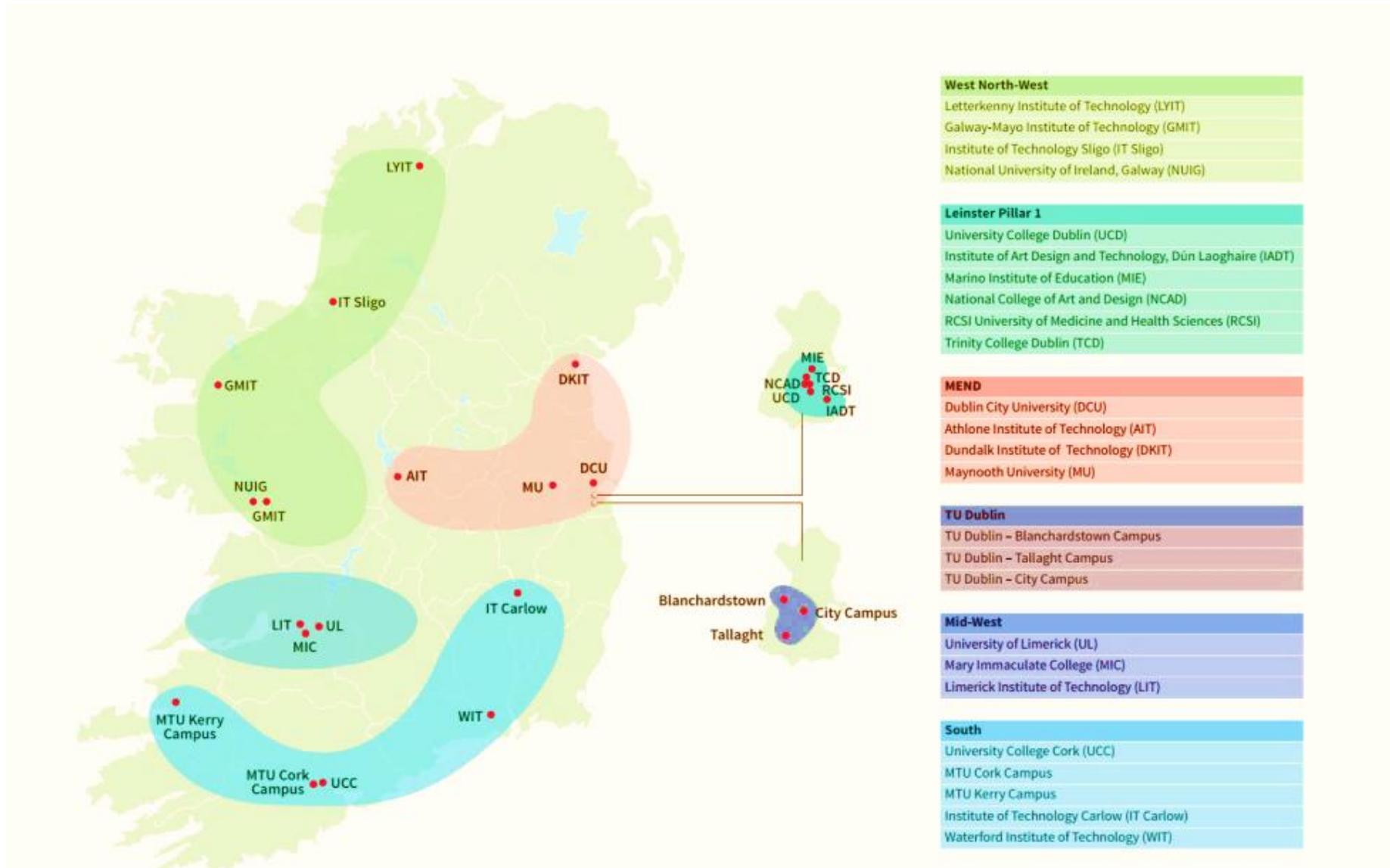
PATH was established by the Department of Education and Skills to fund innovative initiatives to increase equity of access to higher education.

**In 2017**, the Shannon Consortium were successful in securing €900K (over a three-year period) in funding from the HEA for the provision of access activities under the PATH 3 call for funding.

PATH 2- 1916 Scholarships

PATH 3- Supporting Access initiatives





**West North-West**

- Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT)
- Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT)
- Institute of Technology Sligo (IT Sligo)
- National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG)

**Leinster Pillar 1**

- University College Dublin (UCD)
- Institute of Art Design and Technology, Dún Laoghaire (IADT)
- Marino Institute of Education (MIE)
- National College of Art and Design (NCAD)
- RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences (RCSI)
- Trinity College Dublin (TCD)

**MEND**

- Dublin City University (DCU)
- Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT)
- Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT)
- Maynooth University (MU)

**TU Dublin**

- TU Dublin - Blanchardstown Campus
- TU Dublin - Tallaght Campus
- TU Dublin - City Campus

**Mid-West**

- University of Limerick (UL)
- Mary Immaculate College (MIC)
- Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT)

**South**

- University College Cork (UCC)
- MTU Cork Campus
- MTU Kerry Campus
- Institute of Technology Carlow (IT Carlow)
- Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT)

# Midwest -Cluster Strands

PATH is managed by the Midwest Cluster

Steering Group The Cluster operates the following strands as part of PATH 3:

- 1. Destination College: Supporting the Journey (University of Limerick as the lead)**
2. Lone Parents (Mary Immaculate as the lead)
- 3. Education Programme for Irish Travellers and Early School Leavers (TUS Midwest as the lead)**



STUDY CLUB



TRAVELLER  
AND EARLY  
SCHOOL  
LEAVER

# TUS Midwest Programmes

# STUDY CLUB

**Target Group:** Second level students exam year, who experience educational and socio-economic disadvantage- Limerick City ( exploring working with other areas)

**Supports:** Tuition in a subject area, Learning Resources, Study Skills, Revision courses, Mentoring and Support from the TUS Midwest Access Service, Information and Guidance on Pathways to HE, Funding, SUSI...

**Partners:** UL, MIC, Engage in Education, Northside Family Resource Centre, Limerick CDP, Limerick DEIS schools, JumpAgrade.

## Opportunities:

Supporting Students from under-represented NAO target groups.

An opportunity to work with our cluster partners, community and school stakeholders

Develop a more active regional role ( Clare and Tipperary)

## Challenges:

Covid 19, Studying online and keeping connected, limited resources, sustainability of funding model

## **Education Programme for Irish Travellers and Early School Leavers**

TUS Midwest Access Service are leading on a PATH 3 initiative aimed at increasing participation in higher education by Irish Travellers and Early School Leavers.

**Aim of the Programme:** Provide a range of activities and programmes ( pre and post-entry) that demonstrate that Higher Education is a welcoming place

**Key Activities to Date include:** Transitions to Higher Education Programme ( Ennis and with ALFA); Campus visits and Workshops, Education Advice Clinics for Parents, Mentoring and Supports post entry ( 1916, Laptop Scheme, TUSLA internship application Support)

## **Current Activities with Partners (Traveller Education)**

**Safe Pass Course-** TUS Access Service and TUS Department of Flexible Learning is exploring the offering of a Safe Pass to offer Traveller men a tailored Safe Pass course in collaboration with  
**Partners: SOLAS and Exchange House.**

**A Ceiliúradh of Traveller Education** event is planned to be held at TUS Midwest

**Partners: Rathkeale Community Development, Tipperary Rural Traveller Project**

**TUS Midwest-Tipperary Partners-** The TUS Midwest Access office is a member of a stakeholder working group convened by Tipperary County Council exploring the educational opportunities and challenges within County Tipperary for Travellers.

**Partners: Tipperary County Council**

**Culinary experience-** visit by primary and secondary students to the Moylish campus, experiencing the culinary school getting involved in baking/cooking.

**Partners: TUS Culinary Arts, TUS Access Service and Tipperary Rural Traveller Project**



# Entry Pathways

1. CAO
2. MATURE STUDENTS
3. QQI
4. Transitions to Higher Education programme
5. HEAR and DARE

# Certificate in Transition to Higher Education

It provides a pathway for adults who experience severe social, economic and/or educational disadvantage to engage in a supportive and structured third-level academic foundation programme.

The programme promotes a **structured, supportive learning environment** where students can prepare for progression to full-time study and recognises that students who may have exited formal education at an early juncture may require additional support, and subsequently a holistic suite of offerings are in place, such as the inclusion of additional learning support, CAO and SUSI guidance, disability support, and mentoring.



# Certificate in Transition to Higher Education Delivery

- ❑ 1-year part-time foundation programme - Blended and Online
- ❑ Delivered from September to May
- ❑ Two evenings per week – (Mon + Thurs 6.30pm to 9.30pm)
- ❑ Course fee: €500 or €100 for applicants on DEASP payment
- ❑ Mentoring support provided

## Modules: -

Semester 1 : Computer Applications+ Personal Development

Semester 2 : Learning and Academic skills + Maths



***Student Testimonials (past students) on Transition to Higher Education Programme:***

***“I found this course very good. The tutors are very helpful and I have acquired a lot of useful skills to help me move forward. I would definitely recommend this course to anyone wishing to pursue higher education.”***

***“The transition to higher education programme has really put my fears regarding third level education to rest. I now understand what third level education will be like. This course has fulfilled all of its objectives in my eyes; and I feel fully equipped to not only pursue third level education, but the skills I have acquired are also transferrable to real life. I would highly recommend anyone to do this course.”***



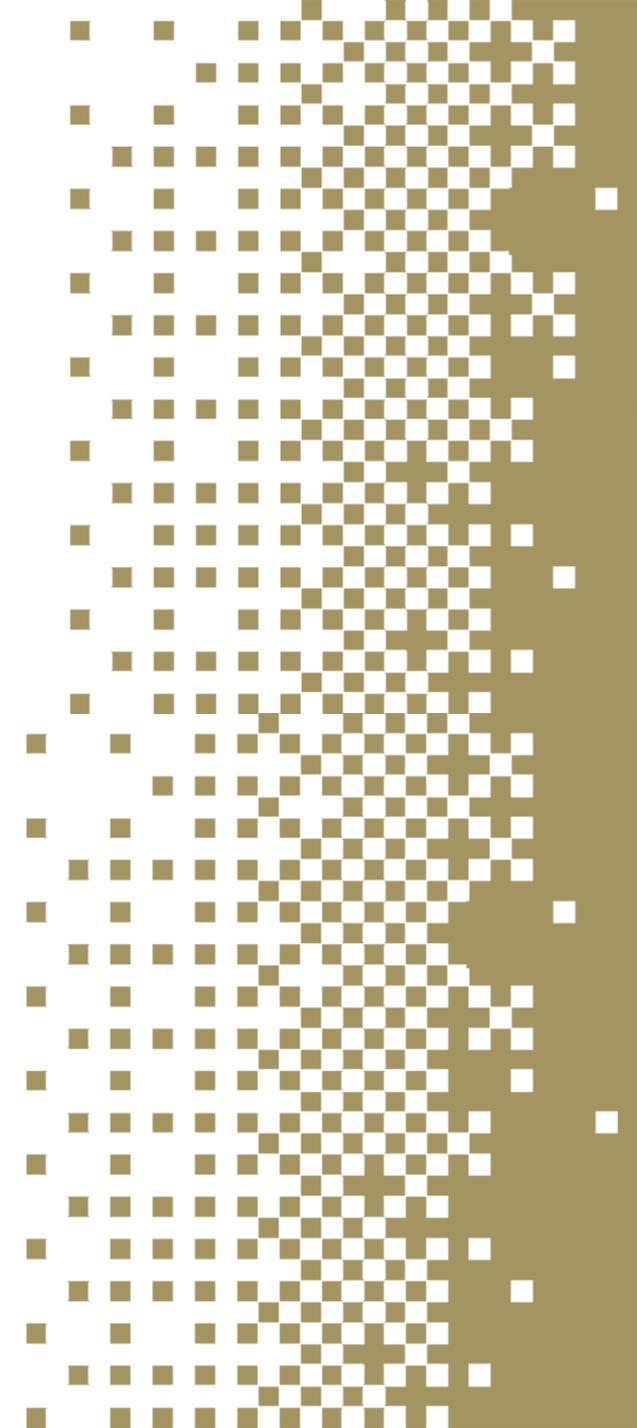
# HEAR Scheme

The **Higher Education Access Route** is an admissions route for school leavers who for **social, financial or cultural** reasons are **under-represented** in **third level education**,

It was set up to ensure that all Leaving Certificate students have a fair and equal opportunity to progress to third level education.



- **Reduced points CAO offers** in the participating colleges provided you meet the minimum entry requirements.
- **Post-entry supports** such as financial, academic, social and personal. **Reduced points CAO offers** in the participating colleges provided you meet the minimum entry requirements.
- **Post-entry supports** such as financial, academic, social and personal.



## What is DARE?

The **Disability Access Route to Education (DARE)** is a third level alternative admissions scheme for school-leavers whose disabilities have had a negative impact on their second level education.

DARE offers reduced points places to school leavers who as a result of having a disability have experienced additional educational challenges in second level education.



# OPPORTUNITIES

- **Dedicated and Committed Team**
- Moving from **Ecological Disconnections** to **Ecological Connections**
- **High levels Of Engagement from our Community Partners**-Working in and with communities- establishing trust, building relationships
- The establishment of the DFHERIS, which is committed to ‘support and encourage Ireland’s social and economic development’ and to ‘make sure that public investment and policy in these areas give opportunities to everyone, including the most vulnerable in society’.
- **Funding and Dedicated** Resourcing ( PATH 2 AND PATH 3 )
- PATH 3- Opportunities to share and disseminate best practice
- Work collaboratively with HEI’s, community groups, schools
- Regional Focus of PATH 3 and TUS

# Challenges

- Ecological Disconnections- must still work towards 'connecting the dots'
- Recovering from Covid Pandemic
- Sustainable resourcing
- Time and staffing constraints
- Working in and with communities- establishing trust, building relationships ( complex and often very lengthy process- **sustained proactive engagement** is needed)

# Post-Entry Supports

The Access Service works to ensure students are supported from the beginning of their University career right through to the end by offering the following supports:

- Mature Student Supports (This includes; Welcome Day, Book Lending scheme, Mature Student Support Network, Mature Student Workshops).
- Student Assistance Fund (SAF).
- 1916 Bursary Fund.
- Laptop Lending Scheme.
- Support for students who have a disability and/or a specific learning difficulty.
- Mentoring Scheme.

## Reference List

AIT-LIT Consortium (2020) Application for Designation as a Technological University, AIT-LIT Consortium.

Bargary-O'Neill, C. (2021) The use of ICT for Learning: in Irish Primary Education: Children, Parent and Teacher Perspectives, unpublished thesis (PhD), University of Limerick.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*, Cambridge, UK: Harvard University Press.

Central Statistics Office (2017) Census 2016 Summary Results - Part 2, available: [Census 2016 Summary Results – Part 2.pdf \(cso.ie\)](#) [ accessed 09/09/21].

Central Statistics Office (2016) *Irish Travellers - Socio-economic Aspects and Housing - CSO - Central Statistics Office*, available: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp8iter/p8iter/p8itseah/> [accessed 06/12/2020].

Cullinan, J., Flannery, D., Walsh, S., McCoy, S., Fleming, B., Gill, P., ...and McManus, S. (2013) 2. Geographic inequalities in higher education: Accessibility and participation in Ireland 15.

Department of Education and Science (2019) Action Plan for Increasing Traveller Participation in Higher Education, Dublin, available: <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/action-plan-increasing-Traveller-participation-in-higher-ed-2019-2021.pdf> [accessed 06/12/2020].

Epstein, J.L. (2001) *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators, and Improving Schools*, Boulder, Co: Westview Press.

Goodall, J. (2013) Parental engagement to support children's learning: A six-point model, *School Leadership and Management*, 33(2), 133-150.

Harris, A and Goodall, J. (2008) Do parents know they matter? Engaging all parents in learning, *Educational Research*, 50(3), 277-289.

Higher Education Authority (Ireland)(HEA) (2010) National plan to achieve equity of access to higher education 2008-2013: mid-term review.

Higher Education Authority (2020) National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019, Higher Education Authority, Dublin: Higher Education Authority, available: <https://hea.ie/policy/access-policy/national-access-plan-2015-2019/> [accessed 06/12/2020].

# Connect with TUS

on social media:



TUS Access Service



@TUS\_Access

Email us at: [Access@lit.ie](mailto:Access@lit.ie)

Visit our website: [www.tus.ie](http://www.tus.ie) or [www.lit.ie](http://www.lit.ie)

