

PLA: MAINSTREAMING SOCIAL
DIMENSION IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER
EDUCATION AREA :

IRELAND'S IMPLEMENTATION OF ITS NATIONAL STRATEGY ON ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION – 7 OCT 2020



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POLICY CONTEXT FOR A NATIONAL STRATEGY ON ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

- Equity of Access to Higher Education is a National Priority
- Report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education 2001
- Specific National Strategy for inclusion in higher education
- Periodic National Access Plans are published to articulate priorities
- The first plan was published in 2003
- The current plan (National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2021) is the third such plan
- Part of wider Department of Education policy - Goal 2 of the department's Statement of Strategy 2019-2021 is: "to improve the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage or learners with special educational needs"
- Priority actions are published annually in the Action Plan for Education
- Alignment with wider anti-poverty and social inclusion policy and measures in Ireland

WHAT DOES THE CURRENT NATIONAL ACCESS PLAN (2015-2021) LOOK LIKE?

Vision

- Ensure that our student body reflects the diversity of Ireland's population

Goals with related Objectives and related Actions

- Mainstream the Delivery of Equity of Access in Higher Education Institutions
- Assess the Impact of Initiatives
- Developing the Evidence Base through Data – base policy on evidence
- Build Coherent Pathways into Higher Education
- Develop Regional and Community Partnership

Target Groups and related targets

- Socio-economically disadvantaged
- Irish Travellers
- Students with a Disability
- First Time Mature students
- Part-time students
- Students entering Higher Education with Further Education Qualifications

DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL ACCESS PLAN (NAP) SINCE 2017

Consultation

- National Access Plan Steering Group
- Annual Access Forum
- Mid-Term Review in 2018

Evidence Base

- Review of progress towards targets
- Data Collection and Analysis
- Research on Lone Parents and Mature Students

Published Policy Documents

- Access Data Plan (December 2017)
- Progress Review of NAP (December 2018)
- A Spatial & Socio-Economic Profile of Higher Education Institutions in Ireland (October 2019)
- Action Plan for Traveller participation in Higher Education (November 2019)

POLICY LEVERS FOR NATIONAL ACCESS STRATEGY

Significant State investment in the region of €450m annually

- Dedicated resources in both the Ministry and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) with funding and policy advisory roles
- Student financial support – number of targeted schemes with related structures including SUSI (student grant awarding authority)
- Financial incentives for HEIs - The annual core grant allocation by the HEA to higher education institutions includes an access funding element which is based on specific access metrics. The funding model respects institutional autonomy and enables access infrastructure within HEIs and dedicated Access Programmes
- New Funding stream to support innovative access initiatives – PATH fund
- Research

Alignment with other National Strategies

- National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 and related governance, structures and funding
- Whole of Governments approach
 - National Action Plan for Social Inclusion;
 - National Disability Strategy;
 - National Strategy for Traveller and Roma Integration
- Public sector reform strategy
- National Data Infrastructure - Data Plan
- **Note:** Legislation requirements for HEI Equity of Access policies & plans

ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES TO 2021

An increase in participation rates across socio-economically disadvantaged and students with a disability

Mature and flexible learners and Irish Traveller Participation

The development of the Access Data Plan and the progress made on identifying and implementing student success measures

Mainstreaming is “Everybody’s Business”
Communications
Implementation of New Data Plan – link funding to evidence

Significant investment in new access initiatives such as PATH (Programme for Access to Higher Education).

Evaluation of new initiatives, funding limitations, capacity issues

The enhancement of access supports including extension of Student Assistance Fund to part-time participants.

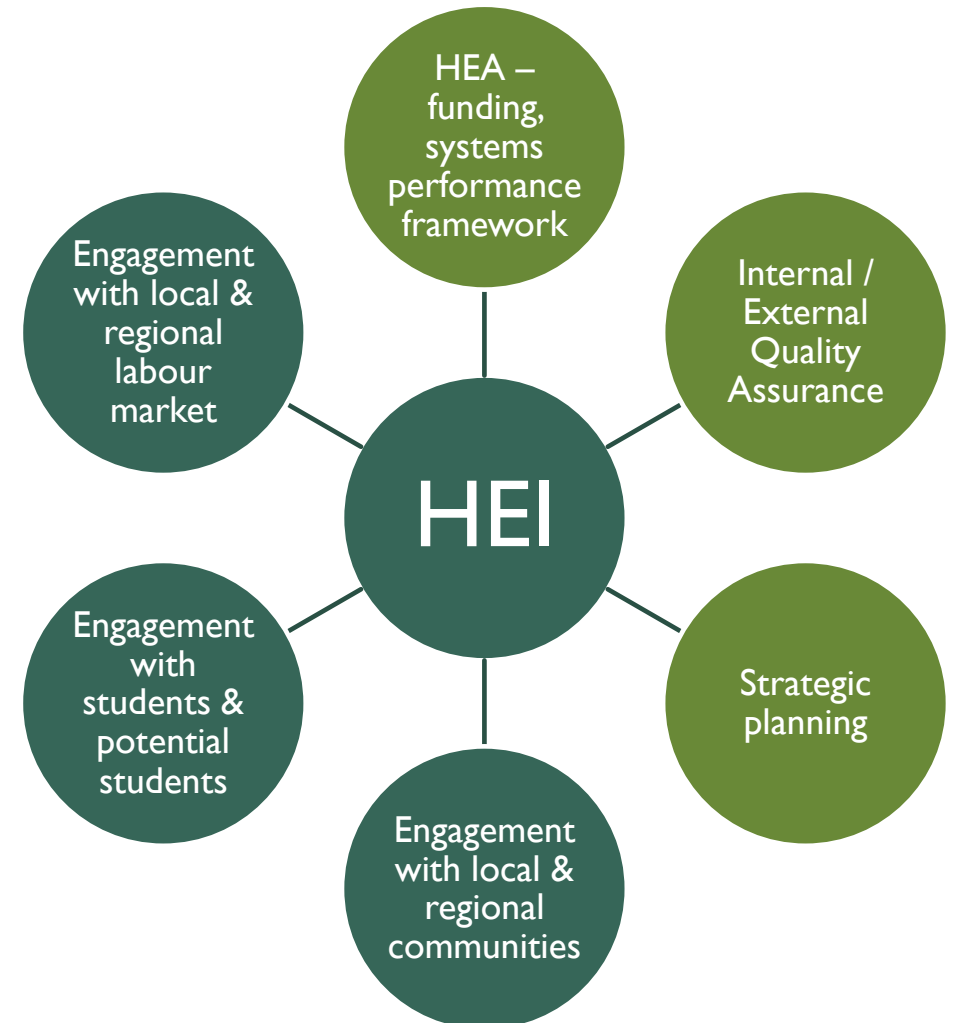
Further to higher education transitions and foundation courses

An increased focus on lone parent’s participation in higher education.

Whole education system approach/Address systemic barriers

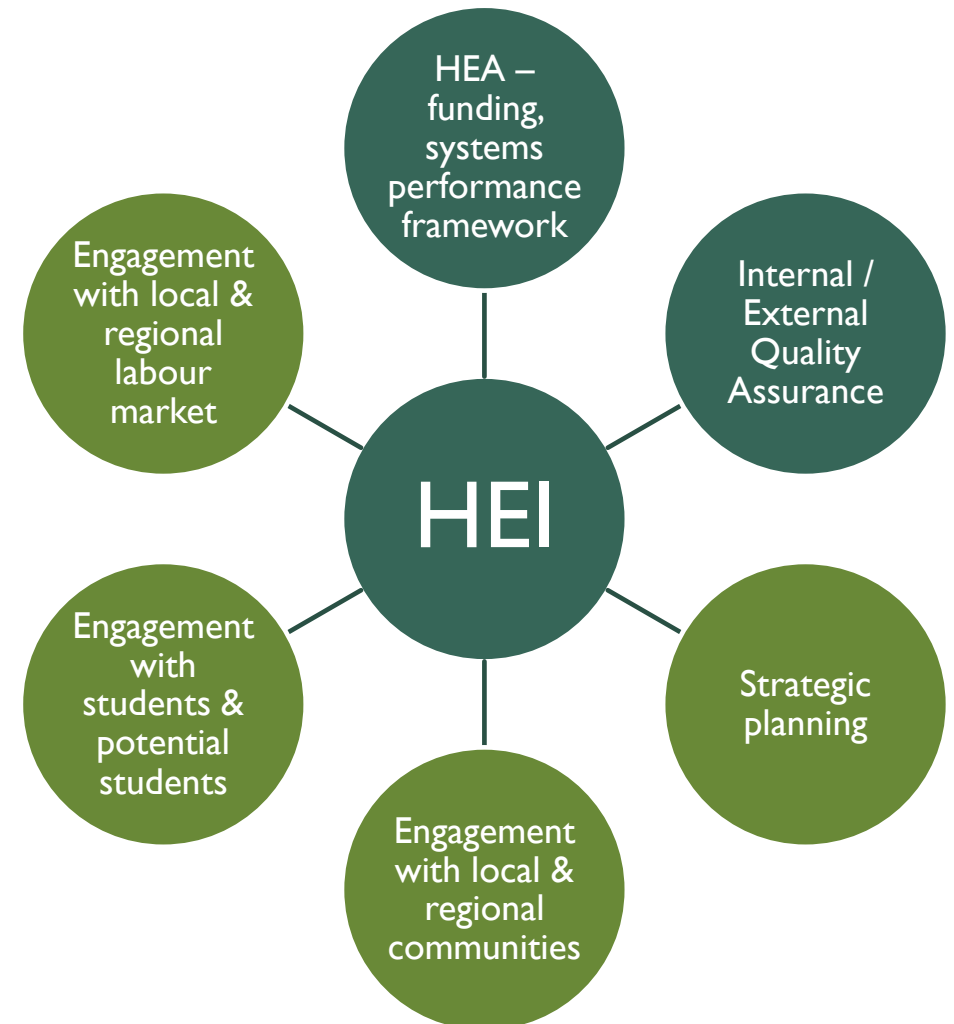
INSTITUTIONS' PERSPECTIVES – AUTONOMY & REPORTING

- Systems Performance Framework – strategic negotiated agreement with the HEA (statutory funding & policy body)
 - (Obj.4) Significantly improves the equality of opportunity through Education and Training and recruits a student body that **reflects the diversity and social mix** of Ireland's population
- Annual (Institutional) Quality Report submitted to Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
- Strategic planning “owned” by the institution



INSTITUTIONS' PERSPECTIVES – STRATEGIC PLANNING

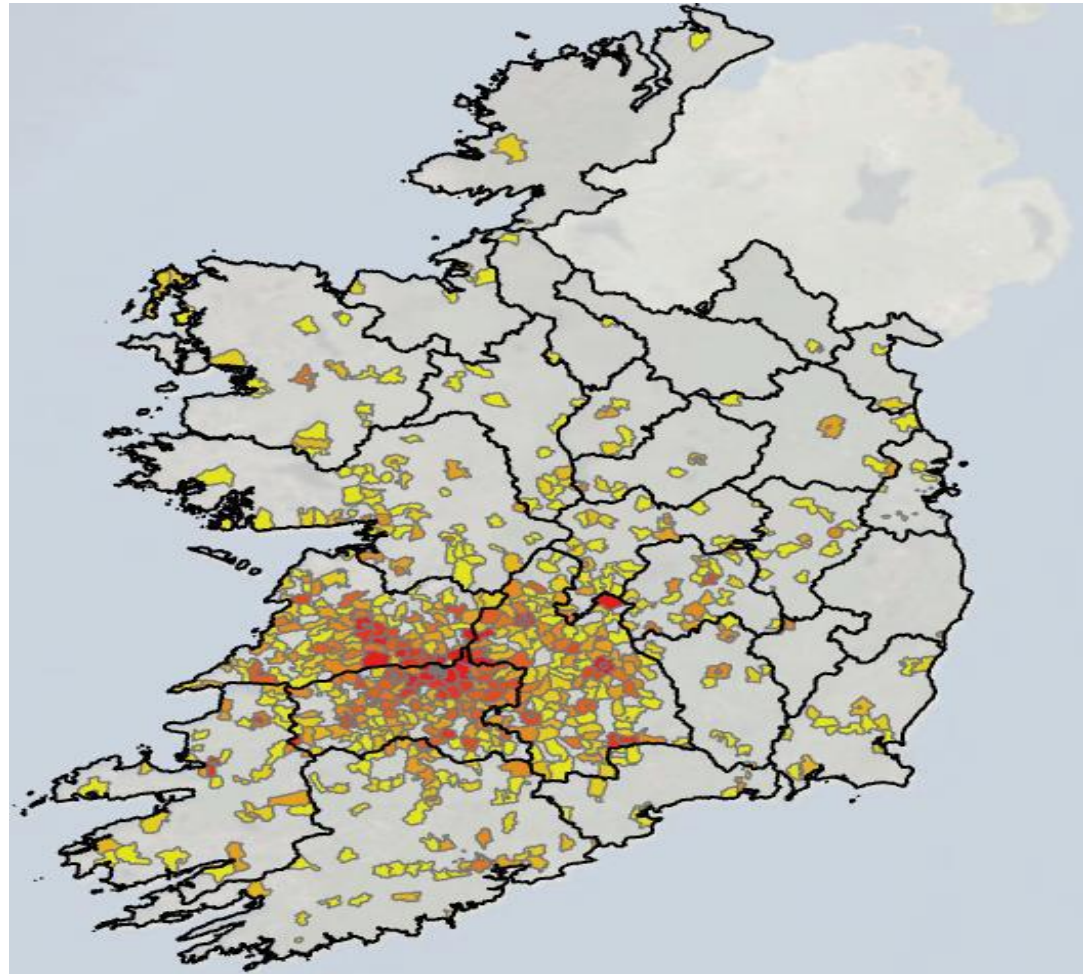
- Strategic planning example: Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT)
- „the plan is based on wide- ranging consultation with those who have an interest in what we do: industry and commerce, local government, schools, education and training boards, our staff and their trades unions and our current student body. That consultation was deeply rooted in the key LIT value of being relevant to and engaged in the needs of the Limerick City Region and of Tipperary“
- „A reorganisation of the senior management team has been carried out to ensure that every key objective in the plan has a capable and account able executive responsible for accomplishing it“
- „In early 2018 the HEA launched a number of important documents, one a reflection on the sector for the period 2014-2017 (HE System Performance) and a new HE System Performance Framework to cover the period 2018-2020. It has also been announced that there will be a new round of Compact agreements for the coming period. LIT has reviewed the outcomes of the 2014-2017 period, and has mapped the priorities and actions of the new Framework to the plan herein.“



GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD OF LIT STUDENTS MATCHED WITH DEPRIVATION SCORES BASED ON CENSUS DATA

A Spatial & Socio-Economic Profile of Higher Education Institutions in Ireland – Published in October 2019

Dark red areas have higher deprivation index scores



INSTITUTIONS' PERSPECTIVES – MISSION-BASED “COMPACTS”

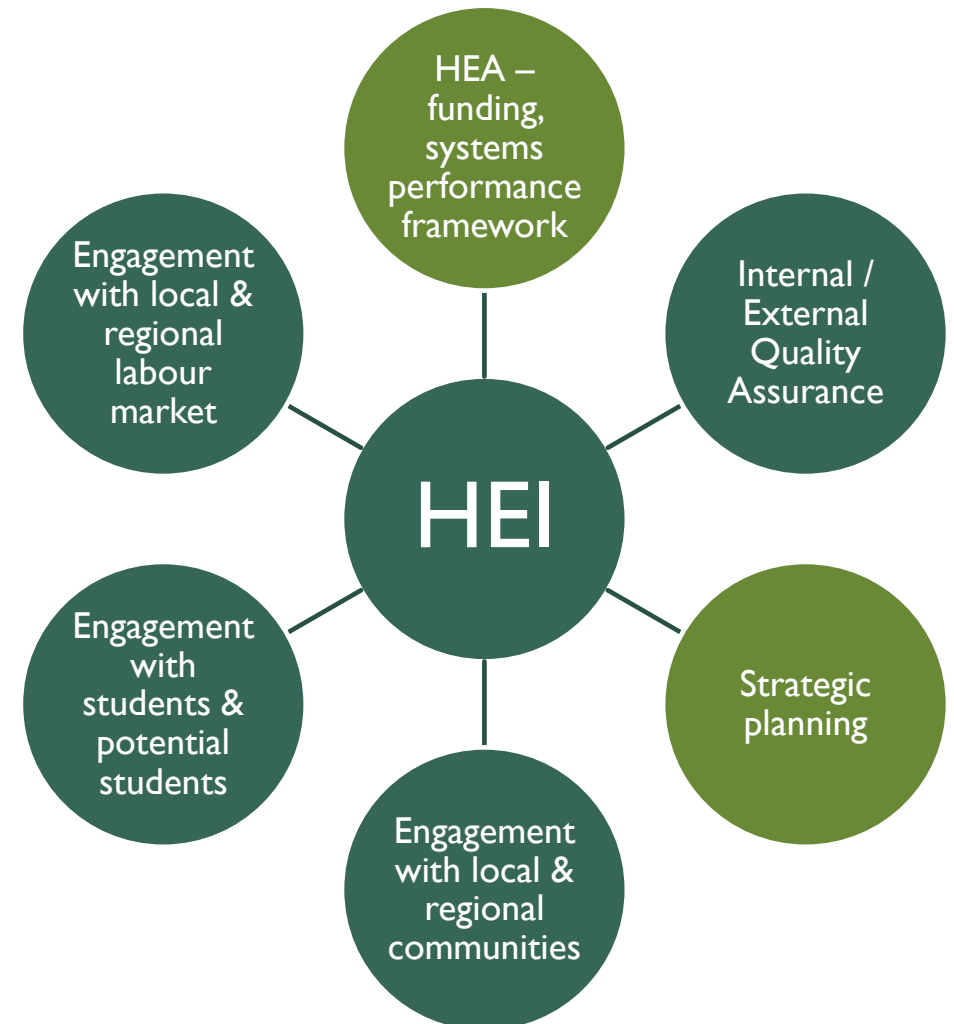
- Negotiated agreements between institution and the HEA
- Institutional responses to national objectives and targets
- Measurable targets clearly stated. These may include:
 - Increasing numbers of learners with FET qualifications; numbers of mature students; numbers of students with disabilities; students from Traveller Community
- Specific national funding to support some institutional activities – for example:



PATH

Programme for Access
to Higher Education

- Initial Teacher Education
- 1916 Bursaries
- HE Access funding to HEI clusters working together



ON THE GROUND: TWO KEY STRANDS OF ACTIVITY

■ Engage with potential students



Certificate in Transition to Higher Education



Community Engagement



GIVE Volunteer Programme



HEAR Scheme



Primary Level Initiatives

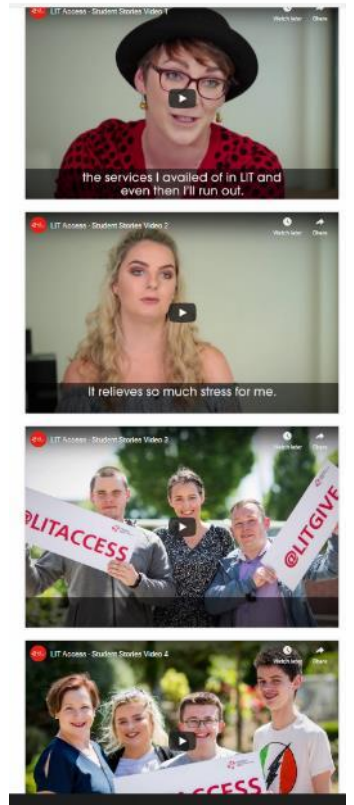


Secondary Level Initiatives

and

Maintain supports for current students

- Financial
- Disability
- Laptop / ICT
- Mentoring & peer support
- Importance of accessible point of contact
- **“You belong here”**
- <https://lit.ie/access-services/student-testimonials>



MITIGATING EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

- ❑ Aiming for system-wide approach
- ❑ Cross sectoral (post-secondary) Mitigating Educational Disadvantage Working Group established – March
- ❑ Range of emerging (and existing) issues explored
 - ❑ Access to suitable learning spaces
 - ❑ ICT – devices and broadband / WiFi
 - ❑ Additional financial challenges
 - ❑ Equity of assessments
 - ❑ Mental health and wellbeing
- ❑ Responses include – funding for laptops and for mental health supports
- ❑ Re-thinking opportunities for face to face engagement
- ❑ How to engage with pre-entry students in future?



FINDINGS IN RESPECT OF COVID 19 – CONSISTENT THEMES

- ❑ Financial distress
 - ❑ Loss of part-time employment to support college costs
 - ❑ Demands to increase direct student supports
 - ❑ Concerns about the removal of temporary welfare supports for students affected by Covid-19
- ❑ ICT Issues
 - ❑ Demands for laptops and supports for data packages to support blended learning
 - ❑ Broadband issues
- ❑ Study Spaces
 - ❑ Many socio-economically disadvantaged students live in small overcrowded accommodation with little room to study
- ❑ Motivation
 - ❑ Lack of physical contact with peers, mentoring and access services
 - ❑ No structure to the day and many distractions at home
- ❑ Mental Health
 - ❑ Social isolation

COVID 19 POLICY RESPONSES – RETURN TO EDUCATION

- ❑ Additional funding provided in July to support the return to education in September 2020
- ❑ Supports for Students and Access Services
 - ❑ Additional access funding provided to support students via the Student Assistance Fund
 - ❑ Additional supports provided to support access services in the HEIs
- ❑ IT Solutions
 - ❑ State support provided for the purchase of laptops and data packages for vulnerable students
- ❑ Mental Health and Social Interaction (also looking at space considerations)
 - ❑ Wider than National Access Plan
 - ❑ Additional state support provided for mental health and wellbeing services in HEIs
- ❑ Rethinking Approaches to Access Strategies in HEIs
 - ❑ Plans to hold a Community of Practice seminar in early 2021 to share good practice

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

- <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/06/Consultation-Paper-Towards-The-Development-of-a-New-National-Plan-for-Equity-of-Access-to-Higher-Education.pdf>
- <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/National-Plan-for-Equity-of-Access-to-Higher-Education-2015-2019.pdf>
- <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/progress-review-of-the-national-access-plan-and-priorities-to-2021.pdf>
- **Limerick Institute of Technology – Strategic Plan** <https://lit.ie/getmedia/1c35e9a1-974f-4125-b6fb-d075511249ec/LIT-Strategic-Plan-2018-2022.pdf>
- **Limerick Institute of Technology – Student testimonials** <https://lit.ie/access-services/student-testimonials>
- **Overview of Access for institutes of technology** <http://www.thea.ie/access>
- **Mitigating Educational Disadvantage discussion papers** <https://www.aontas.com/aontas-covid-19-response>

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