

Social Inclusion Annual Reporting Template

1. Name of Activity:

No.: ESF 2.4

Third Level Access

2. What actions have taken place over the last year to incorporate the principle of social inclusion into the Activity?

(a) Ongoing Actions:

(i) The HEA's website on financial support for further and higher education, www.studentfinance.ie was developed by the National Access Office over 2006-2007, in line with a recommendation of the *Review of Funding to Achieve Equity of Access*, and was launched in January 2008. Since that date it has garnered over 535,000 visits and over 4.9m individual page views. www.studentfinance.ie provides comprehensive information on the range of funding schemes that are available to (full-time) students attending further and higher education. The website has been designed to help users, via one information portal, to quickly and conveniently identify the various sources of financial support that they may be eligible for and how they might apply. The website is considered a valuable information resource in providing vital information on student grants and other supports for disadvantaged students.

(ii) In July 2008 the National Access Office, a unit of the Higher Education Authority, published the *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013*. The plan provides an evaluation of progress, identifies challenges and outlines a series of measures to be implemented which ensure that the higher education sector can realise the targets outlined in the plan.

The Plan outlines a range of quantitative targets in relation to enhancing participation of disadvantaged students in higher education in relation to overall goals for fostering social inclusion. The targets are:

- A national participation rate of 72 per cent of the relevant age cohort will be achieved by 2020 (55 per cent in 2004).
- All socio-economic groups will have entry rates of at least 54 per cent by 2020 ('Non-manual' group at 27 per cent and 'Semi-skilled and unskilled manual' group at 33 per cent in 2004).
- Mature students will comprise at least 20 per cent of total full-time entrants by 2013 (13 per cent in 2006).
- Mature students will comprise 27 per cent of all (full-time and part-time) entrants by 2013 (18 per cent in 2006).
- Flexible/part-time provision will increase to 17 per cent by 2013 (7 per cent in 2006).
- Non-standard entry routes to higher education will be developed so that they account for 30 per cent of all entrants by 2013 (estimated at 24 per cent in 2006).
- Ireland will reach EU average levels for lifelong learning by 2010 and will move towards the top quartile of EU countries by 2013.

- The number of students with sensory, physical and multiple disabilities in higher education will be doubled by 2013.

Activities in 2009, with respect to the targets above and which incorporate the principle of social inclusion, include the following:

(b) New Actions

- A number of higher education institutions published their 'Access Plan' which outlines institutional strategy in relation to widening participation for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The plans will be integrated as part of the overall institutional strategic planning process.
- A study on the costs of participating in higher education was completed in 2009 and will be published in January 2010. The study examines available data on costs over a range of fields of study and for a number of different student groups, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, mature students and students with dependants. This study will inform plans for the modernisation of student supports on a national level.
- Following discussions with the higher education sector on the development of enhanced data on the profile of applicants to the Student Assistance Fund, a pilot data collection initiative has been implemented for the 2009-10 academic year. An information management system has been developed to allow for the collection of additional information on the recipients of financial assistance and will allow the National Access Office to track retention and completion for recipients through the HEA student records system. In addition enhanced data will facilitate cross-referencing of recipients across different funding programmes.
- The equal access data collected for 2007-8 was published in February 2009 in the HEA's *Higher Education Key Facts and Figures 07/08*. First year undergraduate entrants were invited to respond, on a voluntary basis, to questions on socio-economic background, disability status and on ethnic and cultural background. The data outcomes for 2007-8 included; the largest socioeconomic group for new entrants in both the university and institute of technology sector was 'Employer and Manager' and students with a specific learning disability are the largest category of new entrants indicating a disability. The report can be accessed at <http://www.heai.ie/files/files/file/HEAFacts0708.pdf>, see section 7. The data will, at a future date, be used to inform a new model of allocation of funding for the higher education sector, including the provision of a 'premium' for students from the disadvantaged groups.

3. Progress against Indicators (where established):

(This should be presented if possible in the tabular form laid out below)

Indicator	Baseline Position	Latest Position
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Number of students benefitting from the Student Assistance Fund	1828 male, 2281 female (2000/2001 figures)	2644 male, 5204 female (2008/2009 figures)
Number of students benefitting from the Fund for Students with Disabilities	250 male, 261 female (2001/2001 figures)	1994 male, 1849 female (2008/2009 figures)

4. Taking account of the material presented under 2 and 3 above, what contribution is the Activity making to the promotion of social inclusion

Inclusion and the creation of a more inclusive society are identified as one of the major challenges facing Ireland. Of particular importance is the need for equality of access to educational opportunities, having regard to the fact that the lack of educational experience and related qualifications militates against one's ability to participate fully in the economy, in employment and in society.

The Third-Level Access Sub-Priority Programme supports the above objectives in promoting and facilitating social inclusion through its support for students with disabilities and students from disadvantaged backgrounds as well as mature students in further and higher education.

The National Access Office is responsible for the administration of two funding programmes to support equity of access to higher education: Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities

- The Student Assistance Fund is intended to tackle disadvantage by providing financial support to disadvantaged students who require additional financial support to enable them to fully benefit from their third-level studies. A gross allocation of €5 million was approved in 2008-9 and a total of 7,848 students benefited from the Fund.
- The Fund for Students with Disabilities provides students with supports and services to enable them to access, to participate and to complete their course of study. A gross allocation of approximately €11.7 million was approved in 2008-9, for 3,843 approved students.

The National Office, in its administration of these funding programmes, continues to provide financial support to students from underrepresented groups studying in further and higher education, thereby promoting and enhancing social inclusion.

5. Identify any issues arising that need to be drawn to the attention of the Managing Authority, the Equal Opportunities and Social Inclusion Co-ordinating Committee or other Departments.¹

¹ The issues could relate to specific implementation concerns e.g. collection of data, or could relate to more general findings concerning the principle in question e.g. a particular policy in another department is obstructing your Activity from promoting the principle.

None.

6. Please feel free to attach any relevant additional material to this reporting template.