

ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning OP 2014-2020	
<b>Priority:</b>	Priority 3: Investing in Education, Training and Life Long Learning with a view to upskilling and re-skilling the labour force.
<b>Thematic Objective and investment priorities:</b>	Thematic Objective: <b>Improving the quality and efficiency of, and access to, tertiary and equivalent education with a view to increasing participation and attainment levels, especially for disadvantaged groups;</b>  Associated investment priority: Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning
<b>Activity title:</b>	<b>Third Level Access</b>
<b>Overall Objective:</b>	To contribute to enhancing attainment of tertiary education qualifications by disadvantaged and disabled students, thereby supporting access to sustainable employment as skilled members of the workforce.
<b>Certifying Authority:</b>	ESF Certifying Authority
<b>Managing Authority:</b>	ESF Managing Authority
<b>Intermediate Body:</b>	Higher Education Authority
<b>Beneficiary Body:</b>	Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)
<b>EU Co-financing Rate:</b>	50%

**1. CONTEXT/ PROBLEM/ NEED BEING ADDRESSED:**

Increasingly, tertiary education qualifications are a pre-requisite for holding sustainable employment over the life-course. Without tertiary level qualifications, members of the workforce face increasing risks of long-term unemployment as Ireland and other countries in Europe increasingly embrace the knowledge-based economy. Job roles linked with lower skills have been steadily relocating from Europe and North America to regions such as Asia, leaving workers with these skills profiles vulnerable.

As Ireland recovers, opportunities for higher education graduates will continue to grow. Traditionally, groups such as the socio-economically disadvantaged and students with disabilities have been underrepresented in tertiary education. Moving forward, this situation will lead to disproportionate numbers of persons from these backgrounds facing risks of long-term unemployment in the knowledge economy. As the research literature internationally shows, there is a strong link between unemployment and poverty. Particular measures are required to ensure that disabled or disadvantaged students are supported to acquire tertiary level qualifications, not only in the interests of equity and equality across society, but also in the interests of ensuring that Ireland's population of working age has the skills necessary to compete in the global marketplace. The Third Level Access activity addresses the need to ensure attainment of skills at higher education level for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with disabilities. A commitment to promoting equality more generally and ensuring that there is no discrimination in how measures are implemented must be part of that, as a matter of course. The groups that will continue to be prioritised are those national target groups, as set out in the National Access Plan.

**2. OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTIVITY:**

To contribute to enhancing attainment of tertiary education qualifications by disadvantaged and disabled students, thereby supporting access to sustainable employment as skilled members of the workforce.

**3. ESF FUNDED ELEMENT OF ACTIVITY:**

The Simplified Costs Option under Article 14(2) of 1304/2013 ESF Regulation is to be applied to the operations of this activity. This means that ESF claims will be made up of the eligible direct staff costs which support the Overall Objective of the Third Level Access Activity, plus 40% to cover the remaining eligible costs of an operation, to include, but not restricted to the following posts:

- Access Officer
- Disability Officer
- Mature Students Officer

Eligible direct staff costs includes costs deriving from an agreement between employer and employee or service contracts for external staff (provided that these costs are clearly identifiable). For example, if a beneficiary contracts the services of an external trainer for its in-house training sessions, the invoice needs to identify the different types of costs. The salary of the trainer will be considered as external staff costs. However, teaching materials for example cannot be taken into account.

Staff costs include the total remuneration, including in-kind benefits in line with collective agreements, paid to people in return for work related to the operation. They also include taxes and employees' social security contributions as well as the employer's compulsory and voluntary social contributions. The following are not considered to be staff costs for ESF claim purposes

- Costs of business trips
- Allowances or salaries disbursed for the benefit of participants (e.g. students, trainees) in ESF operations
- Redundancy or back-pay costs paid to staff that are not related to the eligibility period of the operation being co-funded.

Also, any net revenue generated from the co-funded operations shall be deducted from its eligible expenditure in line with section 3.6 of the Department of Education and Skills Circular 1/2015, Eligibility Rules for 2014-2020 ESF and YEI. This includes any maternity and welfare benefits paid/reimbursed to the employer.

**4. RESPONSIBILITIES OF INTERMEDIATE BODY:**

In line with Article 123(6) of CPR 1303/2013, an Administrative Agreement between the Managing Authority and Intermediate Body for this activity will formally record in writing the responsibilities and tasks to be carried out by the Intermediate Body on behalf of the Managing Authority

5. CONTRIBUTION TO HORIZONTAL THEMES	
<b>A. Promotion of Equality between men and women</b>	<p>While the fundamental criterion governing the allocation of funds under the Third Level Access activity is one of need/merit rather than gender based, it is recognised that the measure can contribute to gender mainstreaming, as defined by the European Commission, by helping ensuring that the implementation process takes adequate account of the effects on the respective situations of men and women. In this context, regard will be had to the impact of the funds in promoting gender equality in further and higher education.</p> <p>Of particular importance for gender equality is ensuring that women with caring responsibilities are not excluded on financial grounds from higher education participation. Assisting with the costs of childcare for parent students is one of the areas addressed by the Student Assistance Fund. The fund can also be accessed by students for ongoing financial or emergency support.</p>
<b>B. Promotion of equal opportunities and non-discrimination</b>	<p>The promotion of Equal Opportunities is central to the twin objectives of the Third Level Access activity. The measure contributes to Ireland progress towards a system of further and higher education which is accessible to all who wish to gain a qualification, regardless of factors such as socio-economic background, age, disability or ethnicity/race. The Third Level Access activity is integrated into the wider set of policies and practices, nationally and institutionally, designed to ensure equality of opportunity in tertiary education. These policies comprise non-discrimination legislation, a national plan for equity of access to higher education, core funding for access, special admission procedures, outreach and a range of quantitative targets.</p> <p>The Third Level Access activity is committed to equality which includes promoting equality and prohibiting discrimination in employment and in service delivery on nine grounds as defined in the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2011 and the Equal Status Acts 2000-2012. The nine grounds are gender (including gender identity), family status, civil status, sexual orientation, age, disability (including mental health), race (including skin colour, ethnicity and nationality), membership of the Traveller community, religion (including non-religious belief).</p> <p>Providers will provide reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities. The providers will also allow for positive action to promote or ensure equality through preferential treatment or positive measures which promote equality of opportunity for people who may be disadvantaged because of their circumstances, or to cater for their special needs.</p>
<b>C. Sustainable Development</b>	<p>As set out in the Partnership Agreement, the principle of sustainable development requires that the needs of the present be met without compromising the ability of future generations. This requires that support for environmental protection requirements, resource efficiency, sustainable management of natural resources, risk prevention and management are addressed through both dedicated funding streams and through their horizontal integration across the Operational Programmes.</p>

	<p>The Governments' sustainable development framework document is intended to provide a platform for the integration of sustainable development principles into policies across all sectors. The framework broadly follows the thematic approach of the <i>EU Sustainable Development Strategy</i> and sets out a wide range of measures that seek to ensure an improvement in Ireland's quality of life into the future. Among the areas listed are sustainability of public finances and economic resilience, sustainable consumption and production, conservation and management of natural resources, climate change and clean energy, social inclusion, sustainable communities and spatial planning, education, communication and behaviour change, innovation, research and development, skills and training and global poverty and sustainable development.</p>
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**6. INDICATORS and REPORTING**

Reporting on the progress of each activity is required for the Annual and YEI Implementation Reports and the Programme Monitoring Committee. This reporting includes information on financial and non-financial indicators as outlined in the subsequent paragraphs.

High level Investment Priority and Priority Axis targets have been set as part of the output and result indicators and performance framework<sup>1</sup> tables included in the PEIL OP. The *ESF co-funded* and *ESF + YEI co-funded tables* below detail the activity level indicators that contribute to the higher level targets in the OP. In order to meet the reporting requirements the data in the table below must be captured and reported for this activity.

In addition to the capturing and reporting on the data for the high level targets included in the OP, data on common indicators is also required. These indicators are detailed in the attached Annex I<sup>2</sup> in line with the requirements of Article 5 of the ESF Regulation 1304/2013.

Priority 3 (ESF co-funded)				
Outputs and Results Indicator Targets	Measurement Unit	Target Value 2023	Performance Framework Targets	
			Target Value 2018	Target Value 2023
<b>OUTPUTS</b>				
Number of disadvantaged or/and disabled persons assisted in accessing third level education (Student Assistance Fund and Fund for Students with Disabilities)	Number of disadvantaged or/and disabled persons	185,296	132,354	185,296
Number of LTU disadvantaged or/and disabled persons assisted in accessing third level education (Student Assistance Fund and Fund for Students with Disabilities)	Number of LTU disadvantaged or/and disabled persons	10,917	N/A	N/A
Certified Expenditure	€m	22.4	6.4	22.4
<b>RESULTS</b>				
Number of disadvantaged and/or disabled persons assisted that gained a third level qualification upon leaving	Number of disadvantaged or/and disabled persons	61,148	N/A	N/A
Number of LTU disadvantaged and/or disabled persons assisted that gained a third level qualification upon leaving	Number of LTU disadvantaged or/and disabled persons	3,603	N/A	N/A

<sup>1</sup> Additional information on the application of the performance framework and reserve are set out under Articles 20 to 22 of the CPR 1303/2013

<sup>2</sup> The information on each participant are set out in data fields included in section (1) of Annex I. The European Commission issued an ESF guidance note on the *Monitoring and Evaluation of European Cohesion Policy* in September 2014 and Annex C of this document includes definitions for common ESF/YEI indicators. A further guidance note on the completeness of data is to be issued by the European Commission to further clarify the requirements in this area.

7. FINANCIAL INPUT	
Budget (€/m.) ESF + National Contribution	€22.4m
ESF Contribution €m	€11.2m
ESF Co-Financing %	50%
EU Intervention Field Code	116

8. CERTIFICATION ROLES		
Ex-Ante checks by:	Certified Claims Submitted by:	Submitted To:
	HEIs	HEA
HEA	HEA	Managing Authority DES
Managing Authority DES	Managing Authority DES	Certifying Authority DES
Certifying Authority DES	Certifying Authority DES	European Commission

9. PROJECT SELECTION	
Project Selection Process	<p>Each year, in advance of the academic session, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) determines how the annual Third Level Access allocation will be apportioned.</p> <p>On behalf of the Department of Education and Skills, the HEA manages two funds that are designed to enable students from the equity of access target groups to participate in higher education: the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) and the Student Assistance Fund (SAF).</p> <p>The provision for the FSD is allocated following a process of submission to the HEA by further and higher education institution. Submissions detail the funding resources, supports and accommodations for registered students with disabilities.</p> <p>The provision for the SAF is allocated among recurrently funded higher education institutions using an allocation model that takes account of a) the size of the institution and b) the recent performance of the institution in admitting new entrants to undergraduate programmes from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.</p>
Project Selection Criteria	The Higher Education Authority issues detailed guidelines for each of the funding programmes at the beginning of or in advance of

	<p>each academic year. These outline the criteria for student eligibility.</p> <p>To ensure that the Student Assistance Fund is directed to supporting the agreed target cohorts, the following criteria apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Those eligible for grant-aid are registered students on full-time undergraduate or postgraduate courses of not less than one year in duration with ongoing needs for financial support or require emergency financial assistance in order to complete their studies.</li> <li>- In 2017, further to the Review of Access to Higher Education the fund has been extended to part time students who are lone parents or members of the other target groups.</li> </ul> <p>To ensure that the Fund for Students with Disabilities is directed to supporting the agreed target cohorts, the following criteria apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Those eligible for funded supports or accommodations are students with a verifiable disability on full-time Further Education/PLC, undergraduate or postgraduate courses who require such supports or accommodations in an educational setting in order to complete their studies.</li> </ul>
<p>Composition of Project Selection Committee</p>	<p>Institutions that are part of the Student Assistance Fund typically have a local committee comprising staff with responsibilities for support and pastoral care of students, in particular disadvantaged students.</p> <p>Local decisions on funding of the target cohort under the Fund for Students with Disabilities are made by a) the Disability or Access Officer in higher education institutions or b) managers or student support functions in further education institutions; in both cases in accordance with the Fund criteria.</p>

10. PUBLICITY/INFORMATION PLANS	
<p>Publicity/ Information Plans for the Activity</p>	<p>Website, brochures, reports and promotional materials will equally publicise the appropriate funding source in line with national requirements and those of Implementing Regulation (EC) regarding information and publicity measures to be carried out by the Member States concerning assistance from the Structural Funds</p> <p>The following Regulations apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EU Regulation No. 1303/2013 CPR ( Articles 115-117)</li> <li>• Commission Implementing Regulation No. 821/2014 (Articles 3 and 4 and Annex II)</li> </ul>

11. IMPLEMENTATION CONTACT		
<p><b>Body:</b> Higher Education Authority (HEA)</p>	<p><b>Contact Name:</b></p>	<p>Modesta Mawarire Sorcha Carthy</p>
<p><b>Address:</b> 3 Shelbourne Buildings, Crampton Avenue,</p>	<p><b>Phone:</b></p>	<p>01 231 7132</p>

Shelbourne Road, Ballsbridge, D04 C2Y6.	Email:	<a href="mailto:mmawarire@hea.ie">mmawarire@hea.ie</a>  <a href="mailto:scarthy@hea.ie">scarthy@hea.ie</a>
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*ANNEX I***Common output and result indicators for ESF investments**

(1) Common output indicators for participants

"Participants"<sup>3</sup> refers to persons benefiting directly from an ESF intervention who can be identified and asked for their characteristics, and for whom specific expenditure is earmarked. Other persons shall not be classified as participants. All data shall be broken down by gender.

The common output indicators for participants are:

- unemployed, including long-term unemployed\*,
- long-term unemployed\*,
- inactive\*,
- inactive, not in education or training\*,
- employed, including self-employed\*,
- below 25 years of age\*,
- above 54 years of age\*,
- above 54 years of age who are unemployed, including long-term unemployed, or inactive not in education or training\*,
- with primary (ISCED 1) or lower secondary education (ISCED 2)\*,
- with upper secondary (ISCED 3) or post-secondary education (ISCED 4)\*,
- with tertiary education (ISCED 5 to 8)\*,
- participants who live in jobless households\*,
- participants who live in jobless households with dependent children\*,
- participants who live in a single adult household with dependent children\*,
- migrants, participants with a foreign background, minorities (including marginalised communities such as the Roma)\*\*,
- participants with disabilities\*\*,
- other disadvantaged\*\*.

The total number of participants will be calculated automatically on the basis of the output indicators.

These data on participants entering an ESF supported operation shall be provided in the annual implementation reports as specified in Article 50(1) and (2) and Article 111(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.

- homeless or affected by housing exclusion\*,
- from rural areas\*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Managing authorities shall establish a system that records and stores individual participant data in computerised form as set out in Article 125 (2) (d) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. The data processing arrangements put in place by the Member States shall be in line with the provisions of Directive 95/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 1995 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data (OJ L 281, 23.11.1995, p. 31), in particular Articles 7 and 8 thereof. Data reported under the indicators marked with \* are personal data according to Article 7 of Directive 95/46/EC. Their processing is necessary for compliance with the legal obligation to which the controller is subject (Article 7(c) of Directive 95/46/EC). For the definition of controller, see Article 2 of Directive 95/46/EC. Data reported under the indicators marked with \*\* are a special category of data according to Article 8 of Directive 95/46/EC. Subject to the provision of suitable safeguards, Member States may, for reasons of substantial public interest, lay down exemptions in addition to those laid down in Article 8(2) of Directive 95/46/EC, either by national law or by decision of the supervisory authority (Article 8(4) of Directive 95/46/EC).

The data on participants under the two above indicators will be provided in the annual implementation reports as specified in Article 50(4) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. The data shall be collected based on a representative sample of participants within each investment priority. Internal validity of the sample shall be ensured in such a way that the data can be generalised at the level of investment priority.

(2) Common output indicators for entities are:

- number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or non-governmental organisations,
- number of projects dedicated at sustainable participation and progress of women in employment,
- number of projects targeting public administrations or public services at national, regional or local level,
- number of supported micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (including cooperative enterprises, enterprises of the social economy).

These data shall be provided in the annual implementation reports as specified in Article 50(1) and (2) and Article 111(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.

(3) Common immediate result indicators for participants are:

- inactive participants engaged in job searching upon leaving\*,
- participants in education/training upon leaving\*,
- participants gaining a qualification upon leaving\*,
- participants in employment, including self-employment, upon leaving\*,
- disadvantaged participants engaged in job searching, education/ training, gaining a qualification, in employment, including self-employment, upon leaving\*\*.

These data shall be provided in the annual implementation reports as specified in Article 50(1) and (2) and Article 111(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. All data shall be broken down by gender.

(4) Common longer-term result indicators for participants are:

- participants in employment, including self-employment, six months after leaving\*,
- participants with an improved labour market situation six months after leaving\*,
- participants above 54 years of age in employment, including self-employment, six months after leaving\*,
- disadvantaged participants in employment, including self-employment, six months after leaving\*\*.

These data shall be provided in the annual implementation reports as specified in Article 50(5) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. They shall be collected based on a representative sample of participants within each investment priority. Internal validity of the sample shall be ensured in such a way that the data can be generalised at the level of investment priority. All data shall be broken down by gender.

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<sup>4</sup> The data shall be collected at the level of smaller administrative units (local administrative units 2), in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 May 2003 on the establishment of a common classification of territorial units for statistics (NUTS) (OJ L 154, 21.6.2003, p. 1).