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An Comhchoiste um Oideachas agus Scileanna

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Bealtaine 2019

Houses of the Oireachtas

Joint Committee on Education and Skills
Report on Education inequality & disadvantage and Barriers to Education

May 2019

32/ES/24
Chairman’s Foreword

The Committee is aware that some research suggests that low educational attainment is directly related to issues such as homelessness, addiction, unemployment, poverty and poor health. The research also suggests that socio-economic factors may contribute to people not having equal access to education thereby denying them the opportunity to break free of such issues.

In its examination of this topic, the Committee was particularly interested in hearing from those ‘on the ground’ and was keen to explore a number of areas, including the impact of educational disadvantage on the individual and society.

As Chair, I agreed that it was essential for this topic to form part of the Committee’s Work Programme and a thorough examination of it should be undertaken. As a result, the Committee invited written submissions and held two meetings to cover this complex matter.

In addition, I was very happy for Senator Lynn Ruane to act as Rapporteur in this examination and wish to acknowledge the significant effort she has put into bringing forward this Report.

Fiona O’Loughlin T.D.
Chairman
May 2019
Rapporteur’s Foreword

The aim of this examination was to focus on solutions to the issue of education inequality and disadvantage. Some areas covered in this examination include the current DEIS model and if it can be improved; if an education system can be created which increases participation in post-secondary education, especially among groups with traditionally low rates of participation.

Also considered was the benefits that equal access to education can provide particularly among groups who experience high instances of poverty, addiction and other social issues especially those who live in areas of deprivation.

This report aims to highlight the areas of improvement which are necessary to increase access routes to further education for early school leavers, young people in the justice system and groups most at risk of educational disadvantage. It may also highlight the reasons why young people drop out or do not complete courses or transition from one level to another resulting in them being ill-equipped to pursue any career.

I want to pay tribute to all those who work in all areas of the education sector and to the stakeholders who made a significant contribution to this process and gave of their valuable time.

Senator Lynn Ruane (IND)
Rapporteur
Introduction

Educational disadvantage is defined as “…the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools” or as “a situation whereby individuals in society derive less benefit from the education system than their peers”\(^1\). In the Republic of Ireland, social inequality is registered and reproduced at all levels of the education system. Notwithstanding State commitments to ‘free’ education, school costs for primary and secondary school children are often three to four times more than the public supports provided, with one in ten parents compelled to go into debt to afford them\(^2\).

In Ireland, research by the Combat Poverty Agency\(^3\) shows that over 1,000 children each year do not transfer from primary to secondary school, some 4,500 young people stop attending school before they complete their Junior Certificate and 1 in 5 children leave secondary school without completing their Leaving Certificate\(^4\). At the end of primary school, children from higher professional backgrounds had a mean literacy score of 43 (out of a possible 50), those from semi or un-skilled manual backgrounds had a score of 28, and those in households where neither parent was employed had a mean score of 25\(^5\). Taking into account involuntary part-time work, and workers marginally attached to the labour market, Ireland has one of the largest rates of youth who are

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\(^1\) Education Act, 1998  
\(^2\) Barnardos, 2016  
\(^4\) https://www.barnardos.ie/changeachildslife-2010/issues/educational-disadvantage.html  
\(^5\) Smyth and McCoy, 2009: 7
neither in employment nor in education\textsuperscript{6}. There are Dublin communities where progression to Higher Education has remained below 20\% despite 20 years of investment in activities to raise the educational aspirations and outcomes for children from these communities\textsuperscript{7}. There are notable regional inequalities with over one in five persons (21.9\%) in Donegal, aged 15 and over, not being educated beyond primary level, the highest for any county, followed by Monaghan (18.0\%), Cavan (17.8\%), Longford (17.7\%), Mayo (17.4\%), Wexford (16.6\%).

Research indicates that participation in high quality education has benefits not only for young people themselves but also for taxpayers and society. These benefits include better job prospects and better health outcomes. Research also shows that issues such as homelessness, addiction, unemployment, poverty and poor health are linked to socio-economic factors, which derive directly, and indirectly from education disadvantage\textsuperscript{8 9 10}.

In light of this information, the Committee decided to include an examination of educational inequality in its 2018 Work Programme. On 6\textsuperscript{th} of February 2018 witnesses were invited to attend a meeting of the Joint Committee to discuss the topic of education inequality and disadvantage.

\textsuperscript{7} HEA, 2014
\textsuperscript{8} https://academic.oup.com/sf/article/94/2/505/2583794
\textsuperscript{9} http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07347324.2015.982463
**Engagement with Stakeholders**

At its meeting on 6\(^{th}\) February 2018, the Committee heard from the following stakeholders:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Name</th>
<th>Position/Institution</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Katriona O’Sullivan</td>
<td>Academic, Maynooth University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. John Bissett</td>
<td>Community Worker, Canal Communities Local Drugs &amp; Alcohol Task Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms. Niamh Quinn</td>
<td>Senior Youth Officer, Foróige</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms. Elizabeth Waters</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer (CEO), An Cosán</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms. Deirdre Malone</td>
<td>Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT)</td>
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<td>Ms. Sinead Dooley</td>
<td>Irish Rural Link (IRL)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms. Caitriona O’Brien</td>
<td>Principal Officer, Department of Education &amp; Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms. Olive McGovern</td>
<td>Principal Officer, Department of Children &amp; Youth Affairs</td>
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At its meeting on 29\(^{th}\) May 2018, the Committee heard from the following stakeholders:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Name</th>
<th>Position/Institution</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professor Kathleen Lynch</td>
<td>University College Dublin (UCD)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr. Patrick Nevin</td>
<td>Tallaght Traveller Community Development Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms. Valerie Maher</td>
<td>One Family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms. Ann Heelan</td>
<td>Association for Higher Education Access &amp; Disability (AHEAD)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr. Andreas Mokake</td>
<td>Spiritan Asylum Services Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms. Niamh Randall</td>
<td>Simon Communities Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr. Shane Rooney</td>
<td>Adult Education Guidance Association of Ireland (AEGAI)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr. Wayne Dignam</td>
<td>Care Leavers’ Network Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr. Shane Griffin</td>
<td>Care Leavers’ Network Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr. Richard Dolan</td>
<td>Principal Officer, Department of Education and Skills (DES)</td>
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Contribution of the witnesses

In the Committee’s first engagement with witnesses on 6th February 2018, a number of important issues were identified and recommendations were put to the Committee for consideration.

A theme which emerged from the evidence given by all witnesses was the importance of the whole community when considering education inequality rather than only focussing on the school system. The witnesses emphasised the intersectional impact that class, community, family, policy and school have on educational opportunities and the necessity for all of these to be considered in any reform process. The contribution from the witnesses described in this section highlights these complexities and emphasises the need for multi-faceted considerations.

Dr Katriona O’Sullivan, Lecturer in the Turn to Teaching Project in the National University of Ireland Maynooth noted that educational inequality has a significant impact upon the capacity of a person to live a ‘good’ life. However, the current provisions to support uplifting those in disadvantaged communities was not doing enough to empower young people to live a life of value and purpose.

Dr O’Sullivan described the failings of the DEIS scheme, pointing to the recent DEIS review which shows that while literacy and numeracy ability has improved, this improvement has been observed in all schools across Ireland. This means that children in DEIS schools are still underperforming in comparison to those students in non-DEIS schools. She suggested that the programme of activities for DEIS students should be prescriptive, and that there was evidence to show that mentoring, academic support and college
awareness activities can play an important part in reducing education inequality.

Dr O’Sullivan also highlighted the importance of moving beyond the DEIS scheme and to recognise the intersectional nature of educational inequalities. She stated that consideration should be given to different levels of disadvantage and developing services to support people at their level, in their communities, and with their families. She recognised the importance of building pathways between community education, further education and higher education including supporting people financially and personally to make these transitions easier.

Ms Quinn from Foróige also noted the importance of building pathways between differing education offerings, especially for those who are at risk of early school leaving. Foróige described the positive impact that non-formal activities, such as youth work, can have on educational outcomes for young people. Ms Quinn also recognised the importance of collaboration between the formal and non-formal education sectors to ensure that young people who require intervention or support, to gain the most from their formal education, are identified, referred and supported. Foróige noted that youth work organisations can play a key role in upskilling and supporting the formal education sector in the delivery of youth education and development programmes.

Foróige argued that an *early warning signs programme*, similar to those seen in international settings, was necessary with special focus being placed on interventions for groups known to be at risk of early school leaving. In her contribution, Ms Quinn stated there was not enough support for pre-school children and highlighted the importance of extending the current welfare supports to pre-school
and over 16 year olds, and that a compulsory pre-school year could contribute to reducing the risk of early school leaving.

Ms Malone from Irish Rural Link (IRL) also noted the importance of targeting early school leaving. She suggested that the current structure of the Leaving Certificate as inadequate in keeping students who are at risk engaged. She further suggested that it is necessary to move from the rote learning, revise and retain model of education to one where innovation and creativity are encouraged and rewarded. The IRL noted that a curriculum that is relevant and coherent could motivate pupils to fully develop their strengths and talents. It was also put to the Committee that, a curriculum could be designed in such a way so that it reflects the different affinities of the pupil, takes account of different starting points and is adaptable to suit the ambitions of the pupil. The IRL argued that this model of engagement should include one-to-one engagement with those most at risk and, based on the individual’s needs, personal pathways should be developed to ensure against early school leaving.

IRL raised the issue of the Youthreach Programme and how its move towards an outcome based approach was not supporting its original goals, which were to work with the needs of the student who felt they had become “detached” from the educational system. Ms Malone called for the Youthreach Programme to revert back to a person centered approach, where the programme is tailored to meet the needs of the young person.

IRL paid particular attention to the importance of good quality Vocational Education programmes being made available to early school leavers noting that considerable work is necessary to
improve the perception of apprenticeships. Students, who choose to do an apprenticeship, whether this is in the traditional trades or new apprenticeships in ICT or finance, should not be made feel inferior to those that choose to attend third-level.

Ms Liz Waters CEO of An Cosán, gave her views on the different causes of education inequality and described the challenges to school completion and participation in further education. Ms Waters noted that for young adults their class, family structure, gender and familial experience of education can negatively impact on the likelihood they will complete school and their progression to further education. For older adults, barriers to participation also included the financial cost of full-time study, childcare, geography, public transport and lack of institutional access.

Ms Waters described the important role that community education can play in helping people to move out of poverty. She told the Committee that An Cosán in Tallaght West had facilitated over 16,000 students to engage successfully in education from basic education through to higher education. She further noted the ‘one generation solution’, whereby educating a young lone parent to degree level, means she/he will earn 40% more than someone without a degree and their children can exit poverty forever. Ms Waters also emphasised the importance of early education stating that this is key to achieving better outcomes in primary and post-primary schools. Ms Waters described the impact funding cuts have on community education and how the programme of activities which once supported lone parents to move out of poverty was at risk of being discontinued as it no longer ‘fit’ into predefined funding brackets.
The Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) spoke specifically to the impact of education on prisoner outcomes. The IPRT noted that educational disadvantage was highest among prisoners, with over 25% having no secondary school experience, and over 80% finishing school without a Leaving Certificate. Ms. Malone noted that her experience has shown that education and training is a vital component in addressing the rehabilitative needs of the prison population but the deterioration in education budgets within the prison estate in recent years is preventing this from happening. She highlighted staffing shortages which have resulted in a reduction in school hours and in March of 2017 only 42% of the prison population could participate in education activities. The IPRT suggested that the lack of supports available to prisoners upon release, including the availability of stable accommodation acts as a barrier for former prisoners to successfully reintegrate into society and gain access to education and employment. For those with more than one conviction, the current Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions and Certain Disclosures) Act 2016 represents a significant barrier to access education, employment, travel and insurance.

Dr John Bissett, Community Worker from Canal Communities Local Drugs & Alcohol Task Force, highlighted the importance of reflecting on the language used in education. He noted that while it appears that the Irish education system is a fair and meritocratic system, it is actually reproducing the class structure and the status quo. He described the impact that the government cuts have had for those living in poverty including the devaluing of the unpaid work of women, the lack of decent paid work, the reductions in the apprenticeship system, intermittent work, zero-hours contracts, casualised and low-paid work. Dr Bissett argued that people in communities of gross inequality are asking themselves the question ‘Unless I am one of the those who are cushioned and insulated from
the effects of all this why would I bother committing myself to long
term education when there is virtually nothing on offer save the
above.’ There was a call for society to reflect upon the whole
structure rather than trying to ‘fix’ small parts of a broken system.
Dr Bissett called on the Committee to be brave in their goals and to
consider the broader philosophical underpinnings of equality. He
asked that the Committee consider focusing its attention on Equality
of Outcome, which requires that individuals have the same share of
goods, not merely a chance to obtain them without the hindrance of
some obstacles.

Ms Caiitríona O’Brien, Department of Education and Skills,
recognised the challenges facing the Department and described the
results from the DEIS evaluations. She stated that while they are
encouraging in terms of educational outcomes, attendance,
retention progression and school planning, a significant gap still
remains between DEIS and non-DEIS schools. Ms O’Brien stated
that the DEIS Plan 2017 is focusing on narrowing this gap while
being mindful that success cannot be measured solely by
educational outcomes. Other aspects need to be taken into
consideration, such as the attitude of the students, their aspirations
and the school climate. The new DEIS plan contains actions aimed
at supporting wellbeing, stressing the importance of school climate
and encouraging the involvement of the wider community.

At the Committee’s second hearing on 29th May 2018, the
witnesses identified a number of important issues and offered
recommendations to the Committee for consideration.

A theme which emerged throughout the proceedings was the
intersectional nature of disadvantage and the importance of
considering the Meso-, Macro- and Microsystems in which educational disadvantage plays out.

At the Meso level the processes within which policies are developed was highlighted by all witnesses as being inadequate in their current State. Witnesses stated that a lack of inter-departmental communication, especially when considering the nuanced needs of specific groups was a key issue.

At a macro level the school system was identified as a barrier to educational outcomes for vulnerable groups. The lack of appropriate teacher training, inadequate resources and the outdated methods of teaching were considered influential.

At a Micro level the hidden costs of education were discussed with access to extra-curricular activities, cultural capital and resources which place children at an advantage in the competitive education system being highlighted.

The contribution from the witnesses described in this section highlights the complexities of educational disadvantage and emphasises the need for multi-faceted, multi-layered considerations.

Professor Kathleen Lynch asked that the Committee recognise the intersection between poverty and all other vulnerabilities stating that while children with disabilities, those from ethnic minority, lone-parents or immigrant backgrounds, Travellers, children in direct provision and other vulnerable groups all experience unique barriers to education. In all cases those who are most adversely affected within these groups are those who reside in poverty.
Professor Lynch stated that in order to address inequalities and barriers for vulnerable groups there needed to be consideration at the national and regional policy-levels (Macro), at school/college and local community levels (Meso) and at family, household levels (Micro).

Professor Lynch discussed the flaws in the principles that currently govern Irish education policy. She stated that an equality of opportunity approach, which is based on individual merit, is inadequate insofar as it is about promoting fairness in the competition for advantage. It implies that there will be winners and losers, people who do well and people who do badly. An ‘opportunity’ in this context is the right to compete, not the right to choose among alternatives of equal value. She recommends an alternative approach, which is equality of condition; this refers to the belief that people should be as equal as possible in relation to the central conditions of their lives, particularly in terms of their material conditions and the exercise of power. It is not about trying to make inequalities fairer, nor is it about giving people a more equal opportunity to become unequal; it is about ensuring that all of humanity citizens have roughly equal prospects for a good and decent life. The current approach to policy reinforces stratification by attempting to supplement gaps rather than making conditions equal for all.

Mr. Patrick Nevin, Traveller Community Development Project, described the impact that historic policies have had on the Traveller community. He further described the impact of policies of absorption and assimilation, stating that these were a major contributing factor to the exclusion of Travellers from educational institutions.
Mr Nevin emphasised the need for a culturally appropriate primary school programme and the reinstatement of resource teachers for Travellers. He also asked that the needs of young Traveller men be considered, with the introduction of culturally appropriate education initiatives.

Ms Valerie Maher, One Family, described the impact that activation policies have had on lone parent groups, with more experiencing deprivation and in-work poverty since their inception. One-parent families demonstrate a stumbling block to these type policies as the idea of a lone parent in isolation as a fully available worker is a myth and the necessity for a wraparound web of supports and services was discussed.

Ms Maher described the low-paid and precarious work that many lone parents are in and how Government policies do not allow for upskilling.

For example, lone parents in receipt of the family working payment may not qualify for back to education allowance as this payment is assessable as means. She highlighted that lone parents in receipt of the back to education allowance are the group that need additional financial support to stay engaged in education.

Ms Ann Healy, AHEAD, discussed the limitations of the education system for disabled students. The current system uses a process of adding things onto the mainstream; this can include special education assistants, and special needs assistants, SNAs. She highlighted the importance of stepping back from this ‘add-on’ system and reflecting upon the whole structure. Many students in second level are getting inappropriate supports and a lot of money
is being spent which could be used differently. Ms Healy suggested that how mainstream teaching and learning is regarded needs to be reviewed and that through the implementation of a Universal Design for Learning model, inclusive practices across education are a prioritised. She also described the importance of supporting the Further Education and Training (FET) sector which supports facilitates a large majority of students with disabilities through education.

Ms Niamh Randall, Simon Communities Ireland, highlighted the high rates of educational disadvantage seen in the homeless and emphasised the importance of including this group as a named target for national policies. She stated that strategies are not working to reverse trends highlighted in homeless statistics and by not explicitly including people experiencing homelessness as a named target group we are ignoring the structural barriers faced by homeless people, placing responsibility for change on the individual. Ms Randall stated that expansion of the housing first approach, which employs a person-centred education and employment approach, would provide supports that are cognisant of the recognised barriers to education faced by people experiencing homelessness. Providing access to Back to Education allowance and specific consideration of young adults experiencing homelessness were emphasised.

Ms. Randall concurred with comments made by other witnesses when she described the importance of an inter-departmental approach to education disadvantage and while she stated that a national homelessness consultative committee exists to ensure there are interdepartmental responses, this committee has not been meeting.
Mr Shane Griffin, Care Leavers’ Network Ireland (the Network), described how children and young people in care have particular educational vulnerabilities. They are more likely to be suspended, to be placed in a special educational setting, to leave school early, to have mental health problems as adolescents and adults, to become unemployed and homeless, and to enter the criminal justice system. The Network recommended a high level national working group to specifically address the cross-departmental responsibilities of the State to children in care, and to develop a report, within one year, on actions required to improve educational outcomes. It asserts that this group should have the support of many stakeholders within the care system. The allocation of a budget to capture the outcomes of children in care within the educational system that can inform a strategy and policy development is also needed alongside the implementation of targeted supports within primary and secondary schools that should be a point of contact with the multi-disciplinary team associated with the child in care.

Mr. Shane Rooney, AEGAI, talked about the impact that adult guidance can have on vulnerable groups, highlighting the ripple effect for communities where one person who goes to college influences their family and wider community to pursue education. AEFI AEGAI re-emphasized the points made by other witnesses and stated that an interdepartmental approach to education disadvantage is necessary, as these groups have a myriad of needs, including underlying learning difficulties, gaps in previous educational experience, financial constraints, family responsibilities, disability, mental health issues such as anxiety or depression, homelessness, drug or alcohol dependency and lack of self confidence or self-belief. AEGAI recommended more co-operation between Departments and an interdepartmental approach to guidance and adult guidance provision. This will ensure that
resources are not being doubled and are being used as effectively as possible.

Mr Richard Dolan, Department of Education and Skills (DES), recognised the challenges facing vulnerable groups stating that inclusive education is a fundamental principle of the education and training system. He stated that at the heart of the DES policies was the understanding that it is vital that all learners have the opportunity to benefit from education in order to help them fulfil their potential in life. He described existing policies that support vulnerable groups. The Better Start Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) has been designed since 2016 to ensure that children with disabilities can access the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. He described the updated DEIS plan, which incorporates a new identification process for the assessment of schools in terms of the socio-economic background of their pupil cohort using centrally held data and updating of the DEIS school support programme. Mr Dolan described the provision for supports in FET and community education and how the DES provides funds for the demand-led student grant scheme and how students in third-level institutions can access the Student Assistance Fund (SAF), the Fund for Student with Disabilities (FSD) and how the recently established the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) is supporting the development of programmes to support targeted groups.
Conclusions of the Joint Committee

Based on the contributions made at both meetings the Committee makes the following conclusions:

**Conclusion 1**

That it may be considered that the education system as it currently stands is unfair and unequal and that the consequences of this are stark. The Committee has been advised that young people, who are from less affluent backgrounds are destined to struggle and lack access to opportunities and outcomes that are freely available to those from more affluent communities. Lone parents, prisoners and those living in poverty have been shown to be particularly vulnerable. They are more likely to suffer homelessness, criminality and mental illness as a direct result of inequality of access to good quality education.

The Committee recognises that how we view inequality needs to change vastly, if significant change is ever to be brought about. It further recognises that the current structure, where there is an unequal distribution of income and wealth, is being legitimised through the ideologies of meritocracy, and is acting to reproduce social class related inequalities.

**Conclusion 2**

There was recognition throughout the session that educational disadvantage is intersectional and there are layers of disadvantage which may impact upon individual outcomes. For example class, community, family, policy and school, individually and intersectionally impact upon outcomes, and these should all be considered in the reform process.
Conclusion 3
The Committee observed that there are key areas and transitions where education outcomes are at risk of deteriorating. These include the transition period from primary school to secondary school, during the leaving certificate examinations, when attempting to access further or higher education, in adult and community education settings where funding is sparse and when attempting to move out of criminality or out of poverty. The Committee has heard cases of individual successes but also reports of large scale failings; particularly when considering the outcomes of prisoners and lone parents and those most marginalised.

Conclusion 4
There was a clear sense that the education system as it currently stands is unfair and unequal; and the consequences of this are stark especially when considering specific groups. Travellers, lone parents, people who have disabilities, who are homeless, or who are in the care of the state, asylum seekers and those who are from less affluent backgrounds are destined to struggle. They lack access to an array of opportunities and outcomes that are freely available to those from more affluent communities. The current approach that drives policy is an equality of opportunity approach, whereby as a society support a competitive approach to education, believing that merit should be rewarded. In this structure it is accepted that some people win and some lose and those who end up at the top of the pile have done so through their own merits. Within this approach Irish policy has began to recognise that class, poverty, disability, ethnicity can have a negative impact upon peoples starting point in this race and we now have a system in place which attempts to ‘supplement’ these gaps. The DEIS scheme, the grants systems, housing support, and other supports attempt to help those who are disadvantaged compete in the educational race. It is clear
from the submission to-date that this supplementation process is inadequate and in some cases is reinforcing the stratification between those who are vulnerable and those who are not. This committee recognises that a large change needs to occur in how we view inequality if there is ever going to be a significant shift in outcome. The Committee recognises that the current structure, where there is an unequal distribution of income and wealth, is being legitimised through the ideologies of meritocracy, and is actively reproducing inequalities in access to education. Through examination of the submissions in this session and the last we have concluded that any reform should consider a change to the underlying ethos which governs our policy agenda. Equalising opportunity is inadequate and has not worked; we need to move to an approach that equalises the conditions in which our children are living and growing.

**Conclusion 5**

There was recognition throughout the session that disadvantage exists and occurs both horizontally, whereby policies and practices do not speak to each other and/or they can negatively impact upon each other and vertically, whereby the broad Meso structures and policies influence the macro systems of schools and universities, which interact with individual capacities, including finances and family status. The example raised by the Travellers representative highlights how the policies of assimilation which prevailed interacted with the cultural norms of the Traveller community, pushing them further away from education. This is also seen in policies which aim to ‘activate’ people into employment, lone parents have ended up in worse conditions through these processes and are unable to access supports for educational uplift. It is the conclusion of this Committee that there is not enough consideration of the interaction between the Meso, Macro, and Micro structures when considering
education disadvantage and the voice of the groups being legislated for is not being heard in these processes.

**Conclusion 6**
The Committee observed that within each vulnerable group there were shared challenges in terms of education, which included provision of support, finances and understanding, and then there were challenges specific to those groups. The Committee recognise that there has not been enough done to understand the idiosyncratic nature of vulnerability in terms of educational disadvantage. The Committee has concluded that the first step towards reform is naming those groups who are most vulnerable and identifying the needs specific to those groups alongside their shared challenges. The Committee also recognises that within schools there needs to be a teacher who can act as a point of contact for vulnerable groups, who can act as a point of contact within the education setting as well as liaison point for external agents. This teacher should be supported to work within the current system to support those from target groups to participate successfully in education. Being an advocate for their needs within the broader education system.
The Joint Committee recommends that:

- programmes of support need to include educational, family and community needs to build positive and trusting relationships, reaching out to the most marginalised groups;
- education programmes which engage low-educated parents during adulthood are developed and expanded;
- education programmes for prisoners are developed and expanded;
- lifelong learning opportunities, including informal adult learning opportunities, are available across all communities and relevant target groups;
- the age range covered by the Education Welfare Act (2000) is expanded to include those under six years;
- consideration is given to additional supports to parents of pre-school children in disadvantaged communities to ensure that children regularly attend at least one ECCE pre-school year;
- there is increased collaboration between the formal and non-formal education sectors to ensure that young people who require a youth educational development intervention or support to gain the most from their formal education are identified, referred and supported;
- the formalisation of vocational education and the Leaving Certificate Applied which allows progression to Further Education and Higher Education;
• all DEIS schools are required to participate in evidence based programmes which support attainment, and progression including:
  o mentoring,
  o meaningful work internships to encourage engagement in higher professions,
  o college awareness activities, and
  o expanded educational guidance support;
• the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) scheme is formalised across all institutions and make the entrance points visible so students have a goal and reduce the percentage of point reductions for entry;
• the Youthreach programme should revert to a person centered approach, where the programme is tailored to meet the young person’s needs and is practical and skills based in order to be effective and relevant;
• support is given to Community Education to achieve parity of esteem with other sectors in the formal education system;
• funding for community education is increased in future budgets;
• the DEIS model of increased resources to early years programmes in DEIS communities is extended;
• the current DEIS model, to support transitions from primary to post-primary, to senior cycle and to further education is extended;
• DEIS should also recognise the impact that educational disadvantage has on the job prospects of students and should consider providing a programme of internships for students in DEIS schools which foster progression of these students into higher professions;
• consideration be given to the expansion of the age range covered by the Education Welfare Act 2000 to include those
over 16 years of age. Vulnerable young people could be supported to remain in education or to transition to employment or training;

- consideration is given to the development of ‘early warning signs programme’ to identify a range of local indicators of potential disengagement from education, and to use the indicators to target those who require additional support to remain in education;

- a coordinating body/taskforce such as a dedicated unit within the Department of Education and Skills is established with cross-departmental links or a separate agency which can support cooperation at national level and collaborate with all Departments and Agencies in related policy fields (e.g. education, economy, employment, youth, health, welfare and social policy);

- both the formal and non-formal educational needs of young people from the Irish Traveller and Roma communities; ethnic groups who experience high levels of educational and social disadvantage receive additional resources; and

- measures are introduced aimed at reducing the cost of accessing third-level education, including supporting costs of accommodation, travel and day to day living costs.

It also recommends that:

- public policies need to actively promote equality of condition, economically and socially, outside of schools and colleges so that there can be more equality of outcome within schools;

- the housing first targets with person-centered education and employment supports for people experiencing homelessness is expanded;

- targeted educational supports for young people between the ages of 18 to 26
• easier access to the Back to Education Allowance Scheme for all adults who wish to return to education, including those who are homeless, lone parents and asylum seekers;
• increased childcare supports for all parents seeking to return to education and training;
• active inclusion of all people in existing Back to Work and Education and Training Programmes and access to secure employment on completion of study or training programmes;
• a budget allocation to systematically capture statistical data on the social background of candidates taking all national tests of attainment, including both the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations and longitudinal tracking of the outcomes of all children in the education system to inform strategy and policy development for improvement of educational outcomes;
• the DES work with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in assigning a budget to deliver a teacher training programme in order to understand the challenges facing children from vulnerable groups;
• that both in-service and pre-service teacher education includes a core compulsory module on how to practice equality and inclusion for vulnerable groups;
• prior to entering the classroom teachers should be assessed on their equality practices in classrooms as part of their overall teaching practice assessment;
• Continuing Professional Development and network opportunities for FET staff providing opportunities to share their expertise, ideas and to solve problems collectively;
• all vulnerable groups are named as targets in national policy;
• the harm that the State has inflicted upon the Traveller community through historical policies of assimilation is recognised;
consideration be given to adapting the Teaching and Learning environment building inclusion into mainstream learning environment, thereby minimising the need for add-on supports for students with special education needs;

- that students with disabilities can exercise their rights to take part on FET courses, by providing strategic grant funding to FET colleges to build inclusive structures and to support staff to ensure they can adequately support students with disabilities attending their courses;

- State funding should be allocated to the eleven higher education institutions that currently provide programmes for young people who live with an intellectual disability;

- culturally appropriate primary and secondary school programmes are introduced;

- consideration be given to how the education system is inclusive and culturally respectful to all, especially Irish Travellers and ethnic minorities;

- Government bodies should work with the Traveller community to address the lack of engagement of male Travellers in education. In developing the strategy, the negative legacy of educational policies and practices in Ireland must be acknowledged and addressed;

- Traveller organisations should be resourced to develop a national network committed to supporting Traveller men in engaging in culturally appropriate education initiatives;

- mechanisms are introduced to share good practice from schools supporting children from vulnerable groups;

- guidance for all teachers on the challenges experienced by vulnerable groups is introduced;
• a Universal design approach to including a diverse body of students into its mainstream provision is promoted and adopted moving towards a model of Universal Design for Learning.
Appendices

Appendix 1 – Members of the Joint Committee

Deputies:  
- Thomas Byrne (FF)  
- Kathleen Funchion (SF)  
- Catherine Martin (GP)  
- Tony McLoughlin (FG)  
- Hildegarde Naughton (FG)  
- Fiona O’Loughlin (FF) [Chair]  
- Jan O’Sullivan (Lab)

Senators:  
- Maria Byrne (FG)  
- Robbie Gallagher (FF)  
- Paul Gavan (SF)  
- Lynn Ruane (Ind)

Notes:
1. Deputies nominated by the Dáil Committee of Selection and appointed by Order of the Dáil on 16 June 2016.
2. Senators nominated by the Seanad Committee of Selection and appointed by Order of the Seanad on 22 July 2016.
3. Deputies Carol Nolan, Ciaran Cannon, Joan Burton, and Jim Daly discharged and Deputies Kathleen Funchion, Tony McLoughlin, Jan O’Sullivan, and Josepha Madigan nominated to serve in their stead by the Twelfth Report of the Dáil Committee of Selection as agreed by Dáil Éireann on 3 October 2017.
5. Senator Paul Gavan nominated by the Seanad Committee of Selection and appointed by Order of the Seanad on 8 March 2018.
6. Deputy Josepha Madigan discharged and Deputy Hildegarde Naughton nominated to serve in her stead by the Twentieth Report of the Dáil Committee of Selection as agreed by Dáil Éireann on 1 May 2018.
Appendix 2 – Orders of Reference

a. Functions of the Committee – derived from Standing Orders [DSO 84A; SSO 71A]

(1) The Select Committee shall consider and report to the Dáil on—

(a) such aspects of the expenditure, administration and policy of a Government Department or Departments and associated public bodies as the Committee may select, and

(b) European Union matters within the remit of the relevant Department or Departments.

(2) The Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order may be joined with a Select Committee appointed by Seanad Éireann for the purposes of the functions set out in this Standing Order, other than at paragraph (3), and to report thereon to both Houses of the Oireachtas.

(3) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1), the Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order shall consider, in respect of the relevant Department or Departments, such—

(a) Bills,

(b) proposals contained in any motion, including any motion within the meaning of Standing Order 187,

(c) Estimates for Public Services, and

(d) other matters as shall be referred to the Select Committee by the Dáil, and

(e) Annual Output Statements including performance, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of public monies, and

(f) such Value for Money and Policy Reviews as the Select Committee may select.

(4) The Joint Committee may consider the following matters in respect of the relevant Department or Departments and associated public bodies:

(a) matters of policy and governance for which the Minister is officially responsible,

(b) public affairs administered by the Department,

(c) policy issues arising from Value for Money and Policy Reviews conducted or commissioned by the Department,

(d) Government policy and governance in respect of bodies under the aegis of the Department,

(e) policy and governance issues concerning bodies which are partly or wholly funded by the State or which are established or appointed by a member of the Government or the Oireachtas,

(f) the general scheme or draft heads of any Bill,

(g) any post-enactment report laid before either House or both Houses by a member of the Government or Minister of State on any
Bill enacted by the Houses of the Oireachtas,

(h) statutory instruments, including those laid or laid in draft before either House or both Houses and those made under the European Communities Acts 1972 to 2009,

(i) strategy statements laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas pursuant to the Public Service Management Act 1997,

(j) annual reports or annual reports and accounts, required by law, and laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas, of the Department or bodies referred to in subparagraphs (d) and (e) and the overall performance and operational results, statements of strategy and corporate plans of such bodies, and

(k) such other matters as may be referred to it by the Dáil from time to time.

(5) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1), the Joint Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order shall consider, in respect of the relevant Department or Departments—

(a) EU draft legislative acts standing referred to the Select Committee under Standing Order 114, including the compliance of such acts with the principle of subsidiarity,

(b) other proposals for EU legislation and related policy issues, including programmes and guidelines prepared by the European Commission as a basis of possible legislative action,

(c) non-legislative documents published by any EU institution in relation to EU policy matters, and

(d) matters listed for consideration on the agenda for meetings of the relevant EU Council of Ministers and the outcome of such meetings.

(6) The Chairman of the Joint Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order, who shall be a member of Dáil Éireann, shall also be the Chairman of the Select Committee.

(7) The following may attend meetings of the Select or Joint Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order, for the purposes of the functions set out in paragraph (5) and may take part in proceedings without having a right to vote or to move motions and amendments:

(a) Members of the European Parliament elected from constituencies in Ireland, including Northern Ireland,

(b) Members of the Irish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and

(c) at the invitation of the Committee, other Members of the European Parliament.
b. Scope and Context of Activities of Committees (as derived from Standing Orders) [DSO 84; SSO 70]

(1) The Joint Committee may only consider such matters, engage in such activities, exercise such powers and discharge such functions as are specifically authorised under its orders of reference and under Standing Orders.

(2) Such matters, activities, powers and functions shall be relevant to, and shall arise only in the context of, the preparation of a report to the Dáil and/or Seanad.

(3) The Joint Committee shall not consider any matter which is being considered, or of which notice has been given of a proposal to consider, by the Committee of Public Accounts pursuant to Standing Order 186 and/or the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993.

(4) The Joint Committee shall refrain from inquiring into in public session or publishing confidential information regarding any matter if so requested, for stated reasons given in writing, by—

(a) a member of the Government or a Minister of State, or

(b) the principal office-holder of a body under the aegis of a Department or which is partly or wholly funded by the State or established or appointed by a member of the Government or by the Oireachtas:

Provided that the Chairman may appeal any such request made to the Ceann Comhairle / Cathaoirleach whose decision shall be final.

(5) It shall be an instruction to all Select Committees to which Bills are referred that they shall ensure that not more than two Select Committees shall meet to consider a Bill on any given day, unless the Dáil, after due notice given by the Chairman of the Select Committee, waives this instruction on motion made by the Taoiseach pursuant to Dáil Standing Order 28. The Chairmen of Select Committees shall have responsibility for compliance with this instruction.
Appendix 3 – Submissions to the Joint Committee
Oireachtas Committee on Education Hearing on ‘Education Inequality and Disadvantage’

January 2018

Written Submission on behalf of Tusla, Child and Family Agency, Educational Welfare Services

1 Context

Education is considered a key driver of economic and social success for individuals, employers and nations (OECD, 2006) and as such Early School Leaving (ESL) has a cost for the individual and for society. Conversely, a higher level of education can lead to a series of positive outcomes relating to employment, higher salaries, better health, less crime, higher social cohesion, lower public a social costs and higher productivity and growth (European Commission/ EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014.

The strategic goals of Tusla, namely keeping children safe, enabling families to make good decisions about their health and lifestyles, helping children engage with education and helping children develop as active citizens, capable of economic independence, imply that partnership with communities, agencies and families is central to its work.

We are ever cognisant that Education is key to breaking the cycle of socio-economic disadvantage and marginalisation. Therefore, the issue of educational disadvantage is central to the work of Tusla Educational Welfare Services, as we attempt to break down existing barriers and create equal opportunities for marginalised children and their families.

To this end Tusla Educational Welfare Services (EWS) directs it three services, Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL), School Completion Programme (SCP) and Statutory Educational Welfare Officers (EWO) to work in an integrated way to support children and families in accessing education and encouraging school attendance, participate and retention.

Early school leaving (ESL) is of particular concern to Tusla EWS. While Ireland has a very good retention rate we always strive to improve, through examination of the causality and within our capacity to offer support to children and families. To this end in 2017 Tusla, in collaboration with Foróige, commissioned Dr. Louise Herran Flynn to examine the issue of ESL. Dr. Herran Flynn examined existing literature and highlighted several key factors around educational disadvantage and early school leaving which we have drawn on for this submission.

Family practices such as low parental involvement in their child’s schooling, poor parental aspirations, parenting styles and language patterns are seen to exacerbate risks of Early School Leaving (ESL). Bourdieu (1971) outlines in his cultural reproductive theory, how systems such as school help to perpetuate and transmit inequality. Due to their socialisation process, some children can experience a linguistic discontinuity between the language used in the home and school environments. Drudy and Lynch (1933) consider that the curriculum is structured in a way that is disadvantageous to working class children and the curriculum is a mechanism through which social and educational inequality is perpetuated.

2 Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)
The average socioeconomic status of students in a particular school outweighs the effect of the individual’s socioeconomic status (OECD 2007). Studies focused on the social composition of a school, have found that a concentration of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have higher rates of ESL (Kerckhoff, 1986; Ryan, 1999; Ayalon, 1994; Goldsmith, 2003; Foskett et al., 2007). The mean economic status, the proportion of ‘at risk’ students, the proportion of ethnic and linguistic minorities, students who changed schools or residences and students from non-traditional families correlated to ESL rates. In Ireland, Byrne and Smith (2010) indicated lower rates of ESL in mixed and middle class schools.

In an effort to counter-balance high levels of education disadvantage in certain schools, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) established ‘DEIS- Delivering equality of Opportunity in Schools: an action plan for inclusion’ in 2005. Schools which met the criteria for inclusion in the plan were allocated additional resources, including the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) and the School Completion Programme (SCP) under the Schools Support Programme.

Operational and oversight responsibility for HSCL and SCP transferred to Tusla in 2014. Under the direction of Tusla EWS, Home School Community Liaison Coordinators, School Completion Programme Coordinators and Educational Welfare Officers are now working to deliver a fully integrated, streamlined and cost-effective service, concentrating their efforts in designated areas of disadvantage. The overall aim of the integrated services is to improve attendance, participation and retention of children in education, thus improving their life chances as outlined earlier and with each of its strands offering a different focus, range of supports and expertise.

2.1 Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL)

In collaboration with the Department of Education and Skills Social Inclusion Unit (SIU), Tusla EWS attempts to counteract the inequalities of educational disadvantage through the HSCL Scheme. HSCL Coordinators are uniquely placed to deliver a comprehensive range of services, along a continuum of care, to marginalised children and families, utilising international best practice and evidence-based interventions that are proportionate and effective in achieving improved outcomes. The scheme is now a central component of Tusla Education Welfare Services, and utilised as a means of reaching out to and engaging families in the education of their children. DEIS 2017 saw the expansion of the HSCL Scheme to 416 Coordinators nationally.

The goals which underpin all work of HSCL are as follows:

- to maximise the active participation of children in the learning process, in particular, those who might be at risk of failure
- to promote active cooperation between home, school and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of children
- to raise parents’ awareness of their own capacity to enhance their children’s progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills
- to enhance children’s uptake from education, their retention in the system and their continuation to post-compulsory education
- to enhance children’s attitudes to life-long learning
- to disseminate the positive outcomes from the scheme throughout the school system

2.2 School Completion Programme
The School Completion Programme (SCP) which was commenced in 2002 has become a part of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) DEIS Strategy – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools. Its aim is to increase the numbers of young people staying in primary and second level school and in doing so improve the numbers of pupils who successfully complete the Senior Cycle, or the equivalent.

SCP Coordinators and Project Workers work in collaboration with Schools, HSCL and EWOs in identifying children at risk of not reaching their potential in the educational system. These children are then supported through initiatives such as breakfast clubs; homework clubs; afterschool and holiday supports; mentoring programmes; and therapeutic interventions. The SCP also implements transfer programmes to support young people transitioning from primary to post-primary school and monitors attendance of targeted students.

2.3 Educational Welfare Services (Statutory)

Under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) of Tusla work with young people and their families who are experiencing difficulty with school attendance. The main priority of their work is around the welfare of children and young people and on ensuring that concerns and problems around attendance are addressed before attendance becomes a crisis issue. As part of their integrated work with the EWS Statutory, SCP and HSCL ensure that all possible supports and initiatives will have been attempted, prior to formal referrals being made to the statutory arm of the service.

3 Absenteeism

Research has shown that students with high levels of absenteeism are more likely to leave school early. A high level of absenteeism in lower second level is often followed by ESL by upper second level (Hernes, 2010; Balfanz et al., 2007; Macive and Maqciver, 2009). Students with a poor attendance record in their Junior Cycle year are twice as likely to leave school at the end of the year (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). Given additional resources Tusla EWS would be in a much stronger position to tackle absenteeism through the early intervention of HSCL and SCP. In some cases where School/ HSCL and SCP interventions fail Tusla’s statutory service (EWS) must be ready to intervene. Currently, this is not always possible due to limited resources and considerable waiting lists.

Furthermore, it is important to note that current legislation prohibits EWOs from prosecuting parents prior to the child reaching 6 years of age, regardless of how poor the attendance. It is therefore entirely possible that a pattern of poor attendance can be well established before the parent can be legally challenged regarding their responsibility to cause their child to attend school. It is of course difficult for children to ‘unlearn’ behaviour at this crucial time in their education, and we would welcome an amendment allowing for earlier intervention in this regard.

4 Community

Early School Leaving is a multifaceted and complex issue caused by a cumulative process of disengagement that occurs over time (Lyche, 2010; European Commission, 2013). While the reasons
for ESL are highly individual, as a social phenomenon, ESL follows certain patterns (European Parliament, 2011). It is considered that student and family characteristics can explain approximately 80% of the variability in student achievement while 20% can be attributed to the characteristics of the schools that the student attend (Rumberger and Lim, 2008). Therefore, when additional needs, outside of educational are identified, Tusla EWS service personnel, in collaboration with schools, support children and their families in accessing community family support services. If a multiagency response is needed then a ‘Meitheal’ can be initiated. This is the national practice model adopted by Tusla Prevention Partnership and Family Support Services (PPFS), whereby wraparound support can be offered to families. HSCL, SCP and EWO lead and engage in Meitheal and significant inroads are being made in this area. Implicit in this approach is building positive and trusting relationships with communities and families, reaching out to the most marginalised and developing and maintaining high levels of skills and motivation.

5 Transition

Difficulties in key transitions, e.g. primary to post-primary, can be predictive of Early School Leaving. Children do not all react in the same way and some encounter difficulties which can manifest in behavioural or learning difficulties, or vulnerability to ESL (Eurydice 1994; Mannoni 1979; CORI, 1996; Boldt, 1997).

HSCL Coordinators in Limerick, in collaboration with Educationally Disadvantaged Parents, developed a Transition Programme for Parents ‘My Child My Vision’. Tusla has had the accompanying manuals printed and disseminated to HSCL nationally. In addition, HSCL Coordinators visit parents to offer guidance and support in this area and, if literacy difficulties exist, assist parents with applications. SCP play a key role in transfer programmes for children and support the children most at risk throughout their transition and through to Junior Certificate. Key transition points, Primary to post-primary, lower to upper second, are critical for potential ESL (European Parliament, 2011). At the beginning of first year, ESLs are more likely to report feeling isolated or anxious than other students. More support needs to be there for these students as they move from one stage in education to another and face the challenges linked to these changes. Presently, HSCL support is only available to families where children attend DEIS schools, while SCP operates mainly in DEIS schools. It is not unusual for an educationally disadvantaged child to transfer to a non-DEIS post-primary and that being the case, this child and family would lose the support and guidance of both HSCL and SCP at the most crucial time of transition. If we are to break the cycle of marginalisation through education then Tusla EWS recommends the extension of the current DEIS model so that all children at risk of ESL would be supported through primary to post-primary transition, through to senior cycle and indeed on to further education.

6 Benefits of Early Education

Parents are fortunate in Ireland to have access to two years pre-school for their children. This is an excellent opportunity for Tusla EWS to intervene at an early stage, in relation to the importance of attendance, participation and retention in school. It is important to create a vision for parents in relation to their child’s future, particularly as many marginalised parents may not have had positive experiences of education. The role of HSCL in this regard is key in terms of early intervention and building positive relationships with parents in advance of their child’s progression to Junior Infants and, in partnership with early years practitioners have developed guidelines around EY transition.
We would welcome the opportunity for EWOs to also play a role in early intervention in this regard, to inform and support parents around their legal responsibility to ensure that their child receives an appropriate education. This is however a capacity issue for the service and at present resources do not allow for this type of early intervention on the part of the EWO.

7  **Relevance**

Drudy and Lynch (1933) consider that the curriculum is structured in a way that is disadvantageous to working class children, and the curriculum is a mechanism through which social and educational inequality is perpetuated. Lack of quality vocational education and training (VET) and alternative routes of educational provision leave less academic students with very little alternative choice (European Parliament, 2011; European Commission, 2015). Tusla EWS would welcome a consistent alternative to the current exam focused education system, which rewards memory and recall rather than transferrable skills. Half of school leavers in Eivers et al.’s (2000) study thought that what they learnt in school was not relevant to the workplace. While we welcome Junior Cert reform it needs to move quickly in order to keep children at risk of ESL in education.

8  **Cultural change**

We live in an increasingly pluralistic society, yet in many cases, schools still operate a monolithic environment in the classroom (Heeran Flynn, 2013). Inclusive teaching and learning can be used to redress this balance. In addition to inequalities created through language barriers, many migrant children have suffered trauma and teachers are often ill equipped to deal with issues arising in classrooms. Tusla EWS recommends CPD for teachers in this regard and additional EAL support for schools with high numbers of migrant students. It is also important the parents and families have support in accessing education for their children and indeed in many cases for themselves. Many of these parents see the school as their community, through which they access information and other services. EAL provision is crucial and ETBs have made significant contributions in this regard. HSCL play a key role in this though referral to EAL courses, home visitation, translation and information.

9  **Special educational needs**

Having a learning difficulty has a strong impact on school retention Markussen, 2010; Rumberger and Lim, 2008). SCP endeavours to support children who are at risk of ESL, due to special educational needs, socio-economic background and/or other factors. It is also important to note that a lack of parental capacity can further disadvantage the child, in relation to accessing the appropriate support and services. In DEIS schools the HSCL Coordinator is well placed to support these parents in building their capacity and in accessing services. Currently, a teacher who has attained the additional SEN qualification and go on to take up the post of HSCL Coordinator lose their allowance. We feel that this qualification greatly assists a HSCL in supporting the parents of children with SEN, and in some cases parents who themselves have SEN needs. We would advocate for teachers who take on the HSCL role to retain this allowance as its loss can also discourage applications for the HSCL position. Where the child is not best placed in a mainstream classroom, it is important that sufficient places are available in ASD settings and that these settings are well resourced. Tusla EWS has concerns around the availability of places for children with special educational needs in some parts of the country.
10 Homelessness

A separate challenge arises from the current crisis with regard to students experiencing homelessness. This is having a detrimental impact on the children’s education, especially when children are rehoused away from their original school and community. Often, they are not living in an environment conducive to doing homework or studying. Tusla EWS services are focused on finding school places for these children and in DEIS schools providing additional supports through HSCL and SCP. Tusla EWS has produced a booklet to advise schools and EWS personnel in relation to this issue.

11 Garda Vetting

We would draw your attention to the ‘Commencement of Statutory Requirements for Garda Vetting’, from 29 April 2016 and the impact the change to this legislation has had on parental engagement in schools. Home School Community Liaison Coordinators run several initiatives to improve literacy and numeracy, in line with national strategies, that facilitate the active involvement of parents at curricular and policy level in schools and they train parents to become a resource to each other, to their school and above all, to their own children. Many school BOM and management bodies are taking this legislation to mean that any adult working with children in a classroom, albeit in the presence of and under the supervision of teachers, must be Garda vetted. We have spent nearly thirty years breaking down the barriers between educationally disadvantaged families and schools and have made great progress. Now in many schools, parents are no longer allowed into schools to do activities such as maths for fun, story time or oral language development with their children unless they agree to be Garda Vetted. This requirement may set us back to the days where parents were kept outside the school gate and not seen as having anything to contribute to their child’s education. The most marginalised parents we are trying to reach are the least likely to agree to Garda Vetting as they may have concerns relating to personal information being accessed by school personnel. Many migrant parents are also fearful of this process as their experience of authority in their countries of origin may have been negative. While we fully appreciate the importance of and necessity for Garda Vetting we would urge the relevant authorities to look at this issue again in relation to parents supporting their own children in schools in the presence of and under the supervision of teachers.

12 Other areas of concern

Poverty and its impact on children’s educational outcomes – unable to access opportunities, unable to afford to attend college/university especially if it requires living away from home.

Pressure on young people from poor families to have part-time work to pay for college – impact on their learning and time for study.

Myriad of social issues in poorer communities, drugs, violence, family breakup, poverty etc. that negatively impact children outcomes.

Payments of education related supports not benefiting the child i.e. back to school clothing and footwear allowance – often misused where parents have addiction, debt problems. These allowances should be paid to school to ensure child benefits by getting uniforms, books etc.
Submission on Educational Inequality and Disadvantage

By Foróige

February 2018

In areas of deprivation, how to create a model of education that benefits those groups who experience high instances of poverty, addiction and other social issues?

1. Introduction.

1.1 Foróige is Ireland's leading youth organisation, providing a broad range of services and programmes to young people, families and communities across the country. Foróige works with over 50,000 young people (over 10% of the youth population) and engages over 5,500 volunteers. It employs over 400 professional youth workers. Foróige’s purpose is to enable young people to involve themselves consciously and actively in their own development and in the development of society. Foróige works to meet the needs of young people within their own communities.

1.2 Foróige works with young people in communities across Ireland through volunteer-led youth clubs and staff-led youth projects. Much of this work focuses on areas of severe disadvantage where poverty and other social issues contribute significantly to poorer educational outcomes for young people. Targeted youth work enables young people to navigate issues associated with poverty, marginalisation and social exclusion, under-achievement at school, early school leaving, youth crime, substance abuse and family difficulties in a safe friendly environment.

1.3 Our programmes build skills, resilience, belief and aspiration in young people. The benefits of these programmes are far reaching. Our work is a unique partnership between young people, parents, volunteers, and the wider community.

1.4 Foróige believes that youth work in general and Foróige in particular can have a positive impact on (a) young people’s engagement with their education and on (b) their individual educational aspirations through the provision of targeted, needs led interventions which aim to reduce the risk factors for educational disadvantage through building and promoting a range of protective factors.

2. Youth Work in Ireland

2.1 Youth work in Ireland was given a statutory basis under the Youth Work Act 2001. The Act defines youth work as:

‘A planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young people through their voluntary involvement, and which is complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training and provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations.’
2.2 Youth work is fundamentally an educational and developmental process. Youth work in Ireland in defined by the active and voluntary participation and commitment of young people to the process. Youth work builds on the personal and social competencies of young people through active, experiential and collective learning (learning by doing). It is defined as ‘non-formal education’. It complements young people’s formal education through the provision of a range of educational and developmental programmes, based primarily on meeting their needs and interests and is planned and facilitated by voluntary youth organisations.

2.3 Young people engage with youth work on a voluntary basis which is, in the main, delivered within the young person’s community. While youth work is universal and accessible to all young people, it often focuses its work on those ‘in need’ and ‘at risk’. In Ireland, 53% of young people engaged in youth work activities are from “economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds” (Indecon, 2012).

3. National Policy

3.1 Youth work is heavily influence by ‘Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures’, which is Ireland’s first overarching national policy framework which spans the ages 0-24 years. The framework requires:

“good quality universal systems open to all, such as schools and primary healthcare services, backed up by additional targeted services and income supports to give ‘at risk’ or vulnerable children and young people the extra help they need to keep up with their peers and lift more children out of poverty, aiming to break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage.”

(Minister Frances Fitzgerald, DCYA)

3.2 Outcome Two ‘Achieving in all areas of learning and development’ focuses on the specific needs of young people with regard to their engagement with and achievement in education. In addition to a specific focus on achieving in all areas of learning and development, the Framework sets out specific commitments by key government departments relating to educational disadvantage including strengthening transitions through the education system, building on existing good practice to enable better access, supporting increased inter professional and interagency training of professional bodies and implementing strategies to improve school engagement and participation of all children and young people, in particular those most vulnerable in society.

3.3 The National Youth Strategy 2015 has its’ foundation in ‘Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures’, and applies the five national outcomes to young people aged 10 to 24 years. Of specific note regarding educational disadvantage are Objective 3 ‘Young people’s core skills, competencies and attributes are enhanced and promoted through accessible, responsive, formal and non-formal education and learning opportunities’ and Objective 4 ‘Young people benefit from strengthened transition supports at all levels as they move through the education system.’ The National Youth Strategy includes both universal and targeted interventions.

4. Educational Disadvantage

4.1 Educational Disadvantage as defined in the Education Act (1998) is:
‘...the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools.’

4.2 Young people from disadvantage communities may experience a range of risk factors which impact negatively on their ability to get the most from their education. This may result in lower levels of educational attainment, of educational aspiration and poorer long term outcomes such as increased likelihood of unemployment, poor health, higher risk of social exclusion etc. Predictions for future skills needs in Europe suggest that in the future only 1 in 10 jobs will be within the reach of an early school leaver (European Parliament, 2011). Addressing the risk factors relating to educational disadvantage and early school leaving are therefore key to improving both outcomes for the individual and for society (Borg, 2015).

4.3 There has been extensive research on the factors that lead to Early School Leaving and most research indicates that it is never a single factor but a combination of factors (Dowrick and Crespo, 2005). The Literature Review ‘Early School Leaving: Predictive Risk Factors’ (Heeran Flynn, 2017) commissioned by Foróige suggests that risk factors can be divided into two distinct categories:

1. Individual and Social Factors, and
2. School and Systemic Factors.

4.4 Individual and Social Factors, the research suggests, can explain approximately 80% of the variability of student outcomes, while the remaining 20% can be attributed to School and Systemic Factors. Key risk factors identified in the Literature Review include:

- Poor or erratic attendance
- Misbehaviour in school
- Anti-Social Behaviour out of school
- Poor parental engagement in young person’s education
- Familial history of Early School Leaving, most particularly of mother
- Known to Social Services
- Poor educational aspirations
- Low levels of literacy and numeracy
- Special educational needs
- Member of the Irish Traveller community or the Roma community
- Disability

4.5 There is no one cause of educational disadvantage or early school leaving; rather educational disadvantage is experienced by young people who present with a complex array of risk factors. The greater the number of risks a young person is exposed to, the greater the young person’s vulnerability to the negative impacts of educational disadvantage.

5. Youth Work and Educational Disadvantage

5.1 Neisser et al. (1996) argue that since measured intelligence only accounts for about 25% of the variance in school success, other non-cognitive factors such as personality, persistence and willingness to study must be important. It is from this perspective that it is apparent that Foróige and youth work can play a key role in educating and upskilling young people in the range of ‘soft skills’ necessary to successfully transition into adulthood. In the building of protective factors, key life skills, resilience and self-efficacy, youth work can bring about profound change in the lives of
individual young people, families and communities. Through engagement in high quality educational and developmental youth work programmes, young people from disadvantaged communities are supported to develop and enhance the non-cognitive factors necessary for educational attainment.

5.2 Foróige’s approach to youth work is underpinned by Urie Bronfenbrenner’s Model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), amongst other theories.

5.3 Bronfenbrenner’s Model of Human Development is a useful tool for understanding the importance of the context in which the young person lives. It encourages and enables youth workers to not look at the young person in isolation but as linked and interdependent on those around them. It presents the interplay of risk and protective factors in designing prevention and early intervention programmes. As indicated in the graphic, forces impact on a developing child at levels that include the individual, family, school, and community. In the graphic, the concentric circles surrounding the individual represent the sources of risk or the sources of protection. Each circle is nested within the others. Note that individual risk and protective factors cluster around personality or psychosocial characteristics, attitudes, knowledge, and behaviours. Family factors may include a family history of alcohol abuse; school-related factors include the young person’s sense of connectedness to the school; and community risk factors include the availability of drugs as well as norms related to alcohol and drug use or criminal behaviour.

5.4. Foróige and youth work can and does impact positively on individual, family and community risk factors.

6. Individual Risk and Protective Factors
6.1 Individual risk factors identified by Bronfenbrenner include anti-social behaviours, peer group norms, low social competency and attitudes to drugs and alcohol. Foróige, and youth work, are very well placed in a community setting to discuss, engage, challenge and educate young people on the impact of these individual risks on their short and long term wellbeing. Foróige does this through the operation of a range of targeted services nationally, including:

- Local Youth Services
- Big Brother, Big Sister Youth Mentoring
- Neighbourhood Youth Projects
- Community Youth Projects
- Early School Leaving Programmes
- Garda Youth Diversion Projects
- Drug Education and Prevention Projects
- Teenage Health Initiatives

These services deliver both one to one and group educational and development youth work programmes to young people with additional or complex needs (Hardiker Level 2 & 3). Youth workers engage with vulnerable young people, assess need and design interventions to bring about positive change in the life of the young person. Youth workers work with young people to identify the change that the young person would like to bring about in their life. It is youth led.

6.2 Foróige use both evidence based and evidence informed programmes, many of which have been positively evaluated by the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway, to address identified needs such as those named above such as:

- **Foróige's Leadership for Life Programme**: a personal development programme for young people aged 15 – 18 years, facilitated across three modules. Aimed at equipping young people to explore their vision and passion, the programme develops key leadership skills such as: planning, decision making, critical thinking, goal setting and problem solving. Young people have the opportunity to demonstrate their newly developed leadership skills through a self-directed Community Action Project in Module 3. In addition, they have the option to work towards formal accreditation by NUI Galway, receiving a Level 6 Certificate in Youth Leadership and Community Action on submission of all three completed modules for assessment.

- **Relationships Explored and Life Uncovered (REAL U)**: a personal development and sex education programme aimed at equipping young people with the skills, knowledge and confidence to develop healthy relationships and delay the onset of early sexual activity. The programme facilitates the development of key competencies in relation to decision making and communication to promote positive well-being and confidence in relationships. Topics include: puberty, body image, reproduction, sexuality, contraception, sexually transmitted infections, relationships, boundaries and emotional well-being.

- **Aldi Foróige Youth Citizenship**: a youth development programme that empowers young people to use their talents and initiative to make a positive difference to the world around them. It involves young people researching the needs of their community, organising practical action in response, evaluating the effectiveness of their work and reflecting on what they’re learning along the way.
Drug Prevention and Education Programmes: aim to clarify information, dispelling myths, challenging attitudes and providing factual information about tobacco, alcohol and drugs, relevant to the age, developmental stage, gender and culture of the young people in the group. Programmes used by Foróige include ‘Putting the Pieces Together’ (primary prevention), ‘Foróige’s Brief Intervention Programme’ (early intervention) and ‘Adolescent Community Reinforcement Approach’ (harm reduction), as well as the ‘Strengthening Families Programme’, a family skills training programme.

Foróige’s ‘Be Healthy, Be Happy’ Programme: enables young people to take charge of their health and well-being in order to enhance the quality of their lives to develop strengths and assets in the areas of physical, mental, social and spiritual health. It is a comprehensive health education programme with topics such as nutrition, hygiene, communication, bullying, recognising mental health problems, problem-solving, spiritual qualities and relaxation techniques.

Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE): a youth entrepreneurship programme. It is a world recognised education and development programme. NFTE is committed to changing the lives of young people in disadvantaged communities by enabling them to develop core skills in business and enterprise and help them to unlock their individual talents and potential.

Youth Offending Behaviour Programmes: Foróige offers a menu of services for staff and volunteers working with young people engaged in offending behaviours. These include Foróige’s ‘Life of Choices’, a group work programme and resource which enables facilitators to explore crime and offending behaviour with young people. It aims to equip participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in pro-social behaviour, make positive life choices and ultimately reduce the level/frequency of their offending. Foróige Youth Justice Workers also use ‘CHART’, a one-to-one cognitive behavioural theory (CBT) programme that focuses specifically on the young person’s offending behaviour.

6.2 Programmes such as these, coupled with youth workers skilled in needs assessment and curriculum design when a more tailored response is required, highlight the ability of Foróige and the youth work sector to address a range of individual risk factors which can lead to educational disadvantage by building protective factors such as resilience, persistence, social skills, negotiation skills etc.

7. Family Risk and Protective Factors

7.1 At the family level, risk factors which may negatively impact on a young person’s education include lack of family bonding, unclear expectations, a focus on a young person’s negative behaviour, family history of alcohol, tobacco or other drug use, permissive family attitudes to alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, inconsistent discipline and permissive family attitudes to anti-social behaviour. While Foróige primarily works with young people, it is very clear the impact and protective nature of positive family relations is key to bringing about last positive outcomes from the most vulnerable young people.

7.2 Foróige engages and supports the development positive family relations through arrange of programmes, interventions and projects. Some of the programmes include:
• **Strengthening Families Programme**: designed to reduce multiple risk factors for later alcohol and drug use, mental health problems and criminal behaviour by increasing family strengths, developing young people’s social competencies and improving positive parenting skills.

• **Parents Plus Adolescent Programme**: an Irish programme designed to enhance parenting skills, foster positive communication, and create and sustain healthy parent-adolescent relationships.

7.3 Foróige provide a range of workshops to upskill parents in areas such as:

• **Technology**: Foróige deliver ‘McAfee Online Safety Programme’ workshops to parents to educate and upskill them on the importance of protecting their child’s personal information online, cyber bullying etc.

• **Drug Education**: Drug Education and Prevention workers deliver a range of workshops to parents to educate and support parents to talk to their children about the dangers of drug use.

7.4 Foróige also have a range of Family Support and Teen Parent Support Programmes nationally. Examples of these include:

• **Family support worker** attached to a Garda Youth Diversion Project. The young person who has received a caution from An Garda Siochana receives a targeted support. The family support worker engages with the parent to identify and address any family, parenting or other issues which may be negatively impacting on the young person’s attitude or behaviour.

• **A Teen Parenting Support Programme** works with both pregnant teens and young mothers and fathers to provide them with the knowledge, practical skills and support to achieve the best outcomes for their child.

8. Community

8.1 Foróige, and the youth work sector, is a passionate advocate for young people, their families and communities. Young people are central to this, with Foróige’s Youth Participation and Advocacy structure enabling young people to be actively involved in influencing decision makers by representing the views of their project/group/service/organisation in order to bring about a positive change.

8.2 Interagency and collaborative work is key to improving outcomes for young people. Foróige and the youth work sector engage on a daily basis with a range of statutory, voluntary and community organisations to address youth risks and build protective factors, such as:

• County Councils
• Education & Training Boards
• Regional and Local Drug and Alcohol Drug Taskforces
• Primary and Post Primary schools
• An Garda Siochana
• Family Resource Centres
• Children and Young People’s Services Committee
Bridging the Gap: Potential Solutions

9.1 The education system in Ireland works for the overwhelming majority of young people. However, there is a sizeable minority who require a range of additional support. Irish early school leaving rates are concentrated and relatively high at approximately 18% who mainly attend DEIS schools.

9.2 There are a number of potential solutions which Foróige believe could help to bridge the educational attainment gap for young people from disadvantaged communities. In brief, these include:

1. Increased collaboration between the formal and non-formal education sectors to ensure that young people who require a youth educational development intervention or support to gain the most from their formal education are identified, referred and supported. This may also take the format of youth work organisations upskilling and supporting the formal education sector in the delivery of appropriate youth education and development programmes (i.e. REAL U, NFTE.)

2. To consider the expansion of the age range covered by the Education Welfare Act (2000) to include those under six years, and those over sixteen. At the younger age range, this would enable Education Welfare Officers to engage with parents of under sixes to address issues relating to poor or non-attendance at primary school before patterns become established. At the upper age limit, vulnerable young people could be supported to remain in education or to transition to employment or training.

3. To consider the development of ‘Early Warning Systems’ (EWS) as used in a range of E.U. countries and in many states in the U.S.A. These EWS enable schools to identify a range of local indicators of potential disengagement from education, and to use the indicators to identify those young people from a whole school population who may require additional or intensive support to remain in education.

4. To additionally resource both the formal and non-formal educational needs of young people from the Irish Traveller and Roma communities; ethnic groups who experience high levels of educational and social disadvantage.

5. To consider additional supports to parents of preschool children in disadvantaged communities to ensure that children regularly attend at least one ECCE preschool year. Research has shown that attendance at preschool not only improves school readiness, but long term follow up studies have found that attendance at preschool can also improve a wider range of adolescent and adult outcomes, including second level completion, less criminal activity, less reliance on social welfare and less teen parenting (Barnett and Belfield, 2006; Gorey, 2001). Furthermore, longitudinal analyses since 1986 have found that students who participate in preschool had graduation rates of 10% or higher than non-participants (Lyche, 2010).
1. **Education Inequality and Disadvantage**

**Introduction**

1.1 Educational underachievement is often intergenerational with profound outcomes: unemployment, poor health and wellbeing, multiple addictions, mental health issues, homelessness and suicides. It takes resilient, creative communities focused on personal and social change to challenge the underlying inequality and disadvantage and turn the tide, there are such communities all across Ireland.

1.2 Community education is adult education which takes place in local community settings where educational disadvantage intersects with unemployment, social welfare dependency and poverty. This educational model is community-led reflecting and valuing the lived experiences of individuals and their communities, and is grounded on principles of justice, equality and inclusiveness. Community education therefore results in wide ranging positive outcomes for individuals, their communities, and society as a whole, by increasing social cohesion as well as empowering people to be engaged learners and active citizens. An Cosán is one of over 150 community education organisations spread across the country, we are the largest and have local, regional and national reach. 53,835 learners participated in SOLAS funded community education programmes in 2016. Many of these learners could be described as educationally disadvantaged, marginalised and hard to reach.

1.3 For 30 years An Cosán in Tallaght West has facilitated over 16,000 students to engage successfully in education from basic education through to higher education. The work of An Cosán is driven by the knowledge of what we call the ‘one generation solution’ - educate a young lone parent to degree level, she/he will earn 40% more than someone without a degree and she and her children will exit poverty forever.

1.4 An Cosán is now developing national impact through our innovative and award-winning Virtual Community College (VCC). VCC is scaling the work of An Cosán across Ireland bringing education, primarily higher education, to communities struggling with the injustice of poverty enabled by the latest on-line and mobile technology. VCC is reducing the digital divide, supporting learners to develop their skills through 21st century teaching and learning technologies, and offering additional supports to learners to enable them achieve their full potential. Over 600 learners from disadvantaged communities across Ireland have successfully engaged in blended on line learning programmes with VCC since 2015.

1.5 An Cosán is an active member of the AONTAS community education network. AONTAS coordinates the Community Education Network (CEN), a forum which seeks to give a voice to and improve the visibility of community education. The CEO of An Cosán is an ‘on the ground’ community education practitioner for over 20 years, she is also currently President of AONTAS the national adult learning organisation and is particularly well placed to make an informed contribution to this discussion on **education inequality and disadvantage**.
2. The impact of educational disadvantage on the individual and society

2.1 In the Republic of Ireland, social inequality is registered and reproduced at all levels of the education system. Notwithstanding state commitments to ‘free’ education, school costs for primary and secondary school children are often three to four times more than the public supports provided, with one in ten parents compelled to go into debt to afford them (Barnardos, 2016). Social class further impacts on children’s educational attainment. At the end of primary school, children from higher professional backgrounds had a mean literacy score of 43 (out of a possible 50), those from semi- or un-skilled manual backgrounds had a score of 28, and those in households where neither parent was employed had a mean score of 25 (Smyth and McCoy, 2009: 7). State examinations at junior and leaving certificate levels crystallise these differences. Each year, some 4,500 young people stop attending school before they complete their junior cert. ‘Taking into account involuntary part-time work, and workers marginally attached to the labour market, Ireland has one of the largest rates of youth who are neither in employment nor in education’ (OECD Economic Survey 2013, cited in Lynch, 2014).

2.2 Class inequalities further manifest in unequal access to higher education. Higher education has witnessed a rapid expansion in Ireland, expanding six-fold over the last four decades (Fleming, 2013: 35). The tertiary attainment rate, at 52.3% in 2015, is well above the EU average (EU Commission, 2017: 41). However, this expansion has primarily occurred among 18 to 21 year olds and among those drawn from professional and managerial classes (Fleming, 2013: 35). Expansion has not significantly reduced glaring inequalities of access, notably, the under-representation of poorer socio-economic groups or mature students. Targets were set in 2008 that by 2013 31 per cent and 20 per cent of full-time new entrants would be from these two groups respectively; but rates of only 21 per cent and 14 per cent were achieved (Cassells, 2015: 22). Comparatively speaking, the degree of equity that characterises access to higher education in Ireland has been described as ‘above average but well behind best practice’ (Cassells, 2015: 22). The implications are very unevenly experienced and the gap remains pronounced: some 99% of Dublin 6 students will progress to higher education programmes compared to 15% in Dublin 15 (HEA, 2014).

We should also note regional inequalities:

- Over one in five persons (21.9%) in Donegal, aged 15 and over, had not been educated beyond primary level, the highest for any county, followed by Monaghan (18.0%), Cavan (17.8%), Longford (17.7%), Mayo (17.4%), Wexford (16.6%).
- Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown had the lowest percentage of persons with no formal or primary education at 6.6 per cent.
- The area with the highest rates of completed third-level education in Ireland is Dun-Laoghaire-Rathdown. A total of 61.1pc of the population in the area boast completion of third-level education.
- Both Longford and Wexford were tied as the areas with the lowest level of people who completed third-level education, at 32.5pc a piece.

3. Barriers faced by individuals returning to education

3.1 The specific barriers facing people accessing further and higher education in Ireland are varied and intersectional. They include financial cost, there are no higher education grants for part-time students, childcare considerations, geography, public transport availability, and lack of institutional access (HEA, 2013). Access to personal laptops/desktops as required by many courses can be a big challenge due to cost.

3.2 Moreover, these barriers remain operative for those learners who succeed in accessing higher education. Those parts of the higher education sector that have the largest proportions of disadvantaged and mature students (QQI Level 6 and 7 programmes in the Institutes of Technology) currently have the least success in retaining them: their non-progression rates are more than 3 times higher than those in Level 8 university programmes (Cassells, 2015: 39). Lack of broadband in rural Ireland is a huge challenge for many organisations and individuals wanting to engage in VCC’s blended learning.

4.0 The intergenerational aspect of educational disadvantage.

4.1 The educational attainment and future economic position of students in Ireland is linked to the educational attainment and economic position of their parents. A Eurostat news release from December 2013 stats that in 2011 among the EU28, “adults aged 25-59 were asked about the level of education of their parents, and this was compared with the respondent’s level of education. Among respondents whose parents had a low level of education, 34% had a low level of education themselves, 48% had a medium level and 18% a high.” In Ireland these numbers show that, 80% of adults with parents who had high educational attainment also reach high educational levels. Whereas only 28% of adults whose parents had love educational attainment will ever reach high educational attainment levels. ¹

4.2 Financially, these low levels of educational attainment among parental groups are also affecting children through increased poverty levels even before they have the opportunity to achieve in education. In 2015 among the EU28, 65.5% of children whose parents had low education levels (at the most lower secondary education) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, compared with 30.3% of children residing with parents who had a medium education level (upper secondary education) and 10.6% of children with parents with a higher education level (tertiary education). In Ireland these numbers are worse, with nearly 70% (68%) of children whose parents had low education levels being at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 41.8% of children with parents who had a medium education level, and 16.4% of children with parents with a higher education level. ²

4.3 These statistics as well as myriad additional reports from the EU, United Nations, IMF and other research organisations prove over the decades the important connection between

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¹ Educational attainment: persistence or movement through the generations? http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/5168314/3-11122013-AP-EN.PDF/7cb8cffe9-50f5-4ee7-920a-64b415af50ee (December 2013)

² One in four children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7738122/3-16112016-AP-EN.pdf/c01aade1-ea44-411a-b20a-94f238449689 (16 Nov 2016)
investing in education and successfully reducing avoidable intergenerational social outcomes including but not limited to poverty and social exclusion.

5. Young People and educational disadvantage

5.1 Just under 13,431 of the lower educated according to the recent census were aged between 15 and 29. The majority of this younger group (59.9%) were males. The unemployment rate for those aged 20-24 with no more than lower secondary education has been over 50%, as compared with about 30% for those with higher secondary education and 20% for third level graduates. 40% of young people aged 16-24 are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 18.7% of young people are not in education, employment or training, this represented about 60,000 young people nationally. One in three young men is unemployed.

The European Commission in 2011 identified early school leavers as:
- at higher risk of poverty and social exclusion;
- confronted with limited opportunities to develop culturally, personally and socially;
- likely to have poor health status; and
- face a cyclical effect associated with early school leaving, resulting in the children of early school leavers experiencing reduced success in education.

6. Some of the reasons why young people drop out/don't complete courses/don't transition from one level to another to a point where they are equipped for a career.

6.1 The outcomes and issues identified as being problematic with respect to this group in West Tallaght and other disadvantaged communities are deeply intertwined with educational disadvantage:
- Failure of the formal school system – 4,500 young people fall out of school each year before reaching the Junior Certificate. Young men are particularly disengaged from education or training.
- Young men’s perception of school/education – disengagement, lack of relevance, boring
- Poor self-image, lack of confidence and emotional well-being leading to depression, internalised oppression
- Peer Pressure
- Lack youth services for young men over 18

6.2 The impact:
- High levels of suicide.
- Addiction
- Anti-social behaviour and engagement in crime

It is clear that innovative, relevant and ‘young male’ centred programmed must be developed to respond to this need.
7. **How can the current DEIS model be improved to address these issues?**

7.1 There is clear evidence that the DEIS programme is having a positive effect on tackling educational disadvantage. The research shows that improvement is taking place in the learning achievements of pupils in DEIS primary schools in urban areas.

7.2 However, “early education is the key to achieving better outcomes in primary and post primary schools. It is widely recognized that that the highest return from investment in education is between the ages of 0 to 5 (Carneiro and Heckman, 2003). In short, early childhood is the stage where education can most effectively influence the development of children and help reverse disadvantage (European Commission, 2011).

- In Ireland 46 per cent of 3 year olds are in ECCE compared with the OECD average of 74 per cent (OECD 2015), this % is significantly higher in communities struggling with poverty.
- Ireland has the highest rate of all OECD countries of children attending pre-primary education in private, non-government dependent institutions (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014).

7.3 The most striking feature of investment in education in Ireland relative to other OECD countries is its under-investment in early childhood education. That Ireland is starting from a very low base in this area was highlighted by an international study (World Health Organization, 2013). In relation to the provision of pre-schooling for more than a year Ireland ranked 33rd amongst 38 European countries. Unfortunately, this area has not been immune from austerity measures in recent years (such as a cut in the capitation rate and in increase in the staff-to-child ratio in Budget 2012). The introduction of the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme in 2010 and its recent extension represent positive first steps in addressing this. Similarly, the focus on this issue in the Updated National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (Department of Social Protection 2016) is welcome.\(^3\)

7.4 The present ECCE scheme provides every child (between ages 3 years and 5 years and 6 months) with free pre-school education (that is, three hours of pre-school care for thirty-eight weeks in each year free of charge) for up to two years.

7.5 However local community not for profit preschool programmes are completely under resourced, staff have no real access to planning time, CPD or reasonable remuneration. In An Cosán we are struggling to ensure every early years educator earns at least the living wage.

8. **The impact of Austerity**

8.1 As recognised by Social Justice Ireland ‘Education is widely recognised as crucial to the achievement of our national objectives of economic competitiveness, social inclusion and active citizenship. However, the overall levels of public funding for education in Ireland are out of step with these aspirations. This under-funding is most severe in early childhood

\(^3\) Social Justice Ireland; *Ireland and the Europe 2020 Strategy: A review of the social inclusion aspects of Ireland’s National Reform Programme in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy* March 2017
education and in the areas of lifelong learning and second chance education – the very areas that are most vital in terms of the promotion of greater equity and fairness."

8.2 Recent austerity measures reinforced barriers to community education and simultaneously undermining community-based supports and development initiatives. Higher education experienced a 25% fall in public funding during the economic recession (Department of Education and Skills, 2016a). Ireland’s spending on education and skills, at 4.3% of GDP in 2014, remains somewhat below the EU average of 4.9%. The EU Commission has warned that ‘fairness and inclusion’ are a concern, and that funding for appropriate strategies may prove ‘insufficient’ (EU Commission, 2017: 41). Austerity impacted particularly severely among the most marginalised groups in Irish society. Cuts of 80% to Traveller-specific supports occurred notwithstanding compelling evidence that Travellers are among the most educationally disadvantaged groups in Ireland (Harvey, 2013). Similarly, asylum seekers surviving in direct provision centres cannot access higher education due to the prohibitive costs of non-EU student fees, averaging four times more than those of Irish/EU learners.

9. In areas of deprivation, how to create a model of education that benefits those groups who experience high instances of poverty, addiction and other social issues?

An Cosán is a model of education that works in areas of deprivation that benefits those groups who experience high instances of poverty, addiction and other social issues

9.1 In An Cosán, we work from a model of transformative community education, where we combine a caring, warm environment with innovative and creative teaching and learning strategies to create unique learning experiences, which harness learners’ potential and ambition to progress further in education, into employment or to take leadership roles in their local community.

9.2 Many of the learners coming onto our programmes are alienated from the education system and are unlikely to engage in a mainstream College of Further Education setting or Adult Education Centres as a first step. Learners come into An Cosán as it is perceived to be a safe welcoming space which is part of the community.

9.3 An Cosán locally has over 600 learners engaged in our adult education programmes annually. We provide Adult Basic Education, Further Education and Higher Education Programmes across levels 1-8 of the NFQ. We have developed further education and higher education programme which both facilitate our learners to enter the labour market, or to upskill, and those which provide local community members with the knowledge and skills to lead on creating solutions to the social problems facing their community, for example, Community Development Level 5 Award or our BA in Applied Addiction Studies and Community Development or our Social Enterprise Development Programmes.

9.4 We provide learners with wrap around supports which enhance our retention rates. We begin each class with an opening circle, providing learners with an opportunity to ground themselves. Each class has its own unique break time in our coffee dock and are offered free tea/coffee and freshly baked scones, providing a space for class groups to bond and build up their social networks. Learners are offered one-to-one academic support when requested. Counselling services are available for any learners who may need it. There are free childcare places for any learner engaging in morning time programmes. It is this suite of supports that creates the high retention rates for which An Cosán is renowned.
10. **Adult Basic Education Programmes**

10.1 Our Adult Basic Education programmes cover a broad range of subject choices. Academic choices include literacy, English language classes, maths, Irish and a wide variety of IT literacy programmes.

10.2 However due to the knowledge that many of our community members had negative or limited childhood schooling experiences and are reluctant to re-enter anything they associate with ‘school’, we provide a wide range of informal educational programmes including, drama, art, creative writing, University of the 3rd Age and a range of health and wellbeing programmes. These programmes provide a bridge for adults back into formal accredited education through embedding literacy, including IT literacy into all our programmes, we build learners’ skills and confidence.

10.3 Of those learners currently engaging in our informal education programmes, over a third have primary school as their highest rate of educational attainment and only 23% are in employment.

11. **Health and Wellbeing Programmes**

11.1 It is widely acknowledged and documented that in order to improve the health of the nation and reduce costs across our health system, in terms of chronic preventable diseases and mental health illness such as depression and anxiety, that adults need to become more health literate, become more physically active, enhance nutrition and build social networks at local community level.

11.2 An Cosán provides a wide range of health and wellbeing programmes, focusing on both physical and mental health. These include Women and Wellness, Personal Development, Mindfulness, and Health and Wellbeing for Life (an over 55s programme), yoga and Women’s Health and Fitness. An Cosán is currently carrying our action research with the group of women who have commenced the Women’s Health and Fitness programme, which explores the role of community education in facilitating hard to reach members of our communities who are classified as having ‘sedentary’ lifestyles to become physically active, in line with the National Physical Activity Plan: Get Ireland Active guidelines and targets.

11.3 Providing health and wellbeing education programmes is essential for when working in disadvantaged communities. Tallaght West has an alarming rate of death by suicide. These programmes provide adult learners, who may be experiencing significant mental and emotional distress, with increased health literacy, resilience building opportunities, skills and resources for engaging in more physical activity and the connections to build enhanced social support networks through getting to know their fellow community members.

11.4 In addition to the many social and health benefits, the wellbeing programmes provide adult learners with a first step into education. Many of these learners are not yet mentally or emotionally ready to start a structured accredited education or employability programme and need the opportunity to first engage in programmes which are less demanding on them. These programmes provide a meaningful pathway to other education programmes. A
significant finding from a study carried out in Limerick is that the community education setting was noted “by approximately half of the learners as a venue where personal issues such as loneliness, the impact of suicide and addiction issues etc. can be discussed with other learners” resulting in tangible supports among participants (Power, et al., 2011). The AONTAS study ‘More than Just a Course’ backs up this finding highlighting that, for older people, adult learning works to prevent their isolation and social exclusion and helps them maintain well-being. (AONTAS, 2011).

11.5 An Cosán’s further education programmes provide progression routes to employment or ongoing education, learners can engage in QQI level 4, 5 & 6 programmes in Community development, Childcare, Social Care and a range of ICT programmes. An Cosán also provides access to Accenture’s on-line Skills to Succeed Academy and support to utilise it in preparation for employment.

11.6 An Cosán has a collaborative partnership with IT Carlow which allow us to develop the degrees that communities request, to date we have developed a BA in Leadership and Community Development, a BA in Addiction Studies and Community Development and a Certificate in Social Enterprise Development. We also provide continuous professional development for adult and community education practitioners; A Special Purpose Award in Transformative Community Education and one in Technology Enhanced Education. Our higher education programmes serve that small but important cohort of learners who would not engage or survive in the formal higher education system.

12. An Cosán’s Model of Early Years Education

12.1 An Cosan’s early years services - Rainbow House and Fledglings - makes a significant contribution to many children’s lives at a key time in their development. The early years’ education programme in Rainbow House caters for 30 children each day, and provides support, stability and early years’ education to 59 children each day, which includes 20 children who are referred by Tusla, and who have additional needs. This support is vital to many families in allowing them to deal with the numerous difficulties they face on a daily basis.

12.2 Early years places are also provided to learners who are participating in the programmes and courses in An Cosan. In all cases this support is vital as otherwise parents could not attend.

12.3 Rainbow House welcomes diversity and provide for a full spectrum of needs, backgrounds, cultures and stages in development. Following a number of weeks carrying out observations on the children’s stages of development, likes/dislikes and interests, care plans have been put in place and discussed with parents. These care plans will be reviewed at the end of the term.

12.4 The early years’ educators work hard to develop and implement a rich curriculum, supporting all areas of the children’s development. For example, part of the programme includes staff exploring the significant role that language and literature plays in Rainbow House. Strategies include:

- Practical suggestions for presenting and extending language and literature
- Exploring language in a way that is meaningful for children
• Understanding how children learn
• Encouraging children to create stories and act them out using their own personal experiences
• Encouraging children to make their own books
• Exploring all areas of the curriculum through language and literacy.

25% of the population have literacy difficulties and through our curriculum we have an excellent opportunity to give children pre-reading, writing and literacy skills while they are attending the service. An Cosán early years services also provides new opportunities in Information Communications Technology (ICT), Drama, Dance and Sport, for the 24 school-age children who are currently attending our out-of-school programme, to build on their existing skills and interests.

13. What improvement can be made to increase access routes to further education for early school leavers, young people in the Justice System and groups most at risk of educational disadvantage?

An Cosán’s Young Men’s Programme might present a template for such an access route

13.1 Build on current good practice and research

Initiate a consultation process. Accepting that the formal systems have failed young male adults, we must start with this group, where they are, where they gathered and reach out and consult, listen, build interest and trust with a broad range of young men.

Offer a place to drop in, have a coffee, chill out. An Cosán houses a coffee dock, an Open Learning Centre with access to a range of technologies, as well as qualified community educators who offer a range of literacy, numeracy and other accredited courses, all of which will be accessible as part of programme engagement. An Cosán also offers a nationally accredited Counselling Service.

Identify the assets and interests of local young men, often they cannot see their own strengths and abilities, we often have to remind young men that they are not ‘unskilled’ as individuals.

Work with a representative group to co-create opportunities and relevant curricula to provide an access route to further or higher education

Develop the leadership skills of these young men to become role models and recruit and support their peers.

Provide a one stop shop – multi-disciplinary services - for young men.

This programme will bridge existing supports, and create a continuum for young men to reengage, access multiple existing opportunities.

Leverage local community champions to support them every step of the way using a holistic and transformational model of education.
14. **Recommendations**

14.1 I believe we have made the case for community education as a model of education that effectively challenges the impact of pervasive inequality and educational disadvantage. Community education helps people actively participate in society, build self-esteem, improve skills, progress in their education and where relevant take the first steps into employment.

14.2 Social Justice Ireland points out that more needs to be done at government level to ensure that the further adult and community education sector achieves parity of esteem with other sectors within the formal system. This is particularly important when one considers that is it expected to respond to the needs of large sections of the population who have either been failed by the formal system of for whom it is unsuitable as a way of learning.

14.3 Fundamentally we require recognition and resourcing. We appeal to this committee to support Community education in the following ways:

15. **Advocate for and Support Community Education**

15.1 In AONTAS’ 2017 pre-budget submission we called for a doubling of the community education budget from €10.58 million in 2016 to €21.16 million in 2019. AONTAS is pleased that SOLAS funding for non-accredited courses has at minimum been maintained over the last several years as other parts of government expenditure have been reduced. However as wide ranging social supports for the most underserved in our society were eroded over the past decade, community education providers have been stretched financially. In light of the severe cuts to the community and voluntary sector since 2008, which have impacted on community education provision across the country, it is now important to increase funding for community education.

16. **Advocate for and Support increasing the community education budget to 15.87 million in 2018**

16.1 Extending the DEIS model of increased resources to early years programmes in DEIS communities would have a significant impact on educational achievements of primary school children.

17. **Advocate for and Support increased resources for early years providers in DEIS communities**
Submission of the Irish Penal Reform Trust to the
Joint Committee on Education and Skills on
“Education Inequality and Disadvantage”
1 February 2018

About IPRT

Established in 1994, the Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) is Ireland's leading non-governmental organisation campaigning for rights in the penal system and the progressive reform of Irish penal policy. Our vision is one of respect for human rights in the penal system, with prison as a sanction of last resort. We are committed to respecting the rights of everyone in the penal system and to reducing imprisonment. We are working towards progressive reform of the penal system based on evidence-led policies and on a commitment to combating social injustice.

IPRT publishes a wide range of policy positions and research documents; we campaign vigorously across a wide range of penal policy issues; and we have established IPRT as the leading independent voice in public debate on the Irish penal system.

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Introduction
1. IPRT welcomes the invitation by the Joint Committee on Education and Skills to make a brief written submission on education inequality and disadvantage. We commend the Committee for its initiative in choosing to focus on this important issue. While our area of expertise lies primarily in penal policy IPRT views educational disadvantage and inequality as one symptom of wider social exclusion in society. Social exclusion and social injustice are intrinsically linked to penal policy.

2. At the outset it should be noted that in our work, educational inequality and disadvantage is relevant both to the experience of the child and young person but also to that of the adult learner within the prison system. In this submission, IPRT will outline the key points, link to some relevant data while also making some broad policy recommendations.

Statistics on Educational Disadvantage and the Penal System

3. While there has been no recently published study looking at the social profile of prisoners in Ireland, previous studies show a demonstrated link between educational disadvantage and the penal system¹.

4. An unpublished survey conducted by the Irish Prison Service over the period 2015-2017, based on aggregate data from the Midlands, Wheatfield and Limerick prisons shows that:
   - 25.6% of prisoner participants attended no secondary school
   - 52% of participants left school before Junior Cert
   - 80% of participants had left school before Leaving Cert
   - 1 in 5 prisoners had completed the Leaving Cert (compared to 3 in 5 in the general population)
   - Only 9% of the prison population had completed some form of higher education (Certificate through doctorate)

¹ IPRT welcomes invitations for two PhD fellowships issued by the Educational Disadvantage Centre, Dublin College University, Institute of Education and the Irish Prison Service that aim to (1.) examine literacy levels of the prison population (2.) examine digital literacy levels of the prison population https://www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/students/x2_phd_research_fellowships.pdf
5. IPRT’s report *Travellers in the Irish Prison System: A Qualitative Study*\(^2\) highlights figures from the Census 2011 which shows that 17.7% of Travellers have no formal education, this compares with 1.4% of the general population.

6. Oberstown Campus Statistics, *Point In Time Statistics*, January 2018\(^3\) showed that for young people in detention, 23 of 43 young people detained at that time were not engaged in education prior to their detention. It was unclear from files whether an additional nine young people had been engaged in education prior to detention. 6 young people were described as having a learning difficulties/disabilities. Findings from the last HIQA inspection report identified that children in detention ‘loved school.’\(^4\) The report also identified that current logistics in moving children to the school impacted negatively on the duration of time children spent in the school where many children wanted more time in school.

7. This link between educational disadvantage and the prison population is similarly demonstrated in older studies:

   - In a 1997 study, 56% of prisoners in Mountjoy Prison came from six districts in Dublin characterised by high levels of economic deprivation. Almost 80% of participants in the study had left school before the age of 16\(^5\).
   - In 2003 an Irish literacy survey found that 52% of the prison population had the lowest literacy levels. These figures compared with 25% of the general population.\(^6\)
   - Findings from a study in 2007 examining the geography of prisoner reintegration showed that the most deprived areas in the country had 145.9 prisoners per 10,000 population compared to 6.3 in the least deprived areas\(^7\).

**Prevention and Early Intervention**

8. A core part of IPRT’s advocacy work has always focused on the need for early intervention and prevention. In this respect, IPRT would like to draw the attention of the Committee to two ‘at risk’ cohorts of children that should be examined in any consideration of educational inequality and disadvantage in order to inform and support future education policy. These are (1) children affected by parental imprisonment and (2) children in care.

9. Children affected by parental imprisonment may experience disruption to their schooling as a result for example, poor attendance, behaviour or concentration

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\(^2\) [https://www.oberstown.com/campus-stats/](https://www.oberstown.com/campus-stats/)

\(^3\) Health Information and Quality Authority, Inspection of Oberstown Child Detention Campus, 27th to 30th of March 2017, available at [https://www.hiqa.ie/areas-we-work/find-a-centre/oberstown-children-detention-campus](https://www.hiqa.ie/areas-we-work/find-a-centre/oberstown-children-detention-campus)


levels. IPRT in conjunction with University College Cork and the Children’s Rights Alliance developed and made a call for a *National Advocacy Strategy for Children of Prisoners* identifying a need for a holistic approach to respond to the needs of children, in particular how schools can play a pivotal role in supporting children affected by parental imprisonment.

10. Similarly, a report commissioned by the Ombudsman for Children’s Office highlighted the educational barriers facing children in care and the important role schools play (including fostering good relationships with teachers) in providing stability. IPRT will also publish a report later this year that aims to explore the reasons behind the over-representation of children in care in the criminal justice system. **IPRT believes that these two cohorts of children should be recognised and provided with additional supports to ensure better educational outcomes.**

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8 See Barnardos, Department of Education & POPS, 2016, Children of Prisoners: A Guide for Community Professionals, UK, p.17 [https://www.i-hop.org.uk/cgi/fattach/get/664/0/filename/i-HOP+Health+Guide.pdf](https://www.i-hop.org.uk/cgi/fattach/get/664/0/filename/i-HOP+Health+Guide.pdf)

9 See further [http://www.iprt.ie/contents/3190](http://www.iprt.ie/contents/3190)

Young People

11. Crime and punishment must be viewed in the context of wider social and economic marginalisation and exclusion which includes education inequality and disadvantage. In responding to crime and risk of crime, education and access to education is a vital part of the solution. School completion rates and literacy levels are important in ensuring positive life outcomes.

12. Certain socio-economic factors place young people at a higher risk of offending behaviour. These include not being in employment, education or training, living in a disadvantaged area, experiencing familial problems and becoming substance dependent.

13. A consultation for IPRT’s Turnaround Youth report cited above held with young men with offending behaviour - all of whom reported wanting to “stay out of trouble” - highlighted a range of barriers in preventing them from doing so including unemployment, boredom and alcohol use. As one participant interviewed stated: ‘If you can’t get a job, you’re going to go on the rob.’ Other perceived barriers included whether Garda vetting would prevent access to education courses and a lack of training opportunities.

14. IPRT believes that breaking the cycle of educational disadvantage is imperative in addressing the issue of wider social exclusion, thus reducing crime. IPRT believes that early intervention and prevention programmes are key to retaining potential early school leavers.

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13 See further Turnaround Youth: Young Adults in the Criminal Justice System IPRT, 2015 http://www.iprt.ie/contents/2733
Prison and Re-Offending

15. The latest prison recidivism figures collated by the Central Statistics Office\(^{14}\) highlighted that from a 2010 prison population cohort, within three years 45.1% had re-offended. Rates of recidivism were highest for young males between the ages of 21-25.

16. The highest rates of recidivism were by prisoners whose initial offence fell into one of the following categories: Robbery, Extortion and Hijacking Offences, Burglary and Related Offences and Theft and Related Offences. Following a period of imprisonment, the most common categories for re-offending include: Public Order and Social Code Offences, Theft and Related Offence and Drug Controlled Offences. All of these offences could be described as acquisitive offences and often linked to wider socio-economic factors.

17. IPRT believes imprisonment as a sanction is not an effective deterrent to committing crime and has many damaging consequences including disruption to family life and access to education. Using effective alternatives to custody can help promote self-esteem and motivation for offenders, while making a positive contribution to society\(^{15}\).


Education within Prison

18. It is well-known that the prison population is often characterised by low levels of educational attainment. While no exact data are available, an EU report estimates 3%–5% of the prison population would be qualified to undertake higher education, where in many countries early school leaving is strong characteristic associated with the prison population.

19. At the same time, there is a well recognised right to education for persons in prison. The Council of Europe specifically recommends that “All prisoners shall have access to education which is envisaged as consisting of classroom subjects, vocational education, creative and cultural activities, physical education, sports, social education and library facilities” (Recommendation 1) and that “all those involved in the administration of the prison system and the management of prisons should facilitate and support education as much as possible” (Recommendation 4).

20. There has been a deterioration in education budgets within the prison estate in recent years. In addition, staffing shortages have resulted in a reduction in school hours.

21. Figures provided by the Irish Prison Service suggest that only 42% of the prison population participated in education activities in March 2017.

22. Education and training is a vital component in addressing the rehabilitative needs of the prison population. IPRT believes that every prison should provide each prisoner with access to a range of educational activities that meet the individual’s needs and take into account their aspirations.

23. For many, past experiences of the education system have been negative. For this reason, education in prisons should be innovative. It should involve the promotion of forms of non-traditional learning with alternative methods of assessment and accreditation. There is a need for the education system to be comprehensive and reflect the diverse needs and interests of the prison population. A person-centred approach is required whereby both basic and continued learning is catered for. Choice, availability and accessibility should be important features of the curriculum.

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17 See Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners and the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Mandela Rules). Rule 28.1 of the European Prison Rules(2006) provides that “every prison shall seek to provide all prisoners with access to educational programmes which are as comprehensive as possible and which meet their needs which take into account the individual needs while taking into account their aspirations.”
24. Inclusive prison education can help an individual cope with their sentence, while also being used to effect change in offending behaviour. In some cases, prison education can be transformative.

Barriers to Education and Employment on Release

25. The lack of supports upon release, including stable accommodation acts as a barrier for former prisoners to successfully reintegrate into society and access education and employment.

26. The current spent convictions legislation represents a significant barrier in supporting many young people/individuals with a criminal convictions history to access education, employment, travel and insurance. The current legislation does not allow people who have committed more than one offence (with the exception of motoring/other public order offences) to wipe the slate clean, no matter how long ago in the past the offences were committed. While IPRT welcomed the introduction of Spent Convictions legislation, we believe this legislation does not go far enough. Post enactment review of this legislation would provide an opportunity to remove this barrier to education and employment.

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21 See IPRT’s information campaign video for information on the current spent convictions legislation (Adults https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWleQYxy8qU and children https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7e1wfp_GT8
Policy Recommendations and Possible Solutions

Regular Publication of Data

a. Regular data collection and publication of the educational profile of those in contact with the criminal justice system is required in order to analyse the links between educational disadvantage, social exclusion and crime.

Awareness Raising and Education

b. Increased awareness-raising activity including the development of information materials for teachers and schools in order to understand key issues for at risk cohorts of children. This includes children of prisoners (and may include doubly marginalised children such as Traveller children of prisoners) and children in State care. These children should be provided with additional supports (e.g. specialised teaching supports, improved access to services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Speech and Language Therapists, Child Welfare Services and Child psychologists) to maximise positive educational outcomes.

c. The National Drugs Strategy: Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery 2017-2025\(^{22}\) highlights the role that school based programmes play in particular programmes around social and personal development. School is an important intervention point where there is substantial overlap between early school leaving and drug misuse and this links to crime, social exclusion and punishment.

d. Schools should recognise the diverse talents and skills of young people. Curricula should place greater emphasis on non-traditional forms of education, taking a person centred approach.

Investment in Early Intervention and Prevention Programmes

e. Investment in early intervention and prevention programmes in order to retain potential early school leavers.

f. The National Children and Young People’s Framework\(^{23}\) should be monitored, fully implemented and evaluated. Some of the transformative goals are relevant in promoting educational equality and opportunity including: supporting transitions effectively for children and young people, listening to children and young people and creating cross government interagency collaboration and cooperation.


Promotion of Alternatives to Custody

g. IPRT has previously highlighted the damaging effects of imprisonment including its disruption to family life and access to education. IPRT believes that imprisonment should be used as a sanction of last resort, and effective alternatives to custody should be promoted in line with the *Criminal Justice (Community Service) Amendment Act 2011* and international human rights standards.

Access to Education in Prisons

h. Publication of information on education in Irish prisons is required in order to monitor performance in this area.

i. Efforts need to be made to address the specific barriers faced by certain cohorts of prisoners in relation to accessing education. As highlighted by the Council of Europe ‘Every effort should be made to encourage the prisoner to participate actively in all aspects of education.’ In addition, the Strategic Review Group on Penal Policy (2014) recommended ‘prisoners should only be on restricted regimes for the shortest period consistent with their safety and have access to adequate training, education and recreational facilities.’ With high numbers of prisoners across the estate being on a restricted regime or in solitary confinement, a strategy must be in place to ensure that this cohort of prisoners has decent access to education.

Access to Education upon Release

j. Having criminal convictions histories can act as a barrier to accessing education. IPRT believes that legislators should conduct a review of the current spent convictions legislation with a view to broadening criteria of convictions to which it applies by the end of 2018. IPRT believes the current legislation could be strengthened through:

(a.) Raising the limit on the type of custodial sentence eligible to become spent from 12 months or less, in line with other jurisdictions e.g. less than 30 months (Northern Ireland) and less than 48 months (Scotland)

(b.) Removing the cap on the number of convictions that may become spent

(c.) Retaining a proportionate relationship between the nature of the sanction and the rehabilitation period.

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SOLAS Submission to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills on Education Inequality and Disadvantage

February 2018
1. Introduction

An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh Agus Scileanna (SOLAS) is responsible for funding, planning and co-ordinating Further Education and Training (FET) in Ireland. We welcome the opportunity to make this submission to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills on the critical area of education inequality and disadvantage. SOLAS manages and supports the delivery of FET programmes by 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) throughout the country, with annual integrated services plans framing the type, mix and volume of programmes and services to be delivered. SOLAS is strongly committed to active inclusion, with one of the strategic goals set out in its corporate plan for 2017-2019 focused on ensuring that FET provision in equitable and inclusive, reflecting Government policies.

The Further Education and Training Strategy 2014 – 2019\(^1\) sets out a comprehensive roadmap for the development of the sector, with an overall priority to address the unemployment challenge and provide targeted skills programmes that support job seekers to re-skill and up-skill for areas where sustainable employment opportunities are emerging. Of the five goals set out within the strategy, two are most pertinent to efforts to tackle education equality and disadvantage – conceptualised as skills for the economy and active inclusion. The approach adopted by SOLAS is to pursue these two goals in a holistic manner, based on the guiding principles of the FET strategy:

- flexibility and responsiveness in delivery;
- robust evaluation of outcomes based on on-going collection and assessment of data;
- developing and adapting courses that meet the skills needs of local and regional employers;
- most appropriate allocation of resources in helping the unemployed and continuing to provide a pathway to work.\(^2\)

The approach adopted and actively pursued by SOLAS is consistent with a review that envisaged an FET Sector that is capable of simultaneously meeting the skills needs of the economy and those of the unemployed, particularly the long term unemployed, via a strategy of active inclusion.\(^3\) The approach is also consistent with the European Pillar of Social Rights, which inter alia, states that:

‘Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market.’

In the remainder of this paper, we address the specific points identified by the Committee as follows:

- In Section 2, we discuss progress and issues around, and the impact of, educational disadvantage.
- In Section 3, education and training for prisoners and addressing repeat offending is set out.
- In Section 4, the link between educational disadvantage and poverty is examined
- In Section 5, we draw some conclusions from our analysis and highlight some priorities in tackling educational inequality and disadvantage for the Committee to consider

2. **Issues, Progress and Impact around Educational Disadvantage**

It should be recognised that inequality is a multidimensional concept. While inequalities can be considered in many different ways, two key concepts are inequality of outcome (measured by capturing income and wealth) and inequality of opportunity. Investment in education and skills is a key policy tool for reducing inequality and promoting equal opportunities. In particular, as a response to changing work practices caused by technology, up-skilling of low-skilled workers has the most potential to counteract wage dispersion, while also creating more jobs. For young people, education is effective at creating more equal opportunities.\(^4\)

Analysis across the EU shows that participation in adult education and training is influenced by several factors, in particular educational attainment, employment status, occupational category, age and skills. Thus adults with low level or no qualifications, low skilled and those in low-skilled occupations, the unemployed and economically inactive, and older people are less likely to participate in lifelong learning, yet these adults are the most in need of education and training.

The number of unemployed persons in Ireland has been declining annually since a peak of 316,000 in 2011-2012, with the level falling to below 150,000 by the fourth quarter of 2016. The improvements in the Irish labour market over this period are encouraging and reflect both labour market reforms and upskilling and re-skilling actions implemented over the period, including the efforts by the FET sector, as well as general labour market and economy. However, it is of paramount importance to ensure that the recovery benefits all, including those on the margins of the labour market.

Individuals with no or weak labour-market attachment often face a number of employment barriers that prevent them from fully engaging in the labour market. They generally are characterised by insufficient work-related capabilities, evaluated across five dimensions:

- lack of skills, measured using the skill level of any previous job
- health limitations, i.e. whether an individual reports long-standing (longer than six months) physical or mental limitations in daily activities
- care responsibilities, i.e. whether an individual has a family member who requires care and state that their reason for not working is care responsibilities, or they are the only person in the household who can provide it
- lack of work experience or low overall work experience relative to potential experience.\(^5\)

Thus 47% of those with low skills were persistently out of work, and this was the highest share of all segments of population identified as facing barriers to work.\(^6\) This demonstrates the strong relationship between the level of skills and the labour market outcome, which tends to be exacerbated in the recession, but often persists during a period of economic recovery as well. Thus, the unemployment rate of the low skilled was almost 26% in 2012, compared to 7.6% for high skilled. The employment rate of low skilled in 2013 in Ireland was 35.4%, increasing to 36.1% in 2016; at the same time, the employment rate of the medium skilled from to 60.7% to 66.4%, while that for high skilled persons grew from 79.2% to 81.9%. In Ireland, in quarter 4 2016, third level

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\(^4\) EC (2017) European Pillar of Social Rights(12)
graduates continue to have the lowest unemployment rate (at 4%), while persons with a lower secondary education or less had the highest rate at 12%.\(^7\)

The EC has noted that while the labour market continues to improve social challenges remain, in particular for low work-intensity households, while large disparities in labour market outcomes for different skills groups still persist. Hence despite the strong recovery, labour market participation has increased only marginally over the period 2015-2016\(^8\). At the same time, the improving economy is resulting in skills shortages in several areas. The availability and cost of childcare remain barriers to female labour market participation and hinder efforts to reduce child poverty\(^9\) and was also identified as one of the barriers to female participation in FET\(^10\). There thus remains an unused pool of human resources, confirmed by broader measures of unemployment that include involuntary part-time and discouraged workers (i.e. individuals who have given up searching for jobs, largely due to their perception that there is no job available for them and influenced by their skill endowment.

There has however been progress with regard to inclusion, with the EC noting the decline of long term unemployment rate, and the number of people living in jobless households.\(^11\) In addition, the broad unemployment measure, which combines unemployed and part-time underemployed, also declined from 13.5% in quarter 4 2015 to 10.9% in quarter 4 2016\(^12\).

The findings from the 2017 SOLAS FET Follow up Survey\(^13\) in respect of those who exited SOLAS funded training in Q1 2016, (one of the tools used to monitor post-FET outcomes) confirmed the critical role that this provision plays in supporting reintegration into the labour force. In addition, also indicated that the sustainability and quality of employment increased post FET training, while the prevalence of discouraged worker effect also tended to be low post FET training. The survey found that 41% of course participants were in employment, increasing to 51% for those who attended labour market oriented courses, while positive outcomes (i.e. progression to further studies) were identified for additional subgroups of FET participants. It also found evidence of positive outcomes for the most disadvantaged cohorts (i.e. long term unemployed, younger workers and lower skilled workers).\(^14\)

A recent improvement in educational attainment was observed at the higher secondary and further education level, with the share of this cohort increasing by 0.6 percentage points between quarter 4 2015 and quarter 4 2016. The share of those with lower secondary education or less also decreased, moving by 0.5 percentage point closer to the 7% target envisaged for 2020 within the National Skills Strategy.\(^15\)

Despite these encouraging trends, there remains scope to further promote the engagement of young people with the education and training system. For such young people, there is a rather complex interplay between participating in the labour market and partaking in education and

\(^8\) The labour market participation rate changed very marginally over the period 2011 – 2016; it was 60.3% in 2016, 60% in 2015 %, 60% in 2014, 60.2% in 2013, 59.9% 2012- 60.2% in 2011, and 60.7% in 2010
\(^9\) EU Semester : Country report Ireland.
\(^10\) SOLAS (2017) Barriers to Further Education and Training, with particular reference, to long term unemployed persons and other vulnerable individuals.
\(^11\) EC, Joint Employment Report, forthcoming
\(^12\) SOLAS, National Skills Bulletin 2017
\(^13\) The follow-up survey is one of the tools used by SOLAS to monitor post-FET outcomes
\(^14\) SOLAS, (2016) Follow up survey of FET programme participants.
\(^15\) SOLAS, National Skills Bulletin 2017
training and many can also become disengaged from both education and from the labour market. This heterogeneous group of young people who are neither in employment nor in education and training is referred to as ‘NEET’. This group can potentially join the labour market in the future, and as such, it is considered a target group for labour market interventions and FET provision.

SOLAS also maintains a strong regional and local focus in its work and believes that the labour market supply at regional level can be enhanced significantly\textsuperscript{16}. We work closely with the Department of Education and Skills as well as other stakeholders, primarily by providing labour market intelligence to the National Skills Council and nine regional skills fora to help anticipate and respond to the rapidly changing skills needs across all sectors. This initiative contributes towards achieving the relevant targets set out in the regional action plans for jobs.

Providing access and opportunities in lifelong learning is another critical aspect in tackling educational disadvantage. When benchmarked against its peers in the EU, Ireland is below the EU average rate in relation to lifelong learning, ranking 20th out of 28 countries in relation to those in employment engaging in such activity.\textsuperscript{17} If Ireland is to improve its lifelong learning rates, efforts need to concentrate on those in the workforce, those most distant from the education system (i.e. older people and those with lower education attainment), and on the segment of non-formal learning. Challenges include improving participation rates among those with lower education attainment and older age groups.

SOLAS is already supporting the Skills for Work programme, aiming to upskill those holding NFQ 1-3. Nevertheless, it seems that the opportunities for those in the workplace to learn and upskill could be expanded and, equally important, that these opportunities should occur on a more frequent basis throughout workers’ careers. This is particularly relevant within the framework of Ireland’s National Skills Strategy 2025 (published January 2016) where one of the key actions (Action 4.1) aims is to promote the benefits of lifelong learning among individuals, the self-employed and employers. The Strategy recognises the role of increasing participation in lifelong learning in ensuring Ireland has a flexible, skilled workforce, where individuals (including low-skilled and older workers) can gain the skills to move between jobs and careers throughout their working lives.

The findings from relevant research (Adult Education Survey) pointed towards difficulties that adults (aged 25-64) face in participating in lifelong learning, from lack of perceived need to practical obstacles including family responsibilities, conflicts between training and the work schedule, a lack of the ‘prerequisites’ for study, price, a lack of employer's support, a lack of suitable learning activities, a lack of access to ICT, and health. For Ireland, the barrier associated with family responsibilities was relatively high.

Further research indicated that lowering the barriers to adult participation in learning calls for modes of delivery that help overcome time constraints. One of the effective ways to do this is by utilisation of technology. SOLAS will work with the DES to implement the Strategy for Technology Enhanced Learning in FET 2016-2019, including the development of a Technology Enhanced Learning Action Plan in each of the 16 Education and Training Boards. The Strategy seeks to build on the existing capacity in SOLAS and good practice in technology-enhanced learning (which includes being cognisant of the risk that distance based learning can exclude the segment of adult population with


\textsuperscript{17} SOLAS, 2016 Lifelong Learning report.
low level of ICT skills and / or no access to a computer/Internet), and aims to expand access to and continuously improve and innovate FET provision.

In addition, SOLAS will explore using funding guidelines to support the expansion of learner access to technology enhanced learning, particularly for disadvantaged groups. SOLAS has been engaged in similar initiatives by providing relevant funding to NALA (The National Adult Literacy Agency). In turn, NALA, a SOLAS funded FET support agency, has been offering a Distance Learning Service since 2000. NALA provides a range of free and confidential services for adults experiencing literacy and numeracy issues. The service is designed to fit learning around individual needs, with the option of self-directed online learning and / or blended learning.

An often overlooked aspect in addressing educational disadvantage and inequality is the provision of access to non-formal learning. Ireland’s participation rate in non-formal learning is particularly low, while its rate of formal learning is the sixth highest in the EU. This contributes to the overall lag in the lifelong learning rate noted above. Non-formal learning can involve a range of interventions including, for example, seminar participation, courses not leading to certification, and classes in letter writing or driving and can be particularly effective in addressing issues such as literacy and numeracy. Family literacy programmes are particularly effective, typically building on interaction of home and school, with evidence that children from areas and schools designated as disadvantaged benefit greatly from these types of initiative. Studies that have attempted to quantify the extent of the enhancement have concluded that the effect can be as large as other significant educational interventions like reducing class size.

SOLAS is strongly committed to investment in a range of formal and non-formal learning programmes to address such issues. The FET Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy seeks to facilitate literacy provision for family, personal, social, and community contexts. SOLAS, ETBs, NALA, ETBI and other relevant stakeholders will continue to work together to progress these aims. The National Strategy: Literacy and Numeracy for learning and Life 2011 – 2020, and the Further Education and Training Strategy facilitates enhanced co-operation on areas that are common to both strategies, particularly in relation to raising awareness of the benefits of family learning as well as family learning opportunities.
3. **Prisoners and Repeat Offending**

The Committee has asked for specific information in relation to educational disadvantage in relation to prisoners and repeat offending. SOLAS undertakes a range of activities focused on supporting this key target group and maximises their access to educational opportunities.

While participation by offenders in education is voluntary, many of the courses made available to prisoners provide the opportunity to pursue mainstream certification. Courses provided include Literacy, General Learning, Junior Cycle/Leaving Certificate, Woodwork, Art, Languages, Beauty Therapy, Sports and Fitness Instructing. In 2015/2016, over 150,000 hours of prisoner education was provided to 13,000 beneficiaries within the prison service.

The aim of prison education is to help prisoners cope with their sentences and prepare them for release, and particularly offer them the opportunity to discover and develop new potential within themselves. Such personal development has special urgency in a prison context since the great majority of those in prison have had limited education opportunities in the past. The curriculum also seeks to reflect the needs and interests of the student when released into society. Prisoner Education is provided by seven ETBs in co-operation with the Irish Prison Services in 11 locations throughout the country as follows;

- Cork Prison Education Centre
- Dillon’s Cross Project (Pre-release programme)
- City of Dublin Prison Services
- St. Patricks Institution
- Limerick/Clare Prison Services
- Loughan House
- Midlands Prison
- Portlaoise Prison
- Curragh Camp
- Castlerea Prison.

**Young Offenders**

SOLAS, in conjunction with the Department of Justice and Equality, funds Justice Workshops through the ETB network aimed at young offenders (under the age of 25). These workshops deliver the full-time Youthreach programme, which offers second-chance education to early school leavers (typically aged 16-25 years).

**Ex-Offenders**

In addition to the above services aimed at prison inmates and young offenders, the FET sector also supports ex-offenders in a number of different ways. The City of Dublin Education and Training Board’s (CDETB) Pathways Project Centre, for example, is an outreach initiative of its’ Education Service to Prisons which aims to help, support and advise ex-prisoners on matters concerning employment, training and educational courses, accommodation and social welfare. Support is also given in terms of personal development, gaining confidence, and heightening self-esteem as well as personal and vocational guidance counselling. Social and peer support work provides an important role, with personal and addiction counselling where relevant also an important component of service delivery.
SOLAS also allocates funding to the PACE initiative in Blanchardstown, which provides access to further education and training for offenders on probation or parole, ex-prisoners and ex-offenders. This is used for the payment of fees/costs relating to study/training undertaken by ex-prisoners and ex-offenders and to provide advice/guidance to this cohort.

**Families of Prisoners**

One of the consequences of imprisonment documented in research literature is the impact it has on already disadvantaged families. The Dillon’s Cross project, supported by SOLAS Back to Education Initiative (BTIE) funding, aims to address this. This project is run by Cork ETB’s Education Unit to provide educational opportunities for the female relatives of prisoners and ex-prisoners. This programme offers a full QQI Certificate in General Learning Level 3 and is currently based in the Glen Resource Centre, Cork. It is a Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) Project.

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4. **Links between Educational Disadvantage and Poverty**

While the continued improvements in retention and graduation rates at secondary level in Ireland should be acknowledged, with the rate of students completing the Leaving Certificate exceeding 90%, early leaving from education and training still remains a concern for policy makers and is relevant for the provision of FET at regional level. Research in this area points towards a strong negative correlation between the share of early school leavers and the share of medium- or high-qualified individuals in the age group 25-64. This is not surprising, and there remains a strong rationale on continuing to focus on further reduction of early school leaving rates. Across the EU, several Member States have put in place comprehensive strategies against early school leaving and a multifaceted approach to this issue is crucial, with multiple interventions across government agencies needing to be brought together to provide tailored and cohesive responses at individual and family level.

Ireland’s National Skills Strategy 2025 prioritises programmes which provide opportunities for those who left the school system early and the FET sector has a strong role to play in this regard. SOLAS supports Youthreach and Community Training Centre provision as a means for young people to develop skills and confidence and prepare for further education or work. There are 110 Youthreach centres and 35 Community Training Centres, most located in disadvantaged areas, and an evaluation of the Youthreach programme has recently been commissioned.

The Committee also asked for specific information with regard to educational disadvantage and homelessness. Education and Training Boards have offered a range of specific supports for homeless people, including:

- **CDETB Foundations Project**: CDETB is working in partnership with the homeless services and other agencies to increase access to education for those who are homeless. As part of the project, Adult Education Programmes are offered in Parnell Adult Education Centre, including Computers, Photography, Art, Interpersonal Skills, Healthy Living, Literacy etc. Outreach Programmes are also offered on-site in hostels and other homeless services. An Educational Advice and Information Service which refers students on to other education centres or college courses and arranges Education Guidance appointments is in place, with a Settlement Skills Programme helping to prepare people for re-settlement, covering areas such as Communication Skills, Cookery, Budgeting, etc.

- **Louth Meath Education and Training Board – “My Streets Drogheda”**: In 2015 Louth Meath Education and Training Board, in conjunction with State Street (financial services company) funded a social enterprise, *My Streets Drogheda*, which trained homeless people and those transitioning from homelessness as tour guides for the local area.

- **Cork Education and Training Board – SIMON Community Culinary Operations Programme**. In 2014, Cork Education and Training Board funded a SIMON Community initiative, providing inputs on a Culinary Operations programme with the aim of giving homeless people a route out of homelessness. The success rates have been impressive with a 92% success rate in getting people employed and on the road out of homelessness.

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5. Conclusions

The further education and training sector plays an important role in helping to address educational inequality and disadvantage. As set out in the paper, by combining its extensive mainstream provision with targeted interventions to support key vulnerable target groups, the sector has been able to deliver tangible impacts in reintegrating the most marginalised back into education and training and supporting the progression of many into employment. The Committee has asked for recommendations for the Government to consider, and we believe that there are five core areas that must be prioritised if effective responses are to be further developed:

- Continued and enhanced investment in the FET sector to recognise and build upon its pivotal role in addressing existing and intergenerational educational disadvantage and inequality. Alongside this, it is important to recognise the importance of the high returns to investments in the early years of a person’s life, as inadequate early investments are difficult and costly to remedy later.
- Recognition that the adult learning activities provided by the FET sector, which are aimed at young parents are a crucial input into early learning and child development. Such activities carry the additional benefit of improving the early educational environments for children from otherwise disadvantaged backgrounds. Educational involvement of low-educated parents during adulthood can reap the intergenerational gains of improved early learning of their children, by improving the educational background of families.
- Recognition that a critical role of the further education and training sector is to carefully target education and training programmes for adult learners at their particular skills needs as well as the needs of the labour market.
- Focus on ensuring that lifelong learning opportunities, including informal adult learning opportunities, are available across all communities and relevant target groups.
- A coordinated and focused education inclusion policy and associated investment strategies to ensure a holistic end-to-end approach to tackling educational disadvantage, incorporating early childhood education, primary and post-primary provision, guidance services, further education and training, higher education and lifelong learning.

SOLAS would be happy to provide any further information or clarification to the Committee with regard to the material set out in this paper.
1. Introduction

As set out in Goal 2 in the Action Plan for Education 2016-19 – “to improve the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage or learners with special educational needs”, tackling educational disadvantage is a key priority for the Department of Education and Skills. In order to achieve its vision for education to become a proven pathway to better opportunities for those in communities at risk of disadvantage and social exclusion, the Department of Education and Skills (the Department) has set the implementation of a renewed DEIS programme as one of its key priorities. DEIS – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, is the Department’s main policy initiative aimed at tackling educational disadvantage and DEIS Plan 2017 is its current policy statement on the DEIS Programme and related supports for children and young people in the education system.

Equity of access to higher education is a fundamental principle of Irish education policy, and one that has been endorsed by successive governments in policy statements and commitments over the past thirty years as a national priority. Most recently, equity of access is identified as a core national objective for the higher education system in the Department of Education and Skills’ Higher Education System Performance Framework (SPF) 2018-2020. The System Performance Framework (SPF) for higher education institutions sets out a range of high-level system indicators to assess and measure the higher education system’s performance in this priority area. Specifically, one of the main objectives of the SPF is ‘to promote access for disadvantaged groups and to put in place coherent pathways from second-level education, from further education and other non-traditional entry routes’. The overall strategy in relation to equity of access as set out in the overall strategic framework is articulated in the National Access Plan. The third National Access Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2015 – 2019) was launched in December 2015. The vision of this Plan is to ensure that the student body entering into, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland’s population.

In preparing this submission for the Joint Committee, the Department has aimed to provide the Committee with as much relevant material as possible regarding the supports it provides to tackle these issues and to maximise educational opportunities for every child and student in the country. Education and training are key to breaking the cycle of disadvantage and there is a range of measures in place to support the diverse needs of all students across the education continuum.

2. Current DEIS Model – DEIS Plan 2017

In the context of the request of the Joint Committee for suggestions to ‘improve’ the DEIS model, it should be borne in mind that evaluations of the Programme to date have shown an overall improvement in educational outcomes in DEIS schools (more detail contained under Educational Outcomes – Monitoring and Evaluation). The new DEIS Plan which was introduced last year aims to build on what has already been achieved by schools who have benefitted from the additional supports available under the initial DEIS programme introduced in 2005. The ambition set out in DEIS Plan 2017 is for Ireland to become the best in Europe at harnessing education to break down
barriers and stem the cycle of inter-generational disadvantage by equipping learners to participate, succeed and contribute effectively to society.

DEIS Plan 2017\(^1\) focuses on prioritising the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities and is based on the findings of a comprehensive review of the DEIS programme, which involved extensive consultations with all relevant stakeholders and resulted in the publication of the Report of the Review on DEIS\(^2\). The Review examined all aspects of DEIS including the range and impact of different elements of the supports provided under DEIS, the potential for innovation within and between schools and the scope for increased integration of services provided by other Departments and Agencies in order to improve the effectiveness of the range of interventions deployed. Based on the findings of this review, DEIS Plan 2017 was published. The two key elements of the 2017 Plan are:

- The development of a **new identification process** for the assessment of schools in terms of the socio-economic background of their pupil cohort using centrally held data including DES Primary Online (POD) and Post Primary (PPOD) Databases combined with the CSO Small Area of Population (SAP) statistics from the National Census of Population as represented by the Pobal HP Deprivation Index (HP Index).
- The updating of the **DEIS School Support Programme** which represents the overall suite of supports available to schools participating in the programme in order to improve educational outcomes for pupils at greatest risk of not reaching their full potential by virtue of their socio-economic circumstances.

The Plan sets out, as a series of Actions, the details of an updated DEIS School Support Programme which builds on existing supports available to schools. For the first time, specific targets have been set in key areas such as Literacy and Numeracy, School Completion Rates and progression to Further and Higher Education.

In order to achieve these targets, DEIS Plan 2017 has 5 key goals, which are:

1. **Goal 1** - To implement a more robust and responsive Assessment Framework for identification of schools and effective resource allocation
2. **Goal 2** - To improve the learning experience and outcomes of pupils in DEIS Schools
3. **Goal 3** - To improve the capacity of school leaders and teachers to engage, plan and deploy resources to their best advantage
4. **Goal 4** - To support and foster best practice in schools through inter-agency collaboration
5. **Goal 5** - To support the work of schools by providing the research, information, evaluation and feedback to achieve the goals of the plan

The Plan has a particular focus on identifying and embedding good practice through the development of pilot projects supported by a School Excellence Fund, and on encouraging improved interagency working in and around DEIS schools.

Key Actions of DEIS Plan 2017 include:

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• The establishment of a School Excellence Fund to support the implementation of new innovative and creative interventions and help broker the necessary resources from the various support agencies to tackle educational disadvantage;
• Engagement between pre-schools and primary schools in communities will be strengthened;
• Education and Training Boards will establish formal outreach arrangements with DEIS schools to encourage access through its existing education pathways to ensure continued engagement with education and training;
• Formal arrangements to ensure cooperation between schools and other service providers to support improved transitions through the school system and onwards to further and higher education;
• All DEIS post primary schools will have access to a dedicated career guidance counsellor;
• Priority access for DEIS schools principals to leadership training and other relevant courses approved by the Centre for School Leadership;
• Greater prioritisation of National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) service to DEIS schools;
• Learning from ABC Programmes (under the remit of Department of Children and Youth Affairs), should be disseminated to schools and incorporated into teaching and learning;
• Improved inter-agency working to achieve more effective supports in and around schools in areas such as In-School Speech and Language Therapy, School Meals, Home School Community Liaison, School Completion Programme and linkages with community, sporting and youth services;
• Schools are asked in reviewing their School Plan, to set specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time specific targets and to evaluate these annually.

There are now 902 schools in the DEIS Programme – 704 Primary and 198 Post Primary with the Department investing over €125m in 2018 in the various additional supports provided to DEIS schools. These include:

• DEIS Grant
• Additional Teaching Posts (at Primary Urban Band 1 level)
• Enhanced Book Grants
• Allocation of Admin Principal at lower threshold (at Primary Urban Band 1 and 2 levels).
• Access to School Meals (DEASP)
• Access to HSCL Supports.
• Access to literacy and numeracy supports
• Priority access to a range of professional development supports
• Priority access to the Centre for School Leadership
• Enhanced Career Guidance allocation (for post primary schools)
• Expansion of NEPS Provision in DEIS schools
• Roll out of Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme and Friends Programme to all DEIS schools.

At the heart of the DEIS initiative is the requirement, and opportunity, for schools to determine their own needs, set their own targets, and use resources as they think best to target those students most at risk of educational disadvantage. There is a strong focus on literacy and numeracy and improving educational outcomes in these key areas with many of the actions in DEIS providing support in these areas.
The Plan also recognises the need for improved interagency working to achieve more effective delivery of the range of supports that are important to DEIS schools. Accordingly actions aimed at improving the school-readiness of preschool children, increasing the effectiveness of behavioural and therapeutic supports and integrating services that support school attendance, retention and progression are included. Actions in relation to school attendance and retention come under the remit of the Educational Welfare Service of TUSLA. Another important element of the supports offered to schools under DEIS is the School Meals Programme through which DEIS schools are prioritised by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

DEIS Plan 2017 also includes specific actions to address the particular educational needs of Travellers and Roma and migrant children and young people for whom English is not their first language. Education provision for these groups is one of a number of policy areas included in two new national strategies published in 2017 by the Minister for Justice and Equality: the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion strategy and the national Migrant Integration Strategy both of which contain specific education related actions. The Department of Education and Skills contributed extensively to the development of these strategies is represented on monitoring and implementation groups to ensure their delivery.

In relation to the Committee’s suggestion regarding the development of a ‘model’ of education provision specifically targeted at a certain pupil cohort, it is important to note that the education system provided for by the Department is a mainstream one and that the DEIS programme constitutes a suite of additional supports to assist those schools who have a high concentration of students deemed to be at risk of educational disadvantage.

### 3. Identification of schools for inclusion in DEIS programme

A new DEIS Identification model has been developed which allows the Department to assess levels of concentrated disadvantage in all schools. School data for the model is updated annually by schools and this is combined with socioeconomic data from the National Census of Ireland as represented in the Pobal HP Deprivation Index. This new approach offers an objective, evidence-based approach using data which is independently generated and verified, thereby providing a strong and accurate means of assessing the socio economic demographic of schools.

Improved centrally held data was key to this new method of identifying schools which is more responsive to demographic and other changes in school communities and has made it possible to move away from the earlier rigid and inflexible system of assessment of schools.

The key data sources are school data, provided to the Department of Education and Skills by schools through the Primary and Post Primary Online Databases, combined with data from the National Census of Population as represented in the Pobal HP (Haase Pratschke) Index of Deprivation based on Small Area Population Statistics (SA). The SA data is combined with pupil data, anonymised and aggregated to small area level, to provide information on the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in the pupil cohort of individual schools. It is worth noting that it is not where the school itself is situated but where its cohort of students come from that provides the socio-economic profile of the school. The Department has published a guide to the new identification model which is available at https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Identification-Process.pdf.
The development of this model facilitates a robust and responsive Assessment Framework for identification of schools and will facilitate improved effectiveness in resource allocation whereby resources will be more closely matched to identified educational needs in individual schools. A further process is currently underway to take account of updated school data and the 2016 National Census data. If this exercise reveals that further schools are identified at the highest levels of concentrated disadvantage, then subject to available resources, these schools will be included for additional supports under the DEIS Programme.

4. Educational Outcomes - Monitoring and Evaluation

Whilst the overall performance in DEIS schools continues to improve, it also continues to remain below the national average in terms of pupil retention, literacy and numeracy, overall educational outcomes and progression to further and higher education. The renewal of the School Support Programme with an emphasis on setting specific targets in key areas, better inter-agency collaboration, the implementation of innovative and creative pilots to tackle educational disadvantage and a Framework to help inform future policy plays a vital role in the Department’s aim to close the gap with the focus of DEIS remaining on those schools with the highest concentrations of students at risk of disadvantage.

Monitoring and evaluation are key elements of the DEIS Plan. A Monitoring and Evaluation Framework is currently being developed to bring together existing data sources to provide a comprehensive dataset of all Departmental and other resources available to DEIS schools. The aim of this Framework is to better determine which interventions are having the greatest impact in terms of delivering better outcomes for learners as well as providing an evidence base to inform future policy in the area of educational disadvantage and effective resource allocation. The information gleaned from the monitoring and evaluation of the programme also needs to be fed back into the schools system to assist them in improving performance. Better information about what works well to improve school engagement and achieve better learning outcomes will allow us to more effectively support those most at risk and deal more equitably with schools in terms of resource allocation.

The latest Retention Report\(^3\) issued by the Department’s Statistics Unit shows an increase in Leaving Certificate retention rate for DEIS schools from 82.7% for the 2009 student cohort up to 84.41% for the 2010 cohort. Since 2005, non-DEIS schools Leaving Cert retention rate has been between 91.7% and 92.9% while the retention rate has increased from 78.4% to 84.4% for DEIS schools for the same period. While this represents a strong increase and a narrowing of the gap between DEIS and non-DEIS schools, it is evident that a gap still remains.

Evaluations to date of the DEIS programme carried out by both the DES Inspectorate and the Educational Research Centre (ERC) show an overall improvement in literacy and numeracy rates, school retention and progression to further and higher education. Innovations under DEIS, such as school planning, have paved the way for the introduction of planning and self-evaluation structures in the wider school community. The objective of DEIS Plan 2017 is to build on these and other positive elements of the programme to both encourage and challenge schools towards further improvement.

Evaluations of primary DEIS schools have indicated an increase in literacy and numeracy scores over time. The most recent report by the ERC “Evaluation of DEIS: Monitoring achievement and attitudes among urban primary school pupils from 2007 to 2016” reports that, in both reading and mathematics, modest increases in average scores were observed from 2013 to 2016. These are smaller, on the whole, than the increases observed between the 2010 and 2013 rounds of testing. From 2007 to 2016, greater gains were observed in mathematics than in reading at all grade levels. As in previous rounds of testing, higher average scores in both reading and mathematics were observed in Band 2 schools than in Band 1 schools at all grade levels. In several cases, achievement in Band 2 schools in 2016 is at or above the national norms for the tests for the first time. It is also worth noting that absenteeism rates in Urban Band 1 schools have declined over time.

At post primary level there has been a slight narrowing of the gap in overall Junior Certificate grades between DEIS and non-DEIS schools and there is a significant upward trend from 2009 onwards in overall attainment levels in both English and Mathematics at Junior Cert level.

5. Educational disadvantage and homelessness

Children who experience homelessness face barriers which impact on their ability to engage with their learning, their peers and to reach their full potential academically. Such barriers may include unmet basic needs, psychosocial needs as well as academic needs:

- Lack of basic needs, such as adequate sleep, access to facilities for personal hygiene, regular meals and appropriate space to study all of which impacts on school attendance, attention and ability to engage with learning.
- Psycho-social needs are well documented. Children who experience homelessness may experience a higher level of social and emotional problems than their peers. They may experience lower self-esteem, higher levels of anxiety and withdrawal as well as displaying symptoms of depression and trauma. Social isolation and lack of acceptance from peers may result in this cohort of children feeling stigmatised and alienated. Such needs place these children at risk of mental health issues, academic failure and school dropout.

A range of resources are available from the Department to support schools in dealing with identified additional educational needs, including those needs which may arise for children who are experiencing homelessness.

The staff of schools are very sensitive to the needs of children who are experiencing disruption in their lives and make every effort to support the additional needs they experience. Where they are aware of homelessness and where it is impacting on school attendance and participation they may engage with the Educational Welfare Service of Tusla and with the support services of the Department and in particular those of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).

Identification of Need and Early Intervention and Prevention Strategies are considered key components to supporting children who experience homelessness. NEPS works with schools in this area through the DES Continuum of Support framework. Students facing homelessness may have the same emotional needs and learning needs as other students, but the immediacy of those needs is heightened. NEPS psychologists can provide advice and guidance to Principals and teachers in relation to individual students needs and at a systems level in the development of a culture and

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environment which supports connectedness and provides structure and stability, key elements which underpin learning and opportunity.

NEPS has played a central role in the development and promotion of the interdepartmental (DES, DH and HSE) Well-Being in Post Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (2013) and the Well-Being in Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (2015). These initiatives provide schools with a framework to develop a holistic climate to support wellbeing and support pupil mental health. In addition, NEPS psychologists support schools to implement early-intervention and prevention programmes, such as the Incredible Years Programme in Primary Schools and resilience building programmes, such as the FRIENDS Programmes at Primary and Post Primary levels.

DEIS schools may use their DEIS supports to meet the additional identified educational needs that may arise for pupils experiencing homelessness. These schools can also avail of Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) and School Completion Programme (SCP) supports provided by Tusla’s Educational Welfare Service (EWS) to improve school attendance, retention and progression which can be areas of particular challenge to pupils experiencing homelessness.

6. Transition and Retention

In relation to early school leaving, it may be noted that the EU2020 headline target for early school leaving is <10%. The national target set by Ireland is 8% and the EU average is currently 10.7% (2016). Ireland’s current share of early school leavers (i.e. 18-24 year olds with at most lower secondary education and not in further education and training) fell from 10.8% in 2011 to 6.3% in 2016 representing very positive progress in excess of Ireland’s target. As referenced above in relation to the Monitoring and Evaluation of DEIS, retention rates for DEIS schools have improved significantly since the introduction of DEIS. However, despite already exceeding our EU2020 early school leaving targets, a gap still remains between DEIS and non-DEIS schools. In order to continue to address this, there is a strong emphasis in DEIS Plan 2017 on supporting transitions across the education continuum and providing the necessary supports to ensure students complete their second level education and progress on to further and higher education.

The Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) and the School Completion Programme (SCP) are two key supports for DEIS schools in these areas and operate as part of the integrated Educational Welfare Service (EWS) under the remit of Tusla. Tusla, which is the dedicated state agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children, works collaboratively with the Department of Education and Skills to ensure that children’s participation in the education system is maximised. The underlying vision and thrust of the HSCL Scheme is preventative; therefore, it seeks to promote and develop real partnership between parents, schools and communities, in order to enhance pupils’ outcomes and learning opportunities, through improved attendance, participation and retention in the education system. The role of the HSCL Coordinator is to work primarily with the salient adults in the child’s life, in order to empower them, so that they can better support their children to attend school, participate in education and develop positive attitudes to life-long learning. Central to the HSCL initiative, is the identification of educational needs and the provision of a tailored and proportionate response to those needs, through a range of interventions, which are evidence-based, focused and structured. All DEIS Urban primary schools and all post primary schools are currently included in the HSCL scheme, which extends to 539 schools.
HSCL Coordinators also play a key role in effecting successful transitions through the education system – from pre-school to primary school, from primary school to second level, within second level from Junior to Senior Cycle, and onwards through appropriate pathways to further and higher education. The role of the HSCL coordinator is to empower parents to support their child’s education and to ensure parents are linked in with the various stages of the education continuum by facilitating engagement between teaching and other staff and parents.

There is also ongoing work in the context of the transition of children from pre-school into primary school. Templates and research to support this transition have been developed and consulted on by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in 2017. It is intended that these will be published for use by pre-schools in 2018. Work is also being carried out under the AIM initiative which supports the participation of children with a disability in the ECCE programme (pre-school). The Early Years Specialist Service, Better Start and the NCSE are agreeing transition processes and arrangements for children with additional needs as they move from pre-school into primary school.

In DEIS Plan 2017 itself, there are numerous actions specifically supporting successful transitions, including:

- All post primary schools have access to a dedicated career guidance counsellor
- School Plans to provide for formal engagement between guidance counsellors, HSCL Coordinators and Further and Higher Education Access Officers to support successful transitions
- Explore potential for greater use of TY to encourage retention.
- Mainstream delivery of equity of access in Higher Education Institutions.

The importance of school climate and the need to ensure that schools provide an environment which is conducive to successful engagement with education should not be underestimated. This is of particular importance when considering the factors that give rise to poor school attendance, retention and early school leaving. A whole school approach is key to ensuring a positive school climate for the entire school community and DEIS Plan has specific actions relating to this. Supporting wellbeing in DEIS schools is also a particular focus of the Plan, with a commitment to actively supporting the developing of wellbeing initiatives to ensure that mental resilience and personal wellbeing are integral parts of the education and training system. The DEIS Plan has various actions addressing these issues as well as commitment to extend the Incredible Years Teacher Programme and the Friends programme to all DEIS schools and increase the allocation of National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) to DEIS schools.

In the context of a DEIS Plan 2017 commitment, work is underway in Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) to establish a Supporting DEIS Learners Transition to FET Network. The ETBI network will be comprised of ETB representatives from the Directors of Schools, Directors of FET, Guidance personnel from both schools and FET, and School and FET principals to oversee national progress on this action. This will be in place by Q2 2018. This format will then be replicated in each ETB, with the Director of Schools, Director of FET, Guidance personnel from both schools and FET, and School and FET principals, meeting bi-annually to review and ensure appropriate outreach arrangements are in place to support and encourage DEIS learners to access appropriate ETB FET pathways. Terms of reference will be established to support the work of this local team, it is envisaged such teams will place by Q3 2018. Other relevant personnel will be invited to join the team locally and as required.
7. Alternatives to Mainstream Education

While the Department’s policy is to support students in mainstream provision, it also provides supports in a number of out of school settings. This is delivered through schools and centres such as Oberstown Children Detention Campus, Tusla Special Care Centres, Youth Encounter Projects, Line Projects and Life Centres. Education is provided in these centres for children aged 12 to 17 who for a period of time are not in mainstream education. Supports are also provided through the Education and Training Board sector to other out of school education providers such as Youthreach.

The national Youthreach programme is provided by the 16 ETBs and aims to help young people mainly in the 16-20 age group to make the transition from school to work through the provision of co-ordinated foundation training, education and work experience. Its beneficiaries are young people who find it most difficult to make the transition from school to work. There are 110 Youthreach education centres and 35 Community Training Centres, mostly located in disadvantaged areas. The age eligibility criteria may be extended up to age 25 as an exception in the case of lone parents, learners released from detention, Drug Court participants and individuals who have less than upper second level education and whose personal circumstances are such that the centre programme is the most appropriate option for them to pursue.

Youthreach is a full time programme, generally of two years duration. It is delivered in out-of-school settings nationwide. These are intended to be dynamic settings capable of innovation. A pillar of Youthreach is local centre management which enhances local responses to local social, economic and cultural environments and needs. The Youthreach programme aims to provide early school leavers with the knowledge, skills and confidence required to participate fully in society and progress to further education, training and employment. The precise configuration of the programme in each location is a matter to be decided locally and will be determined by individual learner and community needs and potential. In a needs-based service it is the learners’ needs that must define the curriculum rather than the competencies and preferences of providers. Innovation and creativity are encouraged in the development of centre programmes and should utilise projects, collaborative learning and make extensive use of the physical and social environment in which the centre operates. The ESRI has been commissioned by SOLAS to conduct an evaluation of the national Youthreach programme. The evaluation is currently underway and is scheduled for completion later this year. The purpose of the evaluation is to generate policy-relevant knowledge concerning the outputs and outcomes of the Youthreach programme (i.e. Youthreach centres and Community Training Centres) and the effectiveness of this provision.

Another alternative to mainstream education is Youth Encounter Projects (YEPs), which provide educational facilities for children who have either become involved in minor delinquency, or are at risk of same, and have become alienated from the mainstream school system. There are five such schools, three in Dublin, one in Cork and one in Limerick. They are non-residential and each caters for up to 25 pupils aged between 10 to 16 years. A pupil may be referred to one of these schools by a number of agencies or by the Courts system. The schools have additional resources to provide a comprehensive life-skills programme in addition to the normal curriculum.

Action 88 of DEIS Plan 2017 provides for a review of current out of school provision to inform future policy in this area. Work on the implementation of this action has commenced with the establishment of a Working Group chaired by the Department and including representatives from Tusla and the ETB sector. It is intended to conduct a stakeholder consultation, including a consultation with young people in receipt of this provision, over the coming months with a view to publishing a report on the outcome of these deliberations later this year.
8. **Education and Access Routes for young people in the Justice System**

Oberstown Children’s Detention Campus provides for the detention of children in custody in relation to criminal charges with a view to reintegrating the child into society. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs, in order to implement the commitment of government to end the detention of children in adult prisons, funded the Oberstown capital project which commenced in 2012 and concluded in 2016. A capital expenditure programme of €56 million was put in place for the project. The development has resulted in the provision of 6 new residential units, a new educational centre, a new administration building which includes facilities for meetings and a fully furnished health suite. All young people attend school while they are detained at Oberstown. The provision of education and access to appropriate training programmes is a core element of the supports provided to them while detained. Once a young person enters Oberstown, their specific educational requirements are assessed and an individual plan is put in place to address those needs and access to subjects that are part of the national curriculum is available. All of the teachers are professional, qualified and experienced and encourage each young person to complete state exams and continue vocational training. Educational outcomes are measured in a number of ways from looking at improvements in literacy and numeracy to participation in state examinations, all with the ultimate objective of equipping young people to successfully reintegrate into society.

Youth Joint Agency response to Crime JARC is a multi-agency approach lead by An Garda Síochána to manage and address the prolific offending and criminal behaviour of young persons aged 16 to 21 who have committed 5 or more offences. It provides an operational approach for coordination between An Garda Siochána, the Probation Service, the Irish Prison Service, the Irish Youth Service (Oberstown Campus) and Tusla. It aims to place the young person at the centre of the process, identify their needs, strengths and risks and provide an interagency co-operation and coordinated response in addressing these. The DES is represented in this process by its Social Inclusion Unit.

In the area of rehabilitation and assisting offenders to maintain crime free lives, the Department provides for education in prisons and this is generally regarded as an integral part of the rehabilitation of prisoners. Educational services are available in all prisons and are provided in partnership with a range of educational agencies including the ETBs, Public Library Services, the Open University and the Arts Council. Literacy, numeracy and general basic education provision is the priority and broad programmes of education are made available which generally follow an adult education approach. Programme are adapted to take account of the diversity of the prisoner population and the complex nature of prison life. Junior and Leaving Certificate courses are available with the Department funding circa 160,000 teaching hours for the 16/17 academic year.

9. **Increase participation and improve access routes to Further Education**

The Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-19 contains 5 strategic goals. One of these goals is to support the active inclusion of all citizens in society. This complements the strategic goal of providing skills for the economy through addressing the current and future needs of learners and employers.

Further Education and Training (FET) tackles educational disadvantage through the provision of supports to enable participation on the full range of programmes available as well as providing
certain dedicated programmes to assist groups such as early school leavers and people with disabilities. FET also provides a range of literacy, numeracy and basic skills provision to support adult learners engage with society, progress in education and training and move towards employment. FET also has a central role in providing a more diverse set of options for school leavers, particularly through the development of the Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) programme and the expansion of options in apprenticeship and traineeship.

SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority, are also undertaking a programme of research and evaluation to improve the quality of the planning and delivery of FET.

**FET Provision**

Further Education and Training provides over 300,000 learning opportunities in programmes from level one to level six on the National Framework for Qualifications through the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and other partners. The table below sets out the range of FET provision available. The figures relate to 2016 – 2017 data are not available at the time of writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme Type</th>
<th>Beneficiaries (numbers at 1 January 2016 plus all starters during the year)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full Time Programmes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship</td>
<td>8,028 (off the job provision – total apprenticeship population in 2016 was just under 10,500)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blended Training</td>
<td>482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging and Foundation Training</td>
<td>1,281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Training Centres (part of the national Youthreach programme)</td>
<td>3,167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice Workshops</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Training Initiatives</td>
<td>4,292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Leaving Certificate</td>
<td>60,835 (concurrent places – 32,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist Training Programmes</td>
<td>3,687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Skills Training</td>
<td>14,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme</td>
<td>8,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youthreach Centres</td>
<td>8,542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Full Time</strong></td>
<td><strong>114,390</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adult Literacy</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back to Education Initiative</td>
<td>38,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English for Speakers of Other Languages</td>
<td>15,584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening Training</td>
<td>14,688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FET Co-operation Hours</td>
<td>22,277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensive Adult Literacy</td>
<td>3,327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libraries Training</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee Resettlement</td>
<td>584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills for Work</td>
<td>2,958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary Literacy Tuition</td>
<td>2,160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Part Time</strong></td>
<td><strong>139,493</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>53,835</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2016 FET provided for a total budget allocation of €634.4m for SOLAS funded FET provision. There was total number of 338,427 opportunities made available to learners from SOLAS funded FET programmes and services in 2016. Approximately 60% of all provision in 2016 was for individuals that require introductory level courses/ supports (across FET programmes up to level four on NFQ or equivalent) to assist them with progression to further education and to employment over a longer timeframe. However, as these are typically part time and less intensive programmes, they account for a smaller proportion of the total expenditure. The budget allocation in 2017 was €638 million
and it was planned to serve 323,000 beneficiaries – final 2017 beneficiary numbers are currently being compiled.

Of the 338,427 total places made available, 53,835 were specifically for the provision of Community Education. One of Community Education’s primary purposes is to facilitate (re)engagement in the learning process by those who are distant from education and the labour market. Community education also assists learners with a disability to participate in FET provision by adapting course content, resources and teach methodologies to suit their abilities/needs.

**Barriers to Participation**

SOLAS published a national research project in 2017 that examined the extrinsic and intrinsic barriers to participation in FET. This included the identification of barriers to the participation of specific groups who are experiencing socio-economic exclusion and distance from education and/or the labour market. These groups specifically include the under 25’s, the long term unemployed, people with disabilities, and members of migrant communities.

The research centred around four main themes; motivational/dispositional, economic/social welfare, organisational and informational/guidance. The summarised areas for consideration include:

- Addressing the challenges of these specific cohort groups
- Reducing the complexity in the FET system
- Ensuring a clarity around the availability of social welfare while attending FET
- Clearly defining the entry requirements, course requirements, and the direct benefits of participating in a FET course for the learner
- Proactive engagement with all stakeholders, educators, and employers in an ongoing dialogue at national and regional level
- Outreach to employers and engaging them in a dialogue
- Strategic and targeted communications clearly defining the identity and the role of SOLAS in FET
- A clear overarching message to individuals from the cohorts identified in this research that FET is a direct pathway to employment or higher education.

As part of the annual Further Education and Training 2018 service planning process, the ETB sector funding applications to SOLAS will be required to provide details on existing and new initiatives to address barriers to FET.

**FET Programme Evaluations**

SOLAS is committed in the FET Strategy to conducting a series of evaluations of FET programmes to improve the quality, impact and relevance of provision. The first of the FET programme evaluations, carried out by the ESRI, examined the effectiveness of the Post Leaving Certificate programme. ESRI identified that PLC learners are more likely to be from less educated family backgrounds and have a higher incidence of special education needs than those who go directly to higher education.

The ESRI Report and the SOLAS response were published last month by the Minister. The evaluation confirms the positive role played by PLC provision in providing educational opportunities for a diverse group of learners and in enhancing their access to employment and higher education. Programme outcomes (employment and progression) were found to be broadly positive and particularly when examined against a matched group for counterfactual purposes. The study found that PLC learners are on average 16% more likely to be in employment compared to direct labour
market entrants with the Leaving Certificate. They were 27% more likely to progress to higher education than those with the Leaving Certificate who went directly to the labour market. Those with job specific PLC qualifications were around 24% more likely to be in employment (in 2015) than direct labour market entrants.

Set out in the SOLAS Response are 45 recommendations for implementation to improve the quality of the learner experience, learner outcomes and overall programme efficiency.

A SOLAS led PLC Programme Improvement Advisory Committee, comprised of PLC partners will now be established to oversee development and implementation of a three year programme improvement plan, based on the recommendations set out in the SOLAS response, which include the development of a framework for appropriate learner supports as well as a review of the distribution of PLC places, taking into account a number of factors including the deprivation index.

Apprenticeship and Traineeship

The Government is conscious of the need to offer a wider range of post school options to learners. A key element of its approach is the expansion of the apprenticeship system into a range of new sectors of the economy as set out in the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland. The targets set out in the plan are below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Craft-based apprenticeships</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of apprenticeship programmes</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forecast new registrations per annum*</td>
<td>3,390</td>
<td>4,147</td>
<td>4,997</td>
<td>5,087</td>
<td>5,587</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New apprenticeships</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planned number of apprenticeship programmes (cumulative)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned new registrations per annum</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>2,297</td>
<td>3,413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total target apprentice registrations p.a.</td>
<td>3,472</td>
<td>4,947</td>
<td>6,197</td>
<td>7,384</td>
<td>9,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existing traineeships</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of ‘live’ traineeship programmes*</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target new enrolments per annum</td>
<td>2,400**</td>
<td>2,400</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>3,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New/re launched traineeships</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of traineeship programmes (cumulative)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned new enrolments per annum</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total target trainee enrolments p.a.</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>2,600</td>
<td>3,900</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A total of 4,843 apprentices were newly registered in 2017 (4,508 on craft programmes and 335 on new programmes), along with 2,718 trainees.

**New Apprenticeships**

Budget 2018 allocated €122m for apprenticeship training which will support the delivery of 10 new apprenticeship programmes and over 6,000 more apprenticeship registrations in 2018 alone. To date eleven new apprenticeship programmes have been developed in:

- Insurance Practice,
- Industrial Electrical Engineering,
- Polymer Processing Technology,
- Manufacturing Technology,
- Manufacturing Engineer,
- Accounting Technician,
- Commis Chef,
- Two programmes in International Financial Services (Associate & Specialist)
- Two in ICT (Network Engineer and Software Developer which will get underway shortly).

Further new apprenticeships are to be submitted for validation to QQI shortly and, subject to successful validation, are expected to get underway in 2018. In addition a further 26 new apprenticeship programmes have recently been approved for further development into national apprenticeships. These programmes span a wide range of skills and sectors including construction, engineering, horticulture and agriculture. All of the new apprenticeships are flexible, ranging in duration from two years to four years and will be offered at levels 5 to 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications. It is estimated that the development process will take between 12 and 15 months.

**Promotional Campaign**

A digital campaign to promote apprenticeship is now underway with a dedicated Twitter feed #GenerationApprenticeship, a new apprenticeship website [www.apprenticeship.ie](http://www.apprenticeship.ie), an Apprenticeship Ireland Facebook page and a LinkedIn page. The campaign seeks to promote the values of the apprenticeship model for both employers and prospective apprentices.

The campaign has also been designed to influence parents, teachers and potential apprentices on the career path and further educational opportunities emanating from apprenticeships programmes. In addition, the Education & Training Board SOLAS Authorised Officers play a critical role in promoting apprenticeship by visiting employers, schools and attending career fairs.

**Review of Pathways to Participation in Apprenticeships**

Furthermore as set out in the Action Plan, the Department in conjunction with SOLAS, is currently reviewing the pathways to participation in apprenticeship in a range of diverse groups which are expected to include:

- lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex young and older people
- travellers and Roma
- children in care
- migrants
- people with disabilities
- people from lower socio-economic groups
- ex-offenders
- women and girls

The review, which commenced last year, will be completed later this year.

**Traineeships**

Traineeships are between 6 to 20 months in duration, with at least 30% of learning being on-the-job and lead to a level 4 to 6 award on the National Framework of Qualifications.

To date the following 8 new traineeships have been developed:

- Hospitality (level 4 & 5),
- Engineering (level 4 & 5)
- Digital Sales and Marketing
- Interior Systems
- Laboratory Assistant
- Animation

A new Five-Step Guide to Traineeship was launched on 16 November aimed at employers seeking practical information on how to develop a traineeship within their company.

As part of expansion of traineeship nationally, the eligibility requirements have been expanded to include a broader group of potential participants, including those who are in employment. Trainees may include school leavers, older learners, those in employment and those who are unemployed.

**10 Increase participation and improve access routes to Higher Education**

The National Plan for Equity of Access for Higher Education 2015–2019 identifies the target groups that are currently being under-represented in Higher Education, which includes entrants from socio-economic groups that have low participation in higher education, Irish Travellers, Students with disabilities, first time mature student entrants, Part-time/flexible learners and further education award holders. The Plan has five goals, which are as follows:

1. To mainstream the delivery of equity of access in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).
2. To assess the impact of current initiatives to support access.
3. To gather accurate data on access and participation and to base policy on what that data tells us.
4. To build coherent pathways from further education and to foster other entry routes to higher education.
5. To develop regional and community partnership strategies for increasing access, with a particular focus on mentoring.

It also contains targets to increase participation rates by each of the identified groups and in order to achieve these targets, the Plan contains more than 30 actions.

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) plays a key role in implementation of the Plan. Working towards equity of access is a priority for the HEA and “promoting the attainment of equality of opportunity in Higher Education” is among the statutory functions assigned to the HEA on its foundation.

A Steering Group has been established to oversee progress of the key actions/targets in the National Access Plan. Progress under the National Access Plan is also reported to key stakeholders at the end of each year through an annual forum.
A Mid-term Review of the National Access Plan is on-going. Consultants were appointed in November 2017 – (KHSK Economic Consultants) and a steering group will oversee the review. The final report will be presented to the Steering Group in 2018. This review will assess progress against the plans goals, objectives and targets and also consider how these might be refined or further developed, particularly in view of new initiatives and better data. This is all with the aim of increasing participation from those groups with traditionally low rates.

Priority actions for the coming year include:

- Implementation of measures to support student success, particularly for target groups;
- Roll out of Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) initiatives supporting measures to engage directly with communities where participation in higher education is low and supporting increased participation in initial teacher training by student from under-represented groups.
- Completion of a data plan to support implementation of the National Access Plan.
- Completion of the mid-term review of the plan.
- Increase in enrolments from DEIS schools by ensuring that every such school will be participating in a HEI led access programme.
- Completion rates for students from disadvantaged cohorts will be specifically targeted for improvement.
- Implementation of the recommendations arising from reviews of access initiatives including the student assistance fund and the fund for students with a disability.

**Initiatives and Funding to Support Equity of Access**

The Department provides a suite of supports that are intended to assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and other under-represented groups, to overcome financial barriers to accessing and completing higher education. The expenditure in 2017 on these supports was in the region of €450m.

- **Student grants**

  The statutory based student grant scheme (the SUSI grant) is the main source of support available for full-time students attending Post Leaving Certificate (PLC), undergraduate and post graduate courses. The Student Grant Scheme supported in excess of 78,000 students in the academic year 2017/18 at a cost of circa €372 million. The grant ranges in value from €1,500 up to €8,915 affording particular priority to those on the lowest incomes and dependent on social welfare through the special rate of maintenance grant. Additional funding of €4 million was secured in Budget 2017 and a further €3m in Budget 2018 to facilitate the reinstatement of full maintenance grants from September 2017 for the most disadvantaged postgraduate students. This is expected to benefit approximately 1,100 post graduate students who meet the eligibility criteria for the special rate of maintenance grant.

- **Student Assistance Fund**

  The Student Assistance Fund (SAF) provides financial assistance to students experiencing financial difficulties while attending third level. Students can be assisted towards the rent, childcare costs, transport costs and books/class materials. An additional €1m was added to the Fund in 2017 which is specifically ring-fenced for part-time students who are lone-parents or members of the other access target groups. Prior to this the fund supported full-time students only. The review of the Student Assistance Fund was recently published and the recommendations are currently being implemented by the Higher Education Authority.
• **Fund For Students With Disabilities**

The Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) supports participation by students with a disability in full-time programmes of further and higher education. The aim is to ensure that these students can participate fully in education, or an equal basis with their peers. A review of the FSD was finalised this year and the recommendations from the Review are being considered.

• **Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) Fund**

Subsequent to the launch of the National Access Plan, the Department established the *Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) Fund*. This Fund comprises dedicated funding to support access to higher education, which is *Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) Fund* and is allocated on a competitive basis to higher education institutions to support particular priority areas as determined by the DES. €16.2m secured through the budgetary process for the PATH funding has enabled three strands of the fund to be rolled out.

**PATH 1** supports the objective in the National Access Plan to increase access to initial teacher education for students from the target groups identified in the Plan. The Department, through the HEA, invited the six centres of teaching excellence, in partnership with relevant local stakeholders, to compete for PATH 1 funding by submitting proposals in accordance with a set of prescribed criteria. Each of the 6 centres secured funding for initiatives.

**PATH 2** provides €6m to be invested in “The 1916 Bursaries Fund” over three years for the most socio-economically disadvantaged students from under-represented target groups. Lone parents and ethnic minorities will also be a target group for this fund. Bursaries will be awarded to 600 students in the 3 academic years who have been identified by their HEI as being the most socio-economically disadvantaged students in the target groups. These Bursaries are targeted at non-traditional entry groups and can support undergraduate study on either a full or part-time basis. Each bursary will be in the amount of €5,000 per academic year (and could be in addition to a SUSI grant if the person qualifies for a SUSI grant). Funding has been provided to regional clusters of HEIs for the award of the first 1916 bursaries to 200 students in the academic year 2017/2018. Awardees will be funded for the duration of their studies in each academic year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PATH Strand 2: 1916 Bursary Fund</th>
<th>2017/18</th>
<th>Number of which will be for lone parents each year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leinster Pillar I</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leinster Pillar II – TU4D</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-West</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North-West</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leinster Pillar II - Mend</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVERALL</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PATH 3** will provide €7.5m over three years to a Higher Education Access Fund, which is intended to support regional clusters of HEIs and will be allocated on a competitive basis with the purpose of attracting up to 2,000 new undergraduate students (full-time or part-time) from the target groups identified in the National Access Plan, into higher education by the end of Year 3, and to ensure that those students are supported to complete their programme of study. Proposals from clusters will
also be expected to target the sub groups mentioned in the National Access Plan: namely, lone parents and ethnic minorities (including recently arrived programme refugees). At least 10% of all places will be targeted at lone parents. The allocation of funding will be announced shortly.

- **Bursaries**

The awards under the Third Level Bursary Scheme are fixed at €2,000 per student. The bursary is an extra support and incentive to recognise high achievement for students who are from disadvantaged families and attending DEIS schools. Eligibility criteria for the Third Level Bursary is as follows: attend a DEIS school; be a first-time candidate for the Leaving Certificate; be exempt from payment of the Leaving Certificate fee by virtue of holding a medical card.

Up to 100 bursaries are awarded annually under the bursary scheme. Awards under both of the bursary schemes (Third Level Bursary Scheme & Ernest Walton (STEM) Bursary) are made on a regional basis (Dublin, rest of Leinster, Munster and Connaught/Ulster). Eight bursaries are awarded on a regional basis (two each in Dublin, rest of Leinster, Munster, Connaught/Ulster) to students from DEIS schools who pursue courses at third level in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM).

11. **Drop out/Non-completion of courses**

In line with the overall mission of higher education in Ireland there has been a steady increase in student enrolments over recent years. The most recent report by the HEA on retention and progression, entitled 'A Study of Progression in Higher Education 2012/13 to 2013/14', is available on the HEA website, www.hea.ie. This is the fourth in a series of progression analysis released by the HEA and examines those 1st year undergraduate new entrants enrolled in the academic year 2012/13 and traces them to the following academic year 2013/14. The report gives an in-depth analysis of the non-progression rates by NFQ level, sector, discipline, gender, age, nationality and socio-economic group. There are many factors identified as influencing the likelihood of progression such as Gender, Age at commencement, Prior Educational attainment, nationality and socio-economic grouping.

The report shows that 84% of full-time undergraduate new entrants in 2012/13 progressed to their second year of study in 2013/14. The rates of non-progression in 2012/13 varied within and between sectors ranging from 26% and 28% at levels 6 and 7 to 17%, 11% and 6% at level 8 in universities, institutes of technology and colleges respectively. The report demonstrates that the overall new entrant non-progression rate was 15% in 2007/08 and has remained constant at 16% from 2010/11 to 2012/13. However, rates of progression do vary across the sector and between disciplines and further work will be done to see how students can best be supported to continue on their course or transfer to another programme.

The HEA through the System Performance and Strategic Dialogue process also monitor progression rates within the institutions on an annual basis. Institutes report on retention measures in place within their institutes to combat high non-progression rates. The HEA funds retention initiatives in Computer Science disciplines in higher education institutions through the Information Technology Investment Fund. In 2015 these initiatives included additional classes, attendance mentoring, teaching and learning initiatives, student support sessions, buddy practicals and maths enabling courses.
In 2016 the National Forum for Teaching and Learning established an ICT Retention Scoping Group to examine ways in which students could be enabled to complete ICT courses. The group working with practitioners and industry recently made a number of recommendations including capacity building within the school system, improved career guidance, sharing of good practice on pedagogy and retention across the sector and strengthen links with the FET and post primary sectors.

One of the key objectives of the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education2015-2019 (National Access Plan) is to address the issue of non-completion within higher education institutions, for those in under-represented target groups. The Plan also commits to the further development of mechanisms to track the progression, retention and student experience of target groups. The target student groups include entrants from socio-economic groups that have low participation in higher education; first time mature student entrants and students with disabilities.

To support the implementation of these objectives, a Working Group has been established to consider the issues contributing to the non-completion of target groups in the National Access Plan and to produce recommendations for policy and practice. The group is chaired by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and includes representatives of relevant stakeholders.
Focus Ireland Submission
Joint Committee on Education and Skills
"Education Inequality and Disadvantage"

Focus Ireland welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's discussion on the issue of education inequality and disadvantage. As one of the leading homelessness charities in the State, we work with some of the most marginalised individuals and families in society. While we do not have specialist expertise in the area of educational inequality, we have witnessed the effect of homelessness on children and young people and we know the profound educational impacts it can have.

This submission covers two broad areas of concern:

- Mitigating the negative impact of homelessness on the educational outcomes of children in families that are homeless
- Supporting adults who have experienced homelessness to re-engage with post-secondary education.

**Mitigating the negative impact of homelessness on the educational outcomes of children in families that are homeless**

**Introduction**

Focus Ireland operates the DRHE-funded Family Homeless Action Team in the Dublin region.\(^1\) We support families while they are residing in emergency accommodation and help them to move on as quickly as possible. However, the housing shortage and the rate at which households continue to enter homelessness means that families are spending considerable periods of time in emergency accommodation. While we recognise the commitment of the Minister of Housing to tackle the issue, houses cannot be built overnight. We foresee that family homelessness will remain an acute issue for a number of years. Homelessness is primarily the responsibility of the Minister and Department of Housing. However, international research has shown a strong correlation between homelessness and a withdrawal from education, further details of which will be provided below. We believe that this issue is one which requires a whole-of-Government approach. Given the recognised importance of education, it is vital that children and young people residing in emergency accommodation are supported to attend school regularly and perform to the best of their ability.

**Data**

According to the latest official figures, 3,079 children were experiencing homelessness in December 2017. 818 young people aged 18 to 24 were also accessing emergency accommodation.\(^2\) We do not

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\(^1\) Family homelessness has been particularly acute in Dublin. Given our considerable expertise in the area, the majority of research and data in this submission relates to the Dublin region. However, family homelessness has been increasing significantly outside Dublin. As such, responses can no longer focus on the capital.

\(^2\) Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. Available at: [http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data](http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data)
have a monthly age breakdown for children experiencing homelessness, but data collected during Census 2016 is illustrative in this regard. There were 1,846 young people aged 0-17 homeless on the night of the census. This represents 27% of the total number of individuals. The age ranges can be seen in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-4</td>
<td>765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to know the age profile of children experiencing homelessness in order to ensure that educational interventions are effective. There appears to be a high proportion of young children who are pre or primary school aged experiencing homelessness. The Dublin Region Homeless Executive would be able to provide more up to date statistics in relation to age ranges. The date of birth of children experiencing homelessness is recorded on the PASS system, though this breakdown does not feature in the monthly reports.

There is a lack of data relating specifically to educational disadvantage in an Irish context. In your letter of invitation, you reference the report by Camille Loftus which Focus Ireland commissioned. Ms Loftus notes that: "... much of the relevant administration data is collected at school, rather than individual student level". This makes it difficult to measure educational disadvantage for the individual.

Research

A clear and strong relationship is established in the international literature between the experience of homelessness or housing instability and educational disadvantage. The adversities, stress and practical challenges associated with homelessness can have a "detrimental effect on schooling" (p.9). Documented barriers for children which impede their ability to successfully engage with (and complete) school include: increased tardiness and absenteeism; poor nutritional health; fatigue; feelings of shame and stigma; and overall stress. Murphy (2011) argues that homelessness can have long-term consequences for children right into adulthood. In a longitudinal study of homeless children in Birmingham, two-fifths of children were still suffering mental health and developmental problems one year after they had exited homelessness.

Impacts

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As noted above, Focus Ireland operates the Family Homeless Action Team in Dublin. The team includes specialist Child Support Workers who engage with children and young people on a one-to-one basis when they are assessed as requiring additional support. Staff have highlighted the practical impacts of homelessness on children and their education, including:

- Children being tired arriving at school as they have had to travel significant distances from their emergency accommodation. While free transportation supports were introduced under Rebuilding Ireland, these consist of a leap card and do not mitigate the length of time and the number of buses some families have to take to ensure children get to school.
- Children not being alert in school as they do not get a good night's sleep in their accommodation. Families are required to share a single room, impacting sleep patterns.
- Children not completing their homework or not completing it fully as they do not have anywhere quiet to work in their emergency accommodation.
- Children's attention being impacted by poor nutritional options in their accommodation. 
- Children demonstrating behavioural changes as a result of the stress and uncertainty of homelessness.

Family homelessness remains a relatively new phenomenon in Ireland. As such, there is a limited amount of research into the long-term impacts of homelessness on different age-cohorts. Focus Ireland research documenting the ways in which families exit homelessness noted parents' perception of these impacts. The authors noted that: "families with older children reported that it took their older children and particularly their teenagers longer to adapt, particularly when the move to a new home required a change of schools"10. School was recognised as a distinct pressure point for families and children, with some schools praised for their support and others not.

The Irish National Teachers' Union has worked with Focus Ireland to draw attention to these issues, which teachers see on a daily basis.11

**Educational Policy**

Focus Ireland has raised these concerns with the Minister for Education and Skills in two formal letters. We have received no substantive response. The Minister has stated in the Dáil that DEIS, the scheme for tackling educational disadvantage, is the avenue through which supports for children experiencing homelessness will be delivered.12 However, research conducted by Focus Ireland in 2016 found that 45% of school-aged children experiencing homelessness were attending non-DEIS schools.13

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12 Priority Questions, 6 December 2017. Available at: https://www.kildarestreet.com/debates/?id=2017-12-06a.19&s=function;bruton+homeless#g22.r

13 Of a cohort of 307 children. Connolly (2017) Insights into Family Homelessness no.3 - Are the children of families that are homeless attending schools with resources to tackle educational disadvantage? Available at:
This finding should impact the policy response from Government. We cannot rely on DEIS to deliver support to children experiencing homelessness. As well as the fact that many children are not attending DEIS schools, the mechanism for designating schools as disadvantaged does not take into account the rate of homelessness or housing instability in the area. The causes of the current family homelessness crisis are largely to be found in the instability of the private rented sector. As such, families are becoming homelessness from areas with high levels of private rented accommodation as much as they are from areas of recognised disadvantage. Interventions targeting schools will leave many children behind.

Focus Ireland engaged with the Department of Education during the review of DEIS in 2016. In meeting with the Department, the point was made that including homelessness would be inappropriate given the assumption that homelessness is a temporary phenomenon which will be resolved. We can understand this rationale. However, if DEIS is not taking homelessness into consideration, and many children who are homelessness are not attending DEIS schools, alternative supports must be provided.

**Recommendations for Action**

Below are key actions which we believe the Department of Education and Skills should take to help tackle educational disadvantage for those experiencing homelessness:

1. **Acknowledge the limitation of DEIS.** The Department must acknowledge its role in supporting children experiencing homelessness and must further acknowledge that this support cannot be limited to DEIS-designated schools.

2. **Introduce mechanisms to share good practice from schools supporting children experiencing homelessness.** We know that many schools are working tirelessly to ensure children continue to receive an exemplary education while homeless and that teachers and principals accommodate families during this difficult time. This was reinforced in the findings of our recently published research on family homelessness. (Finding a Home: Families' Journeys out of Homelessness, 2017). As recommended in this research the Department could play a key role in facilitating a knowledge-sharing exercise between schools, supporting good practice and provide a forum for teachers to raise their concerns.

3. **Produce guidance for teachers.** Focus Ireland previously worked with the Educational Welfare Service to develop guidance for educational welfare professionals which was well-received by Home School Community Liaison and School Completion staff. This guidance is now out-of-date and we have contacted EWS to enquire about updating it. Similar guidance should be developed for all teachers, regardless of school status. Even schools in socially advantaged areas are supporting children experiencing homelessness, so all teachers will benefit.

4. **Investigate what additional resources are needed to support children.** For example, children attending non-DEIS schools rarely have access to breakfast clubs or school meals. How can...
children in schools which do not need full school meal programmes access these important supports?

5. Consider long-term planning for children currently experiencing homelessness. Given what we know about the link between homelessness and educational disadvantage, it is possible that some of the children currently experiencing homelessness will develop longer-term educational needs. The Department has an opportunity to monitor and plan for these needs. As noted in Camille Loftus' report, we do not currently track educational outcomes at an individual level, limiting our ability to plan for future support needs.

Supporting adults who have experienced homelessness to re-engage with post-secondary education.

A significant proportion of the adult homeless population have experienced educational disadvantage and how a low level of educational qualification. This presents a barrier both to their labour market participation and to the full expression of their capabilities. Many individuals who are homeless find it difficult to engage with the formal adult education system for a number of reasons, including continued chaotic lifestyle, pressures of securing emergency accommodation, negative previous experiences of education.

To meet these needs Focus Ireland operate a service called PETE (Participation in Education, Training and Employment) in Dublin, Limerick and Waterford. This provide access to a range of QQI programmes and other supports.

For instance, the course content for Dublin PETE in 2017 is as follows:

- Computers QQI Level 3, 2 hours for 15 weeks.
- Computer practice, unaccredited, 1.25 hours for 15 weeks.
- Career Preparation QQI Level 3, 2 hours for 15 weeks including CV preparation and interview skills Run twice a year. A 45 minute follow-on session on CV building and online job applications has been added for the second running of this course in 2017.
- Writeon.ie, NALA distance learning QQI accredited, 1 hour.
- Personal and Social Skills QQI Level 3, 2 hours for 15 weeks.
- English reading, unaccredited, 2-3 hours.
- Soft skills sessions beginning with a four week session on health and home skills.
- One to one literacy support, one hour for 3 months. Sketch and chat, 1.25 hours for 15 weeks.
- Summer trips and short courses and gardening, 2 hours for 3 months.

A person is invited to take part in a class and after they have attended three times they are allocated a key worker whose function is to provide support with education and training progression. A needs assessment is conducted by the project workers to identify learning needs. A training, education and employment plan is then drawn up which identifies supports the person will need. Participants must not use drugs or alcohol while attending and behaviour is monitored.
There is a rolling enrolment process so a person could register in week 14 of one programme and continue on into the next programme. People do not have to attend every course within the programme. The assessment process identifies what is most suitable for them.

Most classes have a capacity of 8 and yet there is flexibility. Attendance on any given day can be as low as 3 or 4. There is an awards ceremony every May.

PETE receives much welcome support from the Education and Training Boards in Dublin Waterford and Limerick, and in the past, the Dublin service received funding from the Dublin Region Homeless Executive. However, the majority of the funding for the service is from the organisation’s own fundraising efforts.

The service is currently being evaluated by external evaluators as part of Focus Ireland’s regular programme of reviewing the effectiveness of its services. Arising from this review we expect to develop greater consistency across the country and to more closely align the service with programmes operated by ETBS and Intreo.

The PETE service provides an excellent model of a person-centred programme which is effective at supporting the most marginalised and excluded to participate in educational programmes. We believe that its success can provide valuable lessons which would have broader application in programmes to tackle educational disadvantage.
Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills

Submission by Department of Children and Youth Affairs

Educational Inequality and Disadvantage

Part One: Strategic and structural context for children and young people’s participation in decision making:

1.1 The Department of Children and Youth Affairs has overall policy responsibility for ensuring that the voices of children and young people are heard in relation to decisions that affect their lives.

1.2 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) enshrines young people’s voice within an international legally binding agreement, positioning children’s rights at the core of the decision-making process, particularly in relation to having their views heard about matters that directly impact on their lives. Since the ratification of the convention in Ireland in 1992 the Irish Government has sought to provide structural measures (such as the establishment of the Ombudsman for Children, and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs) and policy measures to ensure children’s rights are embedded, practised and realised. These policy measures include the National Children’s Strategy (2000), Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The national policy framework for children and young people (2014–2020) and the National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making (2015–2020).

1.3 The National Strategy for Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision Making 2015–2020 sets out over-arching objectives for all of Government and also details specific commitments for individual Departments and state agencies.

1.4 The Department of Children and Youth Affairs itself has policy and implementation responsibility for maintaining and developing the permanent structures to enable such participation and these include Dáil na nÓg and Comhairle na nÓg. In addition the Department undertakes and supports consultation and participation processes both within its own policy remit and across Government as requested.

1.5 Dáil na nÓg is the national youth parliament for 12-17-year-olds. It is a biennial event, to which 200 representatives from 31 local Comhairle na nÓg are elected as delegates. The DCYA funds and oversees Dáil na nÓg, which is hosted by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. The topics discussed at Dáil na nÓg are chosen by young people themselves in the 31 Comhairle na nÓg. Recommendations from Dáil na nÓg are followed-up by the Comhairle na nÓg National Executive for the following two years.

1.6 Comhairlí na nÓg (child youth councils) were established in 2002 under the National Children’s Strategy (2000) and are a mechanism for realising Article 12 of the UNCRC, providing children and young people with both a forum for exploring issues relating to their lives and for interacting with decision-makers within the social, economic and political systems in Ireland. Comhairlí na nÓg are funded and supported by the Department of
Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and many are also funded by local authorities, which ensure links with adult decision-making bodies. In light of the fact that Comhairle na nÓg is for young people under the age of 18 and who therefore have no other voting mechanism to have their voice heard, Comhairle na nÓg is designed to enable young people to have a voice on the services, policies and issues that affect them in their local area.

1.7 One representative from each of the 31 Comhairlí na nÓg is elected to the Comhairle na nÓg National Executive, which follows up on the recommendations from Dáil na nÓg to make changes for young people in those areas. The National Executive has a term of office of two years and meets once a month. The National Executive is facilitated and supported by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Foróige and Youth Work Ireland, who ensure that they get the opportunity to engage with appropriate Ministers, policy-makers, Oireachtas Committees and other decision-makers. The National Executive 2015-2017 recently published a report on young people’s voice experience of school, entitled, ‘How was school today’.

1.8 The DCYA provides opportunities for children and young people to contribute their views on issues of national and personal importance and is currently conducting or has recently conducted the following consultations:

- Consultations with children and young people to inform the Report of the Youth Mental Health Task Force
- Consultations with children on after school care
- Consultations with young people on cyber crime
- Consultations with children and young people living in the direct provision system
- Consultations with children and young people as part of the Ireland 2016 National Commemorative Programme
- Consultations with children and young people on development of the National Obesity Strategy

Part Two: Overview of matters raised in recent participative processes relevant to the topic of educational inequality and disadvantage

2.1 The most recent Dail na nOg, hosted by DCYA on December 6th 2017, considered the topic of equality under 5 domains relevant to young people’s lives:

- School
- Home and community
- Online
- Public services
- Sport and leisure

The overall topic and the specific domains were chosen by young people in Comhairle na nOg across the country and in part reflects work/topics also being worked on by Comhairle
themselves. For each topic the participants at Dail na nOg were invited to consider two broad questions:

- What are the equality issues in this place?
- What needs to be done to improve equality in this place?

At the end of the discussions, Dáil na nÓg delegates voted on one area of action for change or improvement. School was the area for action selected by the greatest number of delegates.

2.2 Appendix A of this submission provides detail of the range of issues discussed by young people within the topic of equality and school and also the recommendations from the delegates to bring about improvement for young people [PLEASE NOTE THE REPORT WHICH FORMS THE BASIS OF Appendix A IS CURRENTLY IN DRAFT FORM AND IS DUE TO BE FINALISED IN THE COMING WEEKS].

2.3 The first meeting of the Comhairle na nOg National Executive for the period 2017-2019 will take place on 3 February and over the following weeks and months the young people will further refine the topic content and set out a programme of work to make change/improvements for young people in that regard. At this point in the process it is too early to say what the exact focus of the work will be. The purpose of this submission and providing the detail as set out in Appendix A at this time is to give insight to the Committee of the views of young people and the changes they have given early consideration to in the context of Dail na nOg 2107. It has been a frequent practice of the Executive to seek an opportunity to make a submission to your Committee as their work develops and in this regard the Department expects to be in further contact with the Committee again as the work progresses.

2.4 The Children’s Equality Commission was established by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs with the aim of enabling the voices of children who experience or understand economic hardship or poverty to be heard directly and acted on by policy-makers.

Three panels of children and young people were established by the DCYA to explore the views and experiences of children and young people’s experience or understanding of economic hardship or poverty.

- An Advisory Panel of 12-16 year-old young people
- A panel of 8-12 year-old children from 5 Deis Primary Schools in Tallaght
- A panel of 13-17 year-old young people from Blanchardstown and Tallaght Youth Services

A minimum of six sessions was conducted with all panels using creative methods of seeking their views including life-lines, body-maps, placemats, illustration and audio recording.

Each panel of children prioritised their top three topics and concerns. Under each topic, the children developed statements about how children and young people whose families do not have enough money are affected and suggested solutions. The topics identified of relevance to the topic being considered by the Committee are set out in detail in Appendix B. The suggestions outlined are in the children’s own words and again provide insight for the Committee on young people’s views when asked directly about this topic.
2.5 The work of the Children’s Equality Commission has not yet been completed and the intention is that a video format reporting the work of the Commission will be available in due course.

Part Three: School Completion Programme and a planned consultation with children and young people

The School Completion Programme (SCP) was established in 2002 by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) as a targeted programme to meet the needs of vulnerable young people most at risk of dropping out of mainstream education. The aim is to improve the numbers of pupils who successfully complete the Senior Cycle, or equivalent. In 2014, the SCP came under the remit of Tusla when the functions of the National Education Welfare Board were transferred to Tusla under the Child and Family Agency Act 2013.

The SCP is one of three strands of an integrated Educational Welfare Service which also includes the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) and the statutory Education Welfare Service (EWS). The EWS is designed to drive consistent improvement in the rates of school completion through the use of evidence based interventions to both maintain vulnerable young people in mainstream education and to support young people who have dropped out of formal education to re-engage with learning.

The SCP is a key element in the work to address educational inequality and disadvantage, and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs is currently considering ways of further improving its delivery and governance.

The Minister hosted a consultation event recently, which was designed to inform her decision-making with a specific focus on practice/interventions. A further consultation event to ascertain the views of young people on the current programme and how it could be improved in the future is scheduled to take place shortly. It is hoped that this comprehensive set of engagements with all relevant parties will lead to a the design of a new scheme which will improve school retention rates and benefit those young people who are at risk of early school leaving.
Appendix A: Issues discussed by Young People on Equality and School

Key equality issues in school

The key equality issues in school, from the most to the least commonly mentioned, were:

1. Unequal treatment of students by teachers
2. School uniform and appearance issues
3. Gender inequality in subject choices
4. LGBTI equality issues
5. Issues related to curriculum
6. Religious equality issues
7. Irish language equality issues

1. **Unequal treatment of students by teachers**

The most commonly identified equality issue in schools was unequal and unfair treatment of students by teachers. This included some teachers showing favouritism towards certain students e.g. unequal enforcement of rules and discipline, teachers not respecting students, stereotyping students, not being honest with students, bullying students and “abusing their power”. Young people felt the relationship between teachers and students was unequal, too formal and strict and if they stand up for themselves against teachers it is perceived as “talking back.”

- “Teachers being biased, having favourites and stereotyping students.”
- “Rules not being enforced equally... if students trying to stand up for yourself it will be taken as talking back.”

What needs to be done to improve equality related to unequal treatment of students by teachers:

- Continuous training for teachers on teaching methods, social issues affecting young people, equal treatment of students etc.
- Students should have a voice in the classroom and more freedom to express themselves without getting in trouble
- Better regulation of teachers
- The relationship between teachers and students should be less formal to encourage young people to be open and get help if needed

2. **School uniform and appearance issues**

The second most commonly mentioned equality issue in schools was school uniforms and the appearance issues. For example, participants felt it was unfair that girls in some schools must wear skirts as part of their uniform, and are not allowed wear trousers. Similarly, young people thought boys should be allowed wear skirts if they wish. The cost of school uniforms, which can be very expensive, was also discussed as an equality issue for those who cannot afford them. In relation to appearance issues, participants felt students should not be treated unequally, discriminated against or get in trouble in school because of their appearance, e.g. piercings, jewellery, hair length, tattoos, make-up, nail polish etc. Young
people thought students should have more freedom, be allowed to express themselves and embrace their individuality and diversity through their appearance.

- “Girls not allowed wear pants, boys not allowed wear skirts- gendered clothing.”
- “Cannot discriminate based on appearance, same legislation for students and adults.”

What needs to be done to improve equality related to school uniforms and appearance issues:

- Change school policies around uniforms, e.g. girls allowed to wear trousers etc.
- Change school policies around appearance, e.g. piercings, jewellery, hair length, tattoos, make-up, nail polish etc.
- More gender fluid uniforms
- Allow for student’s individuality, diversity and difference

3. Gender inequality in subject choices

The next most frequently highlighted equality issue in schools was gender inequality in subject choices. In many schools, subject choices are often available based on gender. For example, subjects such as metal work and woodwork are traditionally viewed as ‘male’ subjects and are often not available as subject choices in girl’s schools. Similarly, subjects like Home Economics are traditionally viewed as ‘female’ subjects and are often not available in boy’s schools.

- “Different subject standards between boys and girl’s schools, e.g. girl schools having no metal work and boy’s schools not having home economics.”
- “Subject choices are available depending on gender.”

What needs to be done to improve gender equality in subject choices:

- All subjects should be available to all students in all schools
- There should be no gender stereotyping related to subject choices
- More mixed gender schools

4. LGBTI equality issues

The next most identified equality issue in schools was LGBTI equality issues. The main equality issue highlighted for LGBTI students in schools related to sex education. According to participants, sex education in schools is based on heterosexuality and does not include education on homosexuality, bisexuality, transgender sexuality, intersex sexuality etc. This is often due to the religious ethos of schools. It was also suggested that some schools are prejudiced against LGBTI students.

- “Lack of sex education for those who are LGBT.”
What needs to be done to improve equality in relation to LGBTI equality issues:

- Sex education in schools should be inclusive of all sexual orientations, e.g. heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, transgender sexuality, intersex sexuality etc.
- Sex education should be mandatory in all schools
- Sex education should not be taught based on a particular religious ethos, e.g. Catholic ethos
- Students and teachers should be educated on LGBTI terminology

5. Issues related to the education system and curriculum

Issues related to the education system and curriculum were the next most highlighted equality issue in schools. Some participants felt the current education system and curriculum were unequal, for example, due to the points based exam system, teaching methods lack of life skills in the curriculum.

➤ “Life skills courses needed in schools. Teach about taxes mortgages etc.”

What needs to be done to improve issue related to the education system and curriculum:

- Teach more life skills in schools, e.g. taxes, mortgages etc.
- Have set days for homework in different subjects
- More focus on oral work in languages
- Less exams in the Junior and Leaving Cert, e.g. one day per day

6. Religious equality issues

Issues related to religious equality in schools was the next most discussed issue. This mainly related to religious run schools, e.g. Catholic schools, not accommodating non-Catholic/Christian students. For example, mandatory religion classes in schools and students not allowed to wear non-Christian jewellery or clothing, e.g. hijabs. Instances of islamophobia were also reported in some schools.

➤ “Some schools are not designed for non-Christians.”

What needs to be done to improve religious equality issues:

- Schools should be non-denominational
- Students should learn about all religions in schools
- Students should not be forced to attend religious ceremonies in schools, e.g. attend mass

7. Irish language equality issues

The next most commonly identified issue was Irish language equality issues in Gaelscoileanna (Irish speaking schools). The main issue highlighted here was the lack of text
books in the Irish language which can make it more difficult for students learning through the medium of Irish.

**How to improve Irish language equality issues**

- More text books in Irish

**Other equality issues in schools**

Other equality issues in schools discussed by the delegates, from the most to the least commonly mentioned, are listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equality Issue</th>
<th>How to improve equality related to this issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender inequality in sport in schools</strong></td>
<td>• More choices for sports for girls and boys</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Keep girls motivated and involved in sports</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Equal time/resources etc. for girls and boy’s teams in schools</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Racism</strong></td>
<td>• Teach tolerance of different cultures and ethnicities in schools</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Zero tolerance policy for racism in schools, e.g. expulsion</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lack of mental health supports, e.g. no Counsellors in schools, mental health not take seriously by teachers/schools</strong></td>
<td>• Qualified Counsellors in schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mental health services, e.g. Child and Adolescence Mental Health Services (CAMHS), coming into schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unequal funding/facilities among schools</strong></td>
<td>• More funding for schools, facilities etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Improve school buildings and facilities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Build new schools according to population projects of children and young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inequality in sports/extra-curricular activities, e.g. GAA gets priority over other sports and activities</strong></td>
<td>• Equal focus on sports and the arts etc. in schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Promote other extra-curricular activities in schools, e.g. Comhairle na nÓg</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Alternative sports to GAA in schools</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bullying, e.g. teachers ‘turning a blind eye’ to bullies</strong></td>
<td>• Set up buddy systems in schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unequal access to learning supports, e.g. those with learning difficulties, English is not their first language</strong></td>
<td>• Equal access to learning supports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Extra resources and supports for students whom English is not their first language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inequality for students with disabilities and behavioural issues</strong></td>
<td>• More training for teachers on the needs and requirements of students with disabilities/behavioural issues and how to teach and treat them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Equal treatment of those with behavioural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues in Schools</td>
<td>Solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· More facilities for students with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unequal access to transport, e.g. school buses in rural areas</td>
<td>· More school buses in rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Student Councils in schools</td>
<td>· Student Council to be mandatory in all schools</td>
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<td></td>
<td>· More funding for student councils</td>
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<td></td>
<td>· Give more power to Student Councils, e.g. representative on Board of Management of schools</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Fair elections for Student Councils, e.g. anonymous written interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No TY in some schools</td>
<td>· TY should be available in all schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Topics identified by Children, Children’s Equality Commission

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC: SCHOOL</th>
<th>8 – 12 YEAR OLD PANEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

What makes this hard for children whose families don’t have enough money?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers should stop giving out to the children when they don’t have the book money and they should ask them does your mam and dad have enough money</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People would find it hard to get a proper education to get a god job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They would get slagged by what they eat and drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In high school they get slagged by the way they look</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kids don’t think straight and kill themselves for not having enough money and getting slagged in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kids get put in care and get foster parents and get put in a different school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children don’t tell the teacher they don’t have enough money and get in trouble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kids haven’t got enough book money or lunch money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People get slagged if they don’t have proper clothes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They cannot get enough sleep because it’s too cold</td>
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<tr>
<td>They will get bullied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They can’t go to school because they have to look after their brothers and sisters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t afford things for school and get slagged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They can’t go to school and everyone thinks they’re stupid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They can be forced to work by parents and don’t go to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their parents can’t pay for their books and they would get slagged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their parents aren’t able to afford the uniform so they wear clothes out of Lidl and Aldi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When they go to school they don’t have breakfast and feel dizzy and get sick</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What could be done to make this better?

| Teachers should stop giving out to children that don’t have the money                                                               |
| Some children should stop pressuring other children, it really isn’t nice                                                         |
| We should have free food in the cafeteria or lunch bags                                                                          |
| We could have people to stop bullying and slagging                                                                               |
| The school could help donate to the homeless                                                                                    |
| Food to bring home                                                                                                               |
| The schools can help the mams and dads with the book money and school uniform                                                     |
| The school can help the mams and dads with their bills and payments of their kids book money and kids shoes                      |
| They can tell someone                                                                                                             |
| They can ask a friend for a loan of his books                                                                                  |
| Things that people don’t use anymore, they can give it to them                                                                  |
| People can realise it’s not their fault they can’t afford things                                                                |
| People can donate everything they need to them or people like them                                                               |
| They can work hard and when they’re older they can get jobs                                                                      |
| When the children have no food the school have lunches and can give them to the kids                                            |
| The school that they go to can give them the uniform because they can’t pay for them                                             |
| Their mam and dad can stop doing drugs and buying drink                                                                          |
CHILDREN’S STATEMENT: Children whose families don’t have enough money get slagged and bullied in school.
CHILDREN’S SOLUTION: Schools should help with uniforms, shoes, books and lunches for those who can’t afford them.

TOPIC: NO MONEY FOR SCHOOL THINGS

ADVISORY GROUP (AGE 12-16)

What makes this hard for children whose families don’t have enough money?

| Children have no control over their financial situation. |
| They would feel awkward going to school without their stuff |
| Other children may pick on them for this. |
| They feel embarrassed to tell people e.g. teachers, students |
| Students feel like they can’t tell teachers why they haven’t got supplies because if they do tell then they might get slagged |

What could be done to make this better?

| A less expensive uniform and seniors only have minor difference in uniform change. |
| Everyone uses lunch vouchers, not just those who need them. |
| A grant to help parents who struggle to make ends meet around September. |
| Start a charity to donate second-hand school supplies that can still be used. |
| Schools/teachers should have supplies that are needed. |
| A grant could be given to under privileged children. |
| Schools could supply them with these – for necessities |
| Re-use text books, set squares and uniforms |

YOUNG PEOPLE’S STATEMENT: Children who don’t have enough money for school things get slagged and feel awkward and embarrassed

YOUNG PEOPLE’S SOLUTIONS:

- Black school shoes for all students
- A less expensive uniform and seniors only have minor difference in uniform change
- Start a charity to donate second-hand school supplies that can still be used
- Re-use text books, set squares and uniforms
- Everyone uses lunch vouchers, not just those who need them
- Schools/teachers should have supplies that are needed
- Schools could supply them with these-necessities
- A grant could help parents who struggle to make ends meet around September
- A grant could be given to under privileged children
- Students should have their privacy respected
- Tutors should check in with students to see how things are going
What makes this hard for children whose families don’t have enough money?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Reason</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seek attention at school because they don’t get enough of it at home</td>
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<td>Cannot afford books</td>
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<td>Act up in school</td>
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<td>Won’t have enough books</td>
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<td>Can’t pay school funds</td>
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<td>Will get in trouble for not having books</td>
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<td>Feels insecure when they go to school</td>
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<td>Can’t afford school instalments</td>
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<td>Can’t afford to go on trips</td>
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<td>Can’t go on school tours</td>
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<td>Can’t afford new uniforms</td>
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<td>Want to leave school early to help with money problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>Start fighting</td>
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<td>Can’t get school books</td>
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<td>Don’t talk about it</td>
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<td>It stops them from being involved in school</td>
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<td>Can’t go on trips</td>
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<td>Embarrassed due to fees being paid late</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guidance counsellors are terrible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guidance counsellors are not qualified</td>
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What could be done to make this better?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Reason</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers need more training</td>
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<tr>
<td>Take it easy</td>
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<tr>
<td>More child benefits</td>
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<td>Get grants for school related stuff</td>
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<td>Teachers should be obligated to take a psychology course</td>
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<td>Make going to school cheaper</td>
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<td>Better guidance counsellors</td>
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<tr>
<td>More training with children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Systems that make instalments easy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workshop to teach teachers how to deal with young people with financial problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>A school bank where students can put in small deposits to save for trips</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

YOUNG PEOPLE’S STATEMENT: The expenses for school make it hard for young people (books, uniforms, instalments, trips) and make them embarrassed.

YOUNG PEOPLE’S SOLUTION: Give financed supports to make school expenses cheaper.
YOUNG PEOPLE’S STATEMENTS: Students don’t feel comfortable communicating with Guidance Counsellors on financial difficulties.

YOUNG PEOPLE’S SOLUTIONS:
• School staff need more training workshops on how to communicate and support young people with financial difficulties.
• Teachers need more training on how to know and understand kids and help them with their issues without going overboard. P.S. Don’t shout at kids
Irish Rural Link Submission on Education Inequalities and Disadvantage to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills

1st February 2018

Contact Seamus Boland/Louise Lennon
Overview

Irish Rural Link (IRL) is the national network of rural community groups, representing over 600 groups and thousands of individuals committed to socially, environmentally and economically sustainable rural communities. While access to primary and post primary education is free in Ireland, this does not mean inequalities in education do not exist. According to the SILC\(^1\) report 2016 showed there were 138,949 children aged 0-17 living in consistent poverty\(^2\). This is one in nine children. Consistent poverty means that these children are living in households with incomes below 60% of the national median income and experiencing deprivation based on the agreed 11 deprivation indicators. These can include; unable to afford to heat the home, going 24 hours without a substantial meal.

Households with one adult and one or more children under the age of 18 had the highest deprivation rate in 2016 at 50.1%, while 24.6% of this household type was living in consistent poverty\(^3\).

Early school leaving (ESL) is a multi-faceted and complex problem caused by a cumulative process of disengagement. It is a result of personal, social, economic, education or family-related reasons. Schools play an important role in addressing ESL but they cannot and should not work in isolation. Comprehensive approaches that focus on the root causes of ESL are required to reduce ESL. Reducing ESL can help towards the integration of young people into the labour market, and contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty and deprivation that leads to the social exclusion of too many young people. The SILC report 2016 highlights that households where the head of the household has a lower education attainment is more at risk of poverty, experience higher levels of deprivation and consistent poverty.\(^4\)

Reducing the average European rate of early school leavers to less than 10% by 2020 is one of the education headline targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy. Investment in the educational achievement of young people is essential for the employment prospects of every young person. It is important for the growth of our economy and for social cohesion, especially at a time when the current financial and economic crisis is having a serious impact on young people and their families. Investing in education helps to break the cycle of

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\(^1\) SILC – Survey on Income and Living Conditions
\(^4\) CSO (2017) SILC Report 2016 ibid
deprivation and poverty leading to the social exclusion of too many young people across Europe.

Leaving school before completing secondary education is often the outcome of a progressive and cumulative process of disengagement. It is triggered by problems that can be related to the course of study, the school, or to certain health, personal, or emotional difficulties young people face. It can be associated with the socioeconomic or family background of pupils. Limited access to quality education or to an individual's preferred choice of study may be especially problematic in rural or disadvantaged areas. Structural characteristics of the education system, such as inflexible education pathways, early tracking or high retention rates may also contribute to high ESL rates. At the school level, an unhealthy school climate, bullying or poor relationships between pupils and teachers may trigger ESL. Pupils who do not feel ownership of their education and do not have a voice in the school may lose interest and become at risk of ESL.

Proposed Solutions

1. **A Coordinating Body**: A coordinating body/taskforce such as a dedicated unit within the Department of Education and skills with cross-departmental links or a separate agency can support cooperation at national level and collaborate with all Departments and Agencies in related policy fields (e.g. education, economy, employment, youth, health, welfare and social policy). It can facilitate collaboration with stakeholders, but also help to raise awareness and ensure long-term political commitment for ESL. It could be responsible for policy development, monitoring and assessment of ESL measures at national level and the dissemination of good practice. As with all policy decisions it must be rural proofed and inclusive of all and Irish Rural Link would be willing and able to represent the rural agenda.

2. **Relevant and Engaging Curriculum**: A curriculum that is relevant and coherent can motivate pupils to fully develop their strengths and talents. The curricula should be designed in such a way that it reflects the different affinities of the pupil, takes into account different starting points, and is adapted to the pupil's ambitions. There should be one to one engagement with those most at risk and personal pathways should be developed based on the individual's needs.

3. **High Quality, Attractive and Engaging Vocational Education and Training (VET)**: High quality VET, of equal value to academic education, provides opportunities for all young people to explore and learn more about the world of work.
and ease transition to the labour market. It is important that high quality VET allows progression to higher education in the same way general secondary education does. More and more employers are saying that they require training in preference to education.

4. **More focus on Relevant Apprenticeships**: Too often schools place more focus on CAO Points and third level courses, highlighting past pupils achievements by which third level institute they attend and level of qualification. Apprenticeships are often seen as the ‘Cinderella’ route into a career being referred to an alternative option to explore by students, many of whom had not got the educational supports they needed throughout their years in school. Students who choose to do an apprenticeship, whether this be in traditional trades or new apprenticeships in ICT or finance should not be made feel inferior to those that choose to go to third level.

5. **Explore Education Models from other Jurisdictions**: When compared to the Finish and Japanese education models, the Irish system is sadly lagging behind. They are moving away from the heavy input workload model, moving away from heavy volumes of homework, moving away from rote learning while in Ireland we use the league tables as a barometer for success. We encourage our students to revise and retain large volumes of sometimes irrelevant information and to regurgitate it in a structured form in order to obtain maximum points.

6. **Extra-Curricular Activities**: When we look at the extra-curricular activities within the school’s system and the outcomes from Young Social Innovators, Young Scientist Competitions, Concern Debates to name but a few, when our young people are allowed to be creative they excel above all other nations. We should have an educational system where innovation and creativity is rewarded, encouraged and recognised as part of the curriculum. Employers are shouting from the roof tops that they require employees with training and skills as opposed to employees with multiple degrees and no problem solving skills. Encouraging innovation and problem solving skills from an early age will not only benefit the labour market, but will also build confidence and social skills which will enable young people to deal with issues in a logical manner and as a result will see a reduction in young people presenting with anxiety and stress. There are often some costs associated with participating in extra-curricular activities, which often discourages students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The Irish League of Credit Unions Back to School Survey
2017 showed that 67% of parents surveyed would not be able to afford extracurricular activities\textsuperscript{5}.

7. **Youthreach Programme:** Youthreach Programme has become more academic that was originally intended and this needs to be reviewed. Funding for this programme is now outcomes based with the expected outcome for participants to obtain a QQI level 4, which equates to basic Leaving Cert standard. This needs to revert to a person centred approach, where the programme is tailored to meet the young person’s needs. There is a mismatch between outcomes and awards and the skills match which the Minister continuously refers to. This programme needs to be practical and skills based in order to be effective and relevant.

8. **Cost of Third Level:** The increasing costs of sending a student to third level and retaining them for the duration of the course is discouraging for people from lower socio-economic households. Costs of accommodation, travel and day to day living costs are placing greater pressure on households and students. As most students from rural areas have to move away from home to attend third level, they are impacted more by these higher costs. Evidence of the increasing costs in attending third level education can be seen in the Irish League of Credit Unions’ survey 2017\textsuperscript{6} which shows that 56% of parents are particularly stressed about rental costs. Also registration fees continue to be a grave concern for people and waiting for SUSI payments to come through. College fees and the rising cost of living are causing some young people to rethink attending third level education because they simply cannot afford it. Costs of attending third level should not be a disincentive for people to access or progress in their education but unfortunately it is too often the reason why students from lower socio-economic backgrounds either don’t go to college in the first place or have to drop out before completing their course.

\textsuperscript{5} Irish League of Credit Union (2017) Back to School Survey July 2017

\textsuperscript{6} Irish League of Credit Unions “2017 Third Level Education Study”
Irish Rural Link the Organisation

Irish Rural Link (IRL), formed in 1991, is a national network of organisations and individuals campaigning for sustainable rural development in Ireland and Europe. IRL, a non-profit organisation, has grown significantly since its inception and now directly represents over 600 community groups with a combined membership of 25,000.

The network provides a structure through which rural groups and individuals, representing disadvantaged rural communities, can articulate their common needs and priorities, share their experiences and present their case to policy-makers at local, national and European Level.

Irish Rural Link is the only group represented at the national social partnership talks solely representing rural communities’ interests.

‘Our vision is of vibrant, inclusive and sustainable rural communities that contribute to an equitable and just society’

Irish Rural Link’s aims are:

- To articulate and facilitate the voices of rural communities in local, regional, national and European policy arenas, especially those experiencing poverty, social exclusion and the challenge of change in the 21st century.
- To promote local and community development in rural communities in order to strengthen and build the capacity of rural community groups to act as primary movers through practical assistance and advice.
- To research, critique and disseminate policies relating to rural communities including issues such as sustainability, social exclusion, equality and poverty
- To facilitate cross-border networking between rural communities

‘Our mission is to influence and inform local, regional, national and European development policies and programmes in favour of rural communities especially those who are marginalised as a result of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas.’
Submission to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills

Simon Communities in Ireland

23rd March 2018
1. Introduction

1.1 The Simon Communities in Ireland welcome the opportunity to make this invited submission to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills focusing on the barriers to education facing vulnerable groups. People experiencing homelessness are among the most vulnerable and marginalised groups in society. Far from a uniform demographic, people experiencing homelessness are not a homogenous group. They are a diverse group of people that include women, young people, families, those with complex mental and physical health needs and people with problematic drug and alcohol use. According to the most recent figures published by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG), in January 2018 there were 9,104 people currently trapped in Emergency Accommodation including 1,517 families, 3,627 children and 3,715 adults without dependents in their care.¹ This is in addition to the many thousands of households living precariously in hidden homeless situations or unstable tenancies experiencing ongoing housing instability that remain beyond the reach of official data collection.

1.2 People experiencing homelessness face multiple barriers to the full realisation of a host of economic and social rights. Without access to stable and quality housing it can be difficult, if not impossible, to realise the right to education, employment and health amongst other rights. Low educational attainment, restricted access to quality employment and poor physical and mental health can in turn be significant barriers to exiting homelessness in a housing system marked by spiralling housing costs and a dearth of social and affordable housing supply across tenures. This submission will examine some of the barriers to education faced by people experiencing homelessness. Commonalities with other vulnerable and marginalised socio-economic groups will become apparent throughout. Firstly this submission will provide a statistical picture of the links between poor educational attainment and experiences of homelessness. Thereafter Government commitments with regard to education and those experiencing homelessness will be discussed. This will be followed by an examination of specific barriers to education for people who are homeless as highlighted in recent research. A brief introduction to Housing First will be then be offered, highlighting the beneficial impact of housing without preconditions combined with tailored supports for people exiting homelessness. This submission will conclude with a series of recommendations aimed at breaking down the barriers to education faced by people experiencing homelessness.

2 Homelessness and Educational Attainment – A Statistical Analysis

2.1 According to Census 2016 data, a total of 6,909 people were enumerated as homeless on Census night.² Of this number, 4,198 people had ceased full time education. A significant number, 1,606 did not have an educational qualification beyond lower secondary, accounting for 38% of this cohort. Of these, 581 persons (36%) were educated to primary level only, 193 (12%)

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³ Unlike Census 2011 this figure does not include those people living in Long Term Accommodation (LTA) which amounted to an additional 1,772 people on Census night 2016.
indicated they had no formal education, 955 people were educated to upper secondary level, while 422 persons were educated to third level. Twenty-nine percent of those identified as homeless did not provide any data on their educational attainment compared to only 6% of the general population.

2.2 Cross referencing this data with the 2016 CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions shows the impact of low educational attainment on a number of income and poverty indices which are known structural causes of homelessness. Individuals with the highest level of educational attainment of ‘third level degree or higher’ had the highest median disposable income in the eight income categories analysed. Descending from this point, individuals with lower levels of educational attainment had progressively lower incomes across the eight income categories analysed. Not unsurprisingly, individuals with lower levels of educational attainment ranked highest in terms of the three primary poverty indices including the at-risk of poverty rate, the deprivation rate and consistent poverty rate. Furthermore, a significant percentage gap exists within these indices between those who have attained a third level qualification and others who have attained post leaving cert educational attainment and below. The impact and benefit of the full spectrum of educational attainment could not be starker.

2.3 A society based on the values of fairness and equal access to opportunities for all must prioritise the delivery of educational supports to vulnerable groups and historically marginalised demographics. At the time of writing, complete data was not available on the number of people experiencing homelessness in receipt of back-to-education allowance. In April 2015, the partnership for Health Equity published its Homelessness: An Unhealthy State Report. The study involved a cross-sectional survey of people experiencing homelessness in Dublin City and Limerick City. In addition to highlighting worrying health trends across the participant population, the study provided a unique insight into employment and welfare supports availed of by participants. Of the 570 participants that responded to survey questions relating to employment and social welfare, only 1% were in receipt of the back-to-education allowance (BTEA) payment. This is largely due to the conflict between eligible welfare payments under the BTEA and the range of welfare payments people experiencing homelessness rely on when trapped in Emergency Accommodation. In 2005, the Report of the Working Group on the Review of the BTEA Scheme recommended the extension of eligibility of the scheme to all people who were homeless on the basis that this extension would address inequalities which might lead to poverty. It is so important to provide financial support for those who apply for back-to-education programmes throughout. The Trinity Access Programme is a successful example that should be replicated where possible.

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6 Ibid, at 25.
9 Trinity Access Programme, [https://www.tcd.ie/trinityaccess/about/](https://www.tcd.ie/trinityaccess/about/).
2.4 A 2012 study, *Working it Out – A Report on the Barriers to Employment Faced by people who are Homeless*, further highlights the impact of experiences of homelessness on educational attainment. The study involved a survey of 91 Cork Simon Community residents and builds a picture of the nature and extent of some of the barriers to employment and education faced by respondents whilst navigating the complexity of homelessness. Sixty-five percent of respondents had left school before completing the leaving certificate – more than twice the rate of early school leavers in the general population. Forty-three percent left school without any State qualifications – almost four times the rate of the general population. Thirteen percent of respondents attained only primary education or below with 3% of this group having never attended school. The average age of the early school-leaver cohort was 14 years of age. Thirty-five percent of participants indicated they had low literacy levels, needing help to fill-in forms or write letters always or most of the time. Eighty-seven percent of this cohort were early school leavers with 59% leaving before their junior/inter cert. The barriers associated with these low levels of educational attainment and early school leaving will be discussed further in section 4.

2.5 A 2014 study, *Young People, Homelessness and Housing Exclusion*, offers an important insight into the educational pathways and experiences of young people who are experiencing homelessness. From a statistical point of view, the study showed that 31 of the 40 study participants had left school prior to completing their secondary education with 15 leaving before the age of 16 years and would as a result be classified as early school leavers. Of the 36 participants that were not engaged in education, 10 had left school without any formal educational qualifications. Twenty-one young people had reached junior certificate level before leaving school with only 5 going on to complete their leaving certificate. The barriers encountered by this study group will be discussed in Section 4 including a cross analysis of persistent barriers identified in the follow up study in 2016.

3 Government Commitments – Education and Homelessness

3.1 In 2014, the Government published the *Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019*. Section 6 of the strategy on ‘Active Inclusion’ provides the underlying principle of enabling every citizen, notably the most disadvantaged, to fully participate in society, including having a job. The strategy also includes the promotion and support of lifelong learning for all who engage with FET. Despite these aspirations, the strategy does not explicitly include people experiencing homelessness as a named target group requiring specific supports to engage in FET and lifelong learning. Worryingly, a 2017 report on the barriers to FET for vulnerable people in Ireland did

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14 Ibid, at P. 91.
not consider homelessness as a structural barrier, instead preferring to make passing reference to an Australian report that considered homelessness a dispositional or individual barrier to FET. This perception denies the severe structural barriers which cause homelessness in the first place, including poverty, unemployment, lack of affordable housing and inadequate social protection supports. These are insurmountable barriers to a person experiencing long-term homelessness seeking to (re)engage in further education, training and lifelong learning.

3.2 When the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness (Rebuilding Ireland) was published in July 2016 there were 2,348 children trapped in emergency accommodation. The most recent figures from the DHPLG for January 2018 show there are 3,627 children in emergency accommodation representing a 54% increase in the intervening period. Rebuilding Ireland contains a number of commitments and actions relating to the educational needs of children living in emergency accommodation, including access to early-years services, school completion programmes, access to free public transport for family travel and for school journeys. The Rebuilding Ireland 2017 Status Report shows that progress has been made in delivering on some of these commitments. However, given the escalating number of children living in and entering emergency accommodation on a monthly basis, questions must be raised regarding the availability and staffing of these vital support services and the ongoing focus on an emergency-led response to homelessness. The 54% increase in childhood homelessness mentioned above is likely to have stretched already thin staff resources, diminishing the impact and benefit of educational and school support services for children, and acting as a further barrier to their education. Of equal concern is the complete lack of Rebuilding Ireland commitments and actions in relation to educational supports for young people between 18 and 24 years of age who are experiencing homelessness.

3.3 In March 2014, the Government published the national policy framework for children and young people, Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (BOBF). Through BOBF, the Government recognises the lifelong negative consequences for a child if his or her family is homeless or is in substandard or unstable accommodation. BOBF contains further recognition that learning starts from birth and that engagement in education is a significant protective factor against negative outcomes. Despite this, BOBF contains little in the way of specific goals and outcomes aimed at reducing the impact of homelessness on children’ and young peoples’ education. BOBF does however contain broad recognition of the challenges facing early school-leavers, a cohort that is over represented in the homeless population as outlined above. This recognition is matched with appropriate commitments but does not name young people experiencing homelessness as a named target-group in this regard. It is clear that the two primary Government strategies concerning young people and people experiencing homelessness are together inadequate in tackling the known and perceived barriers to education facing this vulnerable cohort.

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3.4 Access to education provides multifaceted protection - preventing housing instability and homelessness whilst being an important element in supporting people to leave homelessness and housing instability behind. Importantly, participants in the Living in Limbo report acknowledged the importance of educational attainment as a means of leaving homelessness behind. Education was seen as one of many transitions or constituent parts of this process.\textsuperscript{20} The majority of participants believed that attaining educational qualifications and engaging with educational services was crucial for the accrual of essential life skills, the establishment of a sense of structure and a daily routine that would allow them to address low self-esteem, depression, social isolation and boredom. Ultimately, educational attainment was seen as a necessary pathway to transition to employment, financial independence and housing security.\textsuperscript{21}

4 Barriers to Education

4.1 The barriers to education for people experiencing homelessness are numerous. This section will explore the full spectrum of barriers beginning with poor educational attainment and moving to broader structural barriers. This exercise will rely on the key findings of the research studies mentioned above. Of utmost concern, the barriers identified in the Living in Limbo report negatively impacted on young people’s self-worth reinforcing their socio-economic marginalisation.\textsuperscript{22}

4.2 Some barriers highlighted in the aforementioned research include:

- Learning difficulties, limited basic literacy and numeracy skills.\textsuperscript{23}
- High rates of early school-leaving and low levels of qualifications. These barriers often influenced and compounded each other. Early school leaving was seen as the primary barrier because of its ripple effect; contributing and exacerbating other barriers such as low literacy, low confidence and low levels of qualifications. Of all participants in the Working it Out study, those between 18-26 years of age were most affected by these barriers, illustrating the impact of early school leaving.
- The lack of active mentoring for FET individuals during and after the completion of FET programmes as a means of addressing cultural barriers and the lack of social mobility.\textsuperscript{24}
- Having to abandon educational goals to receive better financial and welfare supports leading to poverty and unemployment traps.
- The lack of affordable childcare services for parents was also identified as a significant barrier to engaging with full or part-time training courses.\textsuperscript{25}
- Participants in the Living in Limbo study also cited that having no fixed address or stable accommodation at various times, including unstable returns to the family home, diminished their ability to (re)engage with education and training programmes.\textsuperscript{26}
- The chaotic, unsettling and transient nature of hostile environments.\textsuperscript{27}

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\textsuperscript{20} Ib \textit{bid 11}, at P.15.
\textsuperscript{21} Ib \textit{bid 11}, at P.84.
\textsuperscript{22} Ib \textit{bid 11}, at P.7.
\textsuperscript{23} Ib \textit{bid 9}, at P. 2.
\textsuperscript{24} Ib \textit{bid 16}, at P. 55.
\textsuperscript{25} Ib \textit{bid 11}, at P.85.
\textsuperscript{26} Ib \textit{bid 11}, at P.86.
5 Housing First – Support in Housing

5.1 The 2013 Homelessness Policy Statement marked the Government’s first policy commitment to pursue a ‘Housing-led’ approach to solving long term homelessness. Housing First/Housing-Led offers housing without preconditions and includes a range of supports focussed on harm minimisation and supporting recovery and empowerment through Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams. The success of such initiatives depends not just on housing but also, crucially, on drug and/or alcohol, mental health, and community integration services being available to people exiting homelessness. There are two key aspects to the Housing First/Housing Led approach - immediate provision of housing without pre-conditions or any requirement of housing ‘readiness’ and the provision of support in housing at the level required, for as long as necessary. Supports in this regard include those aimed at increasing access to educational attainment and access to employment. With Housing First the goal is to move people out of homelessness as quickly as possible into permanent housing where a tailored support package is more effective. These approaches, once properly resourced and implemented, improve the outcomes and quality of life for people who are homeless, or at risk in Ireland.

6 Recommendations

6.1 This section will offer a number of recommendations aimed at breaking down the barriers to education faced by people experiencing homelessness.

- Fully resource and expand housing first targets nationwide with person-centred education and employment supports that are cognisant of the recognised barriers to education faced by people experiencing homelessness.
- Reassess Rebuilding Ireland educational and school supports and targets aimed at children and families in Emergency Accommodation. The 54% increase in childhood homelessness since the publication of Rebuilding Ireland should form the basis for the delivery of greater financial and staffing resources to ensure service delivery and effectiveness is not impacted.
- Put in place educational supports for young people between the ages of 18 to 26 who are experiencing homelessness given the impact of early school leaving on this cohort.
- Extend the Back to Education Allowance Scheme to all adults experiencing homelessness.
- Parents seeking to return to education should be offered financial support to ensure childcare is affordable.
- Existing Back to Work and Education and Training Programmes must work more effectively to include people who have experienced homelessness. Ring-fenced funding and placements on these schemes must be made available to ensure greater participation by people who have experienced homelessness. The Homeless Community Employment Schemes within the Community Services Programme is a prime example of where this approach can be delivered given people experiencing homelessness are named as a programme target group.
- Secure and quality employment must be available once study or training programmes are completed.

Ibid 11, at P.85.
• Adequately resource homeless prevention services to include educational components focussing on further education, training and lifelong learning. Where necessary additional mentoring supports should be available to those engaging with and on completion of FET.

7 Conclusion

7.1 People experiencing homelessness face multiple barriers to educational attainment. These barriers are borne out in the statistics and research findings presented above and effect all people experiencing homelessness at all stages of life. These structural barriers serve to compound the experience of homelessness preventing access to a vital pathway and transition out of homelessness. Recent commitments and recognition of barriers to education across multiple Government strategies are welcome but must be reassessed in light of the increasing number of people trapped in emergency accommodation. Unfettered access to tailored educational supports combined with access to affordable and secure housing is needed to assist households to leave homelessness behind in addition to preventing and reducing the number of households presenting to emergency accommodation.
About Simon Communities
The Simon Communities in Ireland are a network of eight regionally based independent Simon Communities based in Cork, Dublin, Dundalk, Galway, the Midlands, the Mid West, the North West and the South East that share common values and ethos in tackling all forms of homelessness throughout Ireland, supported by a National Office. The Simon Communities have been providing services in Ireland for over 45 years. The Simon Communities deliver support and service to over 11,000 individuals and families throughout Ireland who experience – or are at risk of – homelessness every year.

Whatever the issue, for as long as we are needed, Simon’s door is always open. For more information please visit

Services include:
- Housing provision, tenancy sustainment & settlement services, housing advice & information services helping people to make the move out of homelessness & working with households at risk;
- Specialist health & treatment services addressing some of the issues which may have contributed to homeless occurring or may be a consequence;
- Emergency accommodation & support providing people with a place of welcome, warmth & safety;
- Soup runs & rough sleeper teams who are often the first point of contact for people sleeping rough.

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Appendix 1: Housing and homelessness crisis in numbers

- During one week in January 2017 (latest available figures), there were 9,104 people living in emergency accommodation, including 3,715 adults without dependents in their care and 1,517 families composed of 2,122 adults and 3,267 children. (DHPLG, January 2017).

- On the night of 7th November 2017, there were 184 people without a place to sleep in Dublin City. Unfortunately, Dublin is the only area where an official rough sleeper count takes place, making it difficult to get a countrywide rough sleeping picture. (DRHE 2017).

- According to Census 2016, a total of 6,909 people were enumerated as homeless on Census night 2016. Unlike Census 2011 this figure does not include those people living in Long Term Accommodation (LTA) which amounted to 1,772 people on Census night 2016. Including those living in LTA a direct comparison with Census 2011 reveals a 127.9% increase in homelessness in the intervening period between Census 2011 and Census 2016, representing a total of 8.678 people.

- Homelessness and housing insecurity are more acute and visible in our cities but the Simon Communities are working at capacity countrywide – in urban and rural areas.

- There are 86,799 households on the social housing waiting list. Sixty-four percent of households on the list were living in the private rented sector and 17% living with parents, relatives or friends. 4,765 households (5.8%) had at least one member considered to be homeless, a proportion which has doubled since 2013 (DHPLG, 2017).

- Social housing commitments will take time to begin to deliver housing. This is far too long for the people we work with and those at risk of homelessness. In 2017, 1,857 Local Authority and Approved Housing Body new social housing units were built.

- Average national rent now stands at €1,227. (Daft.ie Rental Report Q4 2017).

- Locked Out of the Market X (March 2018 Simon Communities) found that 93% of rental properties are beyond the reach for those in receipt of state housing support.

- Over 70,000 principle dwelling mortgage accounts are in arrears. 41% of all mortgage arrears are in arrears of over 720 days (Central Bank of Ireland, March 2018).

- At the end of December 2017, 18,257 or 15% of buy-to-let mortgages, were in arrears of more than 90 days. (Central Bank of Ireland, March 2018).

- 395,000 people are living in consistent poverty in Ireland. (CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC), 2016).

- 785,000 people are at-risk of poverty in Ireland. (CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC), 2016).

- In 2016, 21% of the population experienced two or more types of enforced deprivation. (CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC), 2016).

- According to Census 2016, there are 183,312 vacant houses nationwide.
ABSTRACT

Care Leavers’ Network Ireland written submission on children in state care and care leavers: ‘Barriers to education facing vulnerable groups’.

Committee Ref: JCES4/C/1/C/7 - 23rd March 2018

‘Care Leavers’ Network Ireland is a Peer Led Organization of Adult Who as Children Spent Time in State Care’
Introduction
In Ireland, there are over six thousand children in the care of the state (figure 1), living away from their birth homes with relatives and foster carers, in residential care homes and special care (in and beyond this jurisdiction). Although, there is currently no data to record the number of care experienced adults living in Ireland we estimate that the numbers would be more than ten thousand. Children can be placed in the care of the state voluntarily or in the presence of court orders. This can be for a multitude of reasons which include, but not limited to; Neglect, Abuse and Abandonment. Children in state care and care leavers often face barriers unique to their peers and many challenges across a range of areas including education.

Care experienced children due to their pathways to care often experience disturbances in the natural progression their peers freely enjoy. Before care, there is often a lack of engagement, poor attendance and quality of attendance can be poor due to the situation at home beyond their control. During care children can face a lack of permanency, be moved around from one foster home to another and barriers as outlined below in accessing and freely enjoying their right to education like their peers. After care again can prompt issues that other children and young adults don’t have to face, extensive form filling, obtaining documents from estranged birth family and at time having to seeking documents relating to birth family that have passed away. This vulnerable group compared to their peers are statistically less likely to complete secondary education and up to five time less likely as their peers, to go onto third level education. The Ombudsman for Children office in 2013 commissioned a study entitled; ‘Education Of Children In Care In Ireland: An Exploratory Study’.

Ironically, many of the gaps in policy identified within are again highlighted below half a decade later. Acknowledging some progress, statistically outcomes for this vulnerable groups are non-existent, the barriers identified below and within this study still effect this cohort of learners. We recommend strongly that a review of this study be conducted to follow up on the implementation of the recommendations within and where warranted, a follow up study to identify what’s working for this groups and where the issues lie.
This submission will explore some of these barriers and challenges to give the reader insight into the lived experience of the children of the Irish state and adult who as children spent time in state care. The authors have provided suggested solutions, examples of international practice and policy to provide a solution focused approach to identified issues. It would also be worth noting that in preparation of this submission the voice of care leavers, social workers, young people, relative and foster carers, principals and teachers were obtained by face to face meetings and telephone conversations. This to ensure a topical perspective of identified issues and to provide where possible examples in the form of case studies, based on factual accounts provided to the authors.

Barriers to Education: An Overview of Topical Issues

Adopted from Care and Refused a SUSI Grant – 2016

In November 2016, a care leaver made contact via there aftercare worker (Tusla) with Care Leavers’ Network Ireland (CLNI) to seek advice and support. Upon completion of their first year and moving into their second year (of four) of their undergraduate university degree course they learned that their SUSI grant application was in fact refused. The grant was refused in year two of their studies due to their adoptive grandparent (RIP) passing and in turn a family home left by way of will to their surviving children (adoptive parent / Aunts and Uncles). This asset was considered as means held by the adoptive parent as part of the SUSI grant process. Strangely, consideration was not made for the applicant entitlements to care leaver status (aftercare allowance, and aftercare support from Tusla). In February 2016, SUSI stated the applicants status as a care leaver was not being accepted as the basis for her receiving the grant. Although, the applicant was considered an ‘eligible adult’ under the Child Care (Amendment) Act, 2015.

In addition to the above facts, this was a young adult who since the age of one was in the care of the state, a child of the state. Adopted by their long-term foster carers close to their eighteen birthday, a warm a joyous occasion for this care leaver. Before the inheritance, adoption from care, and as a then non-standard SUSI grant applicant there was no issues or refusal as a care leaver. However, because of the grant renewal as an adoptive child the applicant fell into the category of ‘dependant’ applicant and thus had a standard discourse where the means of the now adoptive parents came into consideration and this caused the application to eventually be denied.

During the process of appeals the care leaver took on two-part time jobs, was studying full time and this had a profound impact of their wellbeing and mental health. Having dreamed of studying their chosen course and it all to be in jeopardy because of the grant refusal. CLNI alongside Empowering People in Care (EPIC) and various other professionals involved provided letters of support to the independent appeals board, after all other avenues of appeal were exhausted, these were submitted late December 2016 some ten months after the grant refusal, a final decision was made in February of 2017 and the grant was only then awarded by the independent appeals board.

This student, self-motivated to better their lives through education was hampered and avoidable distressed because of the prolonged twelve months of limbo. Assessed unfairly within the SUSI grant application process, due to the positive outcome of having been adopted from care.

- We recommend here the necessary legislative amendments and policy changes be reviewed and amended so students who are adopted from care enjoy the same access to SUSI grants as those who apply while in foster or residential care.
• We also recommend having a streamlined process when applying for SUSI grant support, this could form part of an internal memo, the availability of a tick-box on online and paper applications and awareness among SUSI support representatives to the category of applicant: care leavers (foster care, residential care, adoption).

School Admission Policies – Children in State Care
During the preparation of this submission the authors spoke to school principals, support staff and a foster carer with regards to the experience of children in state care with regards to school admissions. There is currently no national standard on school admission policies for children of the state, this unlike our neighbours in the United Kingdom. The Department of Education (U.K) has given local authorities the power to direct admissions to over prescribed schools with certain conditions attached, this takes away admission refusals and affords ‘looked after children’ (U.K terminology for children in foster care) top priority in school admissions.

The author upon speaking to a primary and secondary school obtained the following with regards to admission policies and practises; The secondary school we spoke to stated that even when places are taken that they have and continue to work with foster families, who have a birth of fostered child enrolled and even go as far as to work with new families to the school in the case of a child arriving during the school term, placed with a local family. That all efforts are made to accommodate these students. We also spoke to the principle of a primary school and a similar desire and past experiences were highlighted that all efforts have and would be made to accommodate where a space was available.

However, while speaking to a foster carer they outlined the experience of a child that lives with them and how the school where their birth children and another child they fostered attended, the school refused to take the second fostered child on the grounds of not having a space available. The family in question appealed this decision to the BOM, then contacted the Department of Education with the support of the child’s social worker, the family also contacted the ombudsman for children’s office as they felt this to be a rights issue.

The child was eventually provided a place and enrolled into the same school. This, after a successful S. 29 application and a mediator was appointed. The families concerns were not the additional travel to the child’s current school away from the other children it was the fact that this refusal created a barrier to the second child been fully integrated into the family, each morning putting on a different uniform they felt made the child feel as if he was different and this hampered the integration efforts by the family and social worker which was concerning due to the high number of previous care placements this child had.

• We strongly recommend a national policy for school admissions for children placed in state care, similarly to that on the U.K Department of Education.
• Given the feedback from multiple parties involved in the above example, perhaps a circular from the Department of Education and / or Tusla to all schools, would be of benefit to all.

Consent for SENO Supports and Educational Psychologist Assessments
Upon speaking with learning support teachers, they quickly expressed their concerns at the long delays in obtaining the correct parental / guardian consent required for educational assessments, SNA and SENO support for pupils placed in state care.

Given the cut off dates in the academic year for applications to local SENO’s for the allocation of SNA’s / Resource hours etc, a child can potentially go from allocated to un-allocated from one school to
another as the support rest with each school as opposed to the pupil themselves. There was grave concern expressed by learning support teachers about the needs of their pupils and their sheer frustrations and struggle to at times to ‘chase down’ social workers for the required consent for pupils.

- **Suggesting here upon admission to care that the removal of any barriers by way of a lack of consent when addressing the educational needs of a child in care.**
- **On a national level, SENO application deadlines become non-applicable to children in care due to the nature and at times lack of permanency within a placement, causing a child to be moved from one community to another and in turn a change in schools.**
- **Funding of educational assessments be covered by the Child and Family Agency, Tusla. This due to the statutory obligations placed on Tusla to provide for the needs of children placed in their care.**

**Taken a Gap Year as a Care Leaver - EPIC**

One of the barriers that face young people is they sometimes lack an ability to engage in education straight away after leaving school or their desire to maybe then take a year out / start dealing with their earlier childhood trauma / go travelling as other young people may also do. However, this is not supported currently for care leavers and can sometimes impact the aftercare that they receive if they do not initially engage or it takes them a while to figure out what they want to do etc.

By that stage aftercare may no longer be an option for them or they have ‘exhausted’ all options that they were meant to take but failed to do. Ideally aftercare support in relation to care leavers should be up until the age of 25 and if they don’t engage until they are 23, yes that is their choice but there is still a support there to encourage them to do so. And not that if they don’t initially engage they lost their chance! Would a birth child have ‘lost the chance’ to be supported by their parents because they spent two years figuring out the world and their place in it. CLNI would fully support this contribution by a Care Leaver involved in EPIC and add that we have often seen our peers reach out for supports at 20 / 21 years of age after they ‘had it all’ and it then crumbled. Pushing people into a discourse of education to be eligible for supports is unfair and doesn’t reflect a mutual desire to break the cycle many of these young adults were born into.

- **Suggesting here that amendments be made to aftercare legislation that allows for the full scale of supports to be afforded to care leavers who take a gap year, without the loss of supports and entitlements. Also noting here there would be no additional cost on the exchequer here, merely an accommodation to push out by a year the same supports.**

*EPIC* is a national independent advocacy organization for children and young adults with care experience.

**Cross-Departmental Commitment to Encourage Education Attainment**

Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection operate the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) Scheme, which is often utilized by eligible care leavers wishing to return to education and further their education. As non-standard applicants (i.e. they often live alone and in the absence of the support of birth families) should provisions be made to amend the scheme? as it currently stands to become more efficient and effective in supporting adult learners along their chosen path of study and in turn into employment post qualification. Given the requirements to switch payments during the summer months (outside the academic calendar) and to then sign back on the live register where recipients are then required to be seeking and available for full time work, which could possible effect he level of SUSI grant aid they received if their income exceed certain limits, in turn becoming a counter-productive practise. Also, the loss of the book grant since October 2012 is a great loss to
recipients, this grant often afforded students the opportunity to purchase core text books and those for adapical learning, went on necessities like stationary required during the academic years.

• Suggesting here that we examine restructuring the BTEA Scheme to include breaks taken by education providers (for example summer time) to afford recipient the opportunities to maintain SUSI grants, gain useful experience in their chosen field of study even on a voluntary basis and allow those who work to earn a limited amount to ease the financial burden of travel, parking, books, course materials, placement requirements and all extra and associated costs with their studies.

• Also, to seek a restoration on a phased basis to the book grant which is an integral necessity as part of undertaken further education. This, to also include the purchase of eBooks across different platforms and providers.

• To record by way of a tick box on BTEA applications if applicants are care leavers to help drive and inform policy for vulnerable groups, who return to education.

A National Scholarships Pathways Scheme for Care Leavers
Care Leavers are poorly represented in third level education and barriers to access, attainment and progression into chosen careers must be enhanced as a mechanism to break the cycle these adults are often born into. Poverty, is often an intertwined factor in the lives of children who experience care and continues into adulthood in the absence of pathways to education and rewarding employment. As outlined in figure 2, we can see a statistical drop in education engagement as early as sixteen years old, this is reflective among non-care experienced students although a lower percentile drops. The environment of a university or institute of technology provide for a vast array of needs; Academic, Social, Physical / Mental Health, Nutrition and Fitness

‘More than 75 per cent of care-leavers have no academic qualifications of any kind and more than 50 per cent of young people leaving care after 16 years old are unemployed’ (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2004. Routes out of Poverty; P45-46)

Currently education providers facilitate Care Leavers by way of access programs and other on-campus supports and services, although largely non-specific. Two examples could be drawn from the access program of Trinity College Dublin (TAP) and more recently launched the Carlow Access Program with the Institute of Technology Carlow, of which our network played an active role in ensuring ‘Care Leavers’ were represented well and catered for. However, we need to greatly improve, on a national level access, active participation and attainment for care leavers in third level education. Suggesting we consider and act on the following;

• A National Scholarship scheme to be designed on a non-completive basis for all Care Leavers. To include access, supports and accommodation. Breaking barriers, cycles of disadvantage, through opportunity.

• A Departmental curricular to all third level education providers which explains the needs of this vulnerable groups, ways to encourage and support care leavers on-campus and an invitation to include ‘Children in Care and Care Leavers’ on electronic and paper applications and prospective student materials.

CPD - Training Opportunities and Active Involvement for Teachers
Upon visiting primary and secondary schools, we asked about training opportunities for teachers and support staff around issues like ‘Trauma Informed Practise’ and learned that currently Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is largely led by the teachers themselves, no national standard,
requirement or funding is set out for this integral part of the teaching profession. Teachers play a massive role beyond academic in the lives of this vulnerable group, often are first recipients of the issues in birth homes, can be that one positive role model to make a profound effect in the lives of children in care and this must be valued, supported and encouraged too. Teachers we spoke to reported feeling ‘left out’ and ‘in the dark’ in matters that affect the lives of children in care, case reviews and care planning were mentioned as missed opportunities to make a valuable and insightful addition to the multi-disciplinary teams who support each child in care. Although, it was acknowledged that often a school principle would be called upon in these case, that it was the teachers who had the closest relationships with the children, knew them best and could advocate for them.

- Teachers and Learning Support staff should be considered as important professional in the lives of children in care and play an active role in multi-disciplinary activities like care planning and case reviews.
- A review of the CPD practise for the teaching profession and a national standard be introduced.
- CPD opportunities for minority / vulnerable groups in education, for all staff. This to ensure a contextual approach to issues like trauma in the classroom and behaviours associated with same.

Conclusion

There are many barriers to access and equal enjoyment of education for children in state care, many barriers for care leavers alike. Among these barriers there are many valuable opportunities to learn, to change and to facilitate the identified and presenting needs of these vulnerable groups, under represented among their peers. Upon receiving our request for submission, we were advised the best use of time for the committee is to identify the problems and in turn suggest recommendations, given the time frame we had we taught best to provide a topical insight to issues today, and to focus on tomorrows solutions for these.

We have also obtained a collective voice among care leavers, young people, their careers and many professionals working with and for these vulnerable groups. We ask that the state, the corporate parents to these 6,000 plus children greatly and to their fullest actively support this vulnerable groups. In doing so we are changing lives, saving lives and making a powerfully and fruitful investment in the future of our county. Although some elements of our recommendation may come at a cost to the exchequer, we must focus on the human cost of not investing in this vulnerable groups, possible lost generation through lack of opportunity.

Finally, in the words of the late Mr Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela;

‘Education is the most powerful weapon, which you can use, to change the world’
Appendices

Figure 1 - Source: Tusla, November 2017

Figure 2 - Source: Department of Children and Youth Affairs, September 2017
1. One Family
One Family was founded in 1972 as Cherish and provides support, information and services to people parenting alone, those sharing parenting of their children, those going through separation; as well as to people experiencing an unplanned or crisis pregnancy. One Family believes in an Ireland where every family is cherished equally, and enjoys the social, financial and legal equality to create their own positive future. Full information on One Family can be found at www.onefamily.ie.

2. Introduction
One Family works towards the full inclusion and integration of one parent families into the fabric of Irish society. Parenting alone, and sharing parenting in new complex and blended family forms, is an increasing and emergent social reality. Many parents will parent alone through the course of their lives, either temporarily or permanently. The traditional ‘breadwinner’ model of family life has given rise to most of our social and economic infrastructure and tends to ignore or evade the multiple, on-going demands of lone parenting. The first requirement, therefore, in removing barriers to economic and social inclusion is recognition and acceptance of the realities of diverse and fluctuating forms of family life. Lone parents are a group who experience multiple disadvantage in Irish society and access to education is part of that. One Family welcomes the opportunity to submit to the Joint Committee on Education & Skills and appreciates your interest in this important issue.

3. Data and Research

3.1 Demographics: one in five children in Ireland live in a one-parent family while one in four families are headed by a lone parent. There were approximately 218,817 lone parents in Ireland in 2016 which is an increase of over 3,500 families since 2011. Almost 90,000 were single; a further 50,496 were widowed, while the remaining 68,378 were separated or divorced. The number of divorced people in Ireland nationally has increased from 87,770 in 2011 to 103,895 in 2016. The vast majority (86.4%) of one-parent families are headed by mothers but many families share parenting of their children. Overall, recent Census data shows there is a steady increase in diverse families in Ireland and this is replicated throughout Europe.

3.2 Lone Parent’s access to Wealth: TASC’s The Distribution of Wealth in Ireland report indicates that one-parent families are:

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• less likely to own their own home and face significant barriers to owning property;
• have savings of €300 on average, which is less than 10% of others;
• have an average net wealth of €30,600 compared to an average figure of €218,700 for all households.

3.3 Employment Rates: Available employment figures\(^4\) indicate that the employment rate of lone parents (aged 15-64) is 58.5%, dispelling any myth that people parenting alone are not working. The employment rate of lone parents is directly linked to the age of their youngest child, as follows:
• Youngest child aged 0-5 years, employment rate is 46.8%
• Youngest child aged 6-11 years, employment rate is 59.8%
• Youngest child aged 12-17 years, employment rate is 65.6%. Therefore as children get older parents are more available for work, this is directly linked to the childcare needs of children.

3.4 Education Participation: Lone parent participation in education has decreased by approximately 20% between 2011 and 2016\(^5\). The reasons for this trend can be complex and varied, but One Family consistently hear from parents that barriers to accessing education are significant. A parent’s availability for education may also be inferred from their availability for employment as above. Both situations share many similarities in that the time and work needed to balance parenting and study/work need to be managed.

3.5 Children’s Well-Being: It is well recognised that the educational levels of parents have direct impact on the lives of their children with the educational level of a mother in particular having a direct impact on the well-being of her child/ren\(^6\). The draining away of lone parents from higher education therefore is of particular concern. The CSO notes that “higher educational attainment levels are linked with lower unemployment rates. Those with primary education/no formal education were over four times more likely to be unemployed in Q2 2017 (14%) when compared with those who had a third level qualification (3%)”.\(^7\) International research similarly shows that despite the complex interactions between parental social, economic and educational positions and conditions, the educational levels of both parents are a significant influence on the life expectations and outcomes of their children. Education is a gateway to more sustainable, quality employment which lifts lone parents out of poverty in the longer term. Educational access enables engagement with society generally, to shared customs, beliefs and behaviours, to marketable skills and professions, and


to political engagement. The children of lone parents are entitled to such supports through their parents’ access to mainstream social capital.8

3.6 Government Policy: as far back as 2006, a Government Discussion Paper: Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents, put forward a number of actions to support lone parents. Among these recommendations there was an express objective to “Facilitate participation in employment /education and training in a positive and systematic way”9.

3.7 Maynooth University Research: Twelve years later, in 2017 Maynooth University Independent Review to Identify the Supports and Barriers for Lone Parents in Accessing Higher Education and to Examine Measures to Increase Participation10 arose from a commitment made in the 2016 Programme from Government.

One Family was consulted as part of this review process as a representative stakeholder group. The recommendations of the Review echo One Family’s recent Pre-Budget Submission11. The report notes especially that while lone parents have attracted considerable policy attention in welfare, and education and training, with regard to activation measures; much less specific attention has been paid to lone parents in higher education and suggests an urgent need to widen access for these families. The need to improve access to higher and tertiary education has also been highlighted by our colleagues in An Cosáin in their recent campaign.12

The complexity of the current system of supports was also highlighted in the Review, including the inadequate dissemination of information, guidance and awareness-raising to lone parents regarding the ‘bundles’ of supports that are offered by different government departments and agencies. The effectiveness of high-support guidance intervention on well-being, career efficacy and employability factors has been shown in recent research on activation, giving rise to an urgent need to train Intreo case workers in the very complex set of opportunities and barriers facing lone parents.13

4 Barriers to Education for Lone Parents

4.1 Work Life Balance: Balancing parenting responsibilities and managing finances with accessing education is a difficult task, especially so for lone parents, who often do so with half the resources and double the responsibility.

4.2 Lack of pathway to education: there are well documented additional challenges for young parents who wish to stay in education as well as older parents.

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Further info: Mary McDermott, Social Policy Analyst | mmcdermott@onefamily.ie | Page 3
who wish to return as mature students. There is no clear pathway of progression for parents who cannot readily move from second level to third level education.

4.3 Lack of income to access education: the income supports that are in place in Ireland are overly complex to access and at insufficient levels to avoid poverty in many cases. One example is that the age of a child generates a barrier to support. Currently, if a child is over 14 yrs, transfer to BTEA is compulsory when a lone parent has moved onto Jobseekers Allowance. As a result of this forced transfer, access to a SUSI maintenance grant is denied to these parents.

4.4 Housing: Ireland is experiencing a housing crisis with most homeless families being one-parent families. If a family is living in insecure housing they are very unlikely to be able to enter or maintain participation in education. Some financial housing supports are specifically unsupported in conjunction with some educational supports and so access to education depends on housing tenure. This is both unfair and illogical. Such barriers often result from uneven and contradictory systems of support, such as the clash between being in receipt of Rental Support on the one hand, but excluded by virtue of receiving that support on the other – for example the SUSI grant.

4.5 Childcare: the challenges for parents in accessing affordable, high quality childcare for their children is well documented. It is extremely difficult to access out of school care as well which may be required for educational participation.

4.6 Inclusion: single mothers are the most socially isolated people in Ireland and particular efforts must be made to recruit and maintain them in education.

5 Recommendations to remove Educational Barriers for Lone Parents

Whilst the issue of barriers to education for parents is complex and some structural barriers such as homelessness and childcare require cross-departmental funding and exchequer investment to solve, other issues can be more directly addressed.

5.1 Income Supports:
Lone parents who have transferred to BTEA were particularly highlighted in Maynooth University’s Independent Review as the most economically vulnerable group among lone parent welfare recipients. One Family recommends the following changes to income supports to ameliorate some barriers to education for lone parents:

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The reinstatement of the student grant scheme (maintenance grant) for BTEA recipients would create a more equitable, less complicated and targeted approach for supporting lone parents in higher education.

The student grant scheme should be available for part-time and online education.

The rigidity of how SUSI classifies students as being dependent or independent causes difficulty for people parenting alone who access a different housing tenure and may lead to them losing their grant. Reassessment is only in very restricted circumstances.

We recommend that SUSI be available to parents engaging in education, regardless of the age of their youngest child (up to a limit of 18). There are several administrative options in how to achieve this. It is important that that once a lone parent is in receipt of One-Parent Family Payment/ Jobseeker’s Transition and the SUSI maintenance grant has begun that their payment continue until their course is completed.

In general, the SUSI grant should be reviewed and the levels increased. The maintenance portion of SUSI education grants only provides a contribution towards the costs of participating in education and ignores the reality of caring for children.

Additional funding for lone parents either in the form of cash transfers or in the form of universal scholarships for lone parents within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should be provided. The Department of Education’s 1916 Bursary Fund offered 200 bursaries for an overall target group of lone parents, first-time and mature student entrants, students with a disability, Travellers, Further Education Award holders, and ethnic minorities. Whilst this is a welcome start, this is actually a nominal and piecemeal response to the education needs of such a huge group of marginalised people, especially those of lone parents. Given that 25% of Irish families are one-parent families, 80 Bursaries set aside for lone parents appears as a gesture, rather than a systemic action towards genuine recognition and educational inclusion.

5.2 Complexity of Supports: the complicated nature of the current systems of supports can block access purely on a bureaucratic level. We recommend stronger dissemination of information, guidance, and awareness-raising regarding the ‘bundles’ of supports offered by different government departments and agencies to parents.

We also concur with Maynooth University’s recommendation that there is a persistent need for training and awareness for Intreо case-workers who operate frontline services and supports in the Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection16.

We are concerned that supports and payments from two government departments interact with each other in a negative way and we strongly recommend that the Department of Education & Science collaborates with the Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection in order to ensure that parents can access education irrespective of their housing tenure.

5.3 Access Pathways: Taking an education-first approach will result in improved employment rates for one-parent families in the longer term. Jobseeker’s

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16 Ibid (p.13)
Transition (JST) payment recipients are a distinct group with a specific set of needs. The time spent on JST is a unique opportunity to invest in a package of supports and services to ensure that these parents can access education or employment. Broadening access to JST will also allow parents with older children to enhance their employability through further education and training. These recommendations would remove a number of structural barriers which currently prevent lone parents from accessing education.

The provision of specialist bridging programmes such as One Family’s *New Futures* and *New Steps* for lone parents, which directly support progression, job-readiness, and incorporate wrap-around parenting and family support services, offer an example of a genuine way into heretofore exclusionary educational institutions.

6.4 Pro-Active Inclusion: Lone parents are a considerable body of potential students who are systematically excluded, since the requirements for their participation are not being met. The profile and needs of this large student cohort should be integrated explicitly into the ethos of each Higher Education Institutions (HEI). This needs to be visibly stated by colleges and universities, who have the responsibility of welcoming people who are parenting alone onto campuses. There is a need to provide lone parents with tutoring that generates both the technical skills and ‘cultural’ competencies required for higher educational engagement. Like other students, they need the tools to succeed.

While there are established Access to Higher Education programmes available across the networks of further education colleges, Institutes of Technology and Universities, there is a need to meet the specific needs of students, current and potential, who are lone parents.

6.4 Housing Tenure:

The ability to access and stay in education should not be linked to housing tenure, indeed education is a route out of homelessness into independence and security for lone parents. The following recommendations are critical for access to education for lone parents:

- Allow those in receipt of Rent Supplement to engage in full time education. This would remove a number of structural barriers which currently prevent lone parents from accessing education.
- Address the anomaly by which lone parents in receipt of Rent Supplement cannot receive their One-Parent Family Payment or Jobseeker’s Transition Payment and the SUSI maintenance grant on taking up an education or training course.
- Ensure all lone parents in receipt of Back to Education Allowance can receive the SUSI maintenance grant to help meet the costs of accessing education.

6.5 Childcare:

The provision of affordable, accessible and quality childcare, including early years and out-of-school care are pre-requisites for lone parents’ ability to engage with work or education. Childcare costs in Ireland are the highest in the OECD for lone parents.

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17 https://onefamily.ie/how-we-support-families/parenting-supports/for-parents/back-to-work-education/new-futures/
parents and the second highest for couples.\textsuperscript{18} One Family makes the following recommendations:

- Increase accessibility so that families in every county can access subsidised and affordable childcare, with particular emphasis on access to out-of-school care.
- Reach the European average of investment in early years education and care so that labour market participation for parents, mothers and lone mothers, can be a reality and their children can benefit from high quality learning. Ireland ranks lowest among 28 EU countries for investment in pre-primary education. Ireland currently invests about 0.1\% of GDP, considerably lower than the EU average of 0.8\% \textsuperscript{19}. Investment is required to address the poor infrastructure of childcare and the crisis in the lack of childcare workers.

\textbf{Ends}

\textsuperscript{18} OECD, ‘Ireland Economic Survey of Ireland’, September 2015
\textsuperscript{19} \url{https://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/latest-eu-report-highlights-irelands-embarrassing-track-record-investment-care-young-children/}
Joint Committee on Education and Skills
Submission on Barriers to Education Facing Vulnerable Groups
Department of Education and Skills
22nd March 2018

Introduction

Inclusive education is a fundamental principle of our education and training system. It is vital that all learners have the opportunity to benefit from education in order to help them fulfil their potential in life. The current over-arching policy document of the Department of Education and Skills (the Department) which gives effect to this principle is the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 which contains, at Goal 2, the objective to “to improve the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage or learners with special educational needs”. In order to achieve its vision for education to become a proven pathway to better opportunities for all learners, including those at risk of not maximising the benefits of education, the Department supports a range of interventions across the education continuum to meet individual identified educational need.

The Department’s Early Years Education Policy Unit is co-located in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to ensure that policy developments in this area are developed within an overall strategic policy framework for children. At primary and post-primary school levels there are a range of additional supports available in mainstream settings to support the identified additional learning needs of pupils and these are supplemented by further supports available under targeted support programmes such as DEIS – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, which is the Department’s main policy initiative aimed at tackling educational disadvantage, and the New Resource Allocation Model to support learners with Special Educational Needs. Other supports are available within the curriculum such as the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. The JCSP operates in 226 schools throughout the country and is aimed at students identified as being at risk of being socially or academically isolated or at risk of early school leaving before completing the Junior Certificate. The LCA is a two year programme aimed at preparing students for adult and working life with courses being offered in three main areas: vocational preparation; general education; and vocational education.

Equity of access to higher education is a fundamental principle of Irish education policy, and one that has been endorsed by successive governments in policy statements and commitments over the past thirty years as a national priority. Most recently, equity of access is identified as a core national objective for the higher education system in the Department of Education and Skills’ Higher Education System Performance Framework (SPF) 2018-2020. The System Performance Framework (SPF) for higher education institutions sets out a range of high-level system indicators to assess and measure the higher education system’s performance in this priority area. Specifically, one of the main objectives of the SPF is ‘to promote access for disadvantaged groups and to put in place coherent pathways from second-level education, from further education and other non-traditional entry routes’. The overall strategy in relation to equity of access as set out in the overall strategic framework is articulated in the National Access Plan. The third National Access Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2015 – 2019) was launched in December 2015. The vision of this Plan is
to ensure that the student body entering into, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland’s population.

The Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-19 contains 5 strategic goals, one of which is to support the active inclusion of all citizens in society including the most disadvantaged and those who are marginalised and from vulnerable groups of society. The goal of active inclusion complements the strategic goal of providing skills for the economy through addressing the current and future needs of learners and employers. SOLAS is committed in the FET Strategy to conducting a series of evaluations of FET programmes to improve the quality, impact and relevance of provision. Details in relation to the FET Strategy and Solas were set out in our recent submission on Education Inequality and Disadvantage to the Committee on 6th February. It is also worth noting that adult education programmes delivered by the Education and Training Board sector provide opportunities to tackle the cumulative effects of learning failure and remedy past deficiencies while at the same time delivering a range of economic and social benefits for many individuals, employers and the state.

The Department is also involved in the inter-Departmental delivery of key Government strategies such as the National Migrant Integration Strategy and the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy and is working collaboratively with other Government Departments and agencies to deliver targeted supports to meet the identified educational needs of learners from these groups in the education system.

In preparing this submission for the Joint Committee, the Department has aimed to provide the Committee with as much relevant material as possible in relation to the delivery of specific programmes and supports to those groups particularly identified by the Committee - such as lone parents, travellers, refugees and asylum seekers. Links to the areas of the Department’s website which contain additional information on relevant broader overall supports are also provided for the general information of the Committee and to provide a context to the specific supports detailed in this submission.

1. **Early Years Education**

Quality and effective early years’ education can play a key role in school readiness and early engagement with education for all children and particularly those from groups where there is a background of poor engagement and early school leaving.

To support the quality of the education element of early years provision the Department’s Inspectorate carries out **Early Years Education-focused Inspections** in early years services participating in the **Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme**. The Inspectorate evaluate the quality of the nature, range and appropriateness of the early educational experiences for children participating in the ECCE. Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, is responsible for inspecting pre-schools, play groups, day nursery, creches and similar services which cater for children aged 0-6 years.

**Effective transitions** are important at all stages of the education continuum, and particularly so between early years provision and primary school. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has completed work on a **Transition Initiative** involving a network of preschools and primary schools and is beginning the process of amending draft templates based on the findings from the Initiative. The templates will be designed to support children in their transition from
preschool to primary school and provide a mechanism for early years’ practitioners to transfer appropriate and relevant information relating to a child’s learning and development to their junior infant teachers. It is intended that these will be published for use by pre-schools in 2018. Building on the recommendations arising from the Transition Initiative report, NCCA, this Department and DCYA will consider approaches to awareness raising, training and support for both practitioners and teachers to use the templates as part of a broader meaningful engagement on this important transition for children. There is also ongoing work in the context of the transition of children from pre-school into primary school. Templates and research to support this transition have been developed and consulted on by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in 2017. Work is also being carried out under the AIM initiative which supports the participation of children with a disability in the ECCE programme (pre-school). The Early Years Specialist Service, Better Start and the NCSE are agreeing transition processes and arrangements. The Transitions Initiative report is available on www.ncca.ie

The Department’s Early Years Education Policy Unit plays a support role in the ongoing development of the Better Start Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) which was launched in June 2016 by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). This is a model of supports designed to ensure that children with disabilities can access the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. The model was developed and agreed by DCYA, this Department and the Department of Health. Figures to the end of 2017 reveal that a total of 3,344 children participating in the ECCE programme have benefited from AIM; all activity under AIM is now funded by DCYA.

The Department, through the work of the Early Years Education Policy unit, continues to provide support to the AIM model through participation in both the project team on developments such as AIM Inclusive Play (AIP) Resources (6000 packs to be delivered to ECCE services nationally in 2018) and the Training working group convened to develop further training programmes in 2018.

An independent End of Year One Review of AIM is currently underway. The Review will gather information reflecting the experiences of the children, parents and pre-school practitioners participating in AIM as well as information from disability representative organisations and key stakeholders involved in delivering AIM supports in the first year of AIM implementation (i.e., from September 2016 to June 2017). It will also cover AIM implementation from September 2017. The Review is expected to take six months to complete and the Department intend to publish the completed report.

2. DEIS Plan 2017

DEIS – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, is the Department’s main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage. Comprehensive details of the recent review of the Programme and of DEIS Plan 2017 were included in the Department’s recent submission to the Committee on Education Inequality and Disadvantage (February, 2018). These are summarised below:

The new DEIS Plan seeks to build on what has already been achieved by schools who have benefitted from the additional supports available under the initial DEIS programme introduced in 2005. The ambition set out in DEIS Plan 2017 is for Ireland to become the best in Europe at harnessing education to break down barriers and stem the cycle of inter-generational disadvantage by equipping learners to participate, succeed and contribute effectively to society.
DEIS Plan 2017 focuses on prioritising the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities and is based on the findings of a comprehensive review of the DEIS programme, which involved extensive consultations with all relevant stakeholders and resulted in the publication of the Report of the Review on DEIS. The Review examined all aspects of DEIS including the range and impact of different elements of the supports provided under DEIS, the potential for innovation within and between schools and the scope for increased integration of services provided by other Departments and Agencies in order to improve the effectiveness of the range of interventions deployed. Based on the findings of this review, DEIS Plan 2017 was published.

The two key elements of the 2017 Plan are:

- The development of a new identification process for the assessment of schools in terms of the socio-economic background of their pupil cohort using centrally held data including DES Primary Online (POD) and Post Primary (PPOD) Databases combined with the CSO Small Area of Population (SAP) statistics from the National Census of Population as represented by the Pobal HP Deprivation Index (HP Index).
- The updating of the DEIS School Support Programme which represents the overall suite of supports available to schools participating in the programme in order to improve educational outcomes for pupils at greatest risk of not reaching their full potential by virtue of their socio-economic circumstances.

The Plan sets out, as a series of Actions, the details of an updated DEIS School Support Programme which builds on existing supports available to schools. For the first time, specific targets have been set in key areas such as Literacy and Numeracy, School Completion Rates and progression to Further and Higher Education.

In order to achieve these targets, DEIS Plan 2017 has 5 key goals, which are:

- Goal 1 - To implement a more robust and responsive Assessment Framework for identification of schools and effective resource allocation
- Goal 2 - To improve the learning experience and outcomes of pupils in DEIS Schools
- Goal 3 - To improve the capacity of school leaders and teachers to engage, plan and deploy resources to their best advantage
- Goal 4 - To support and foster best practice in schools through inter-agency collaboration
- Goal 5 - To support the work of schools by providing the research, information, evaluation and feedback to achieve the goals of the plan

Key Actions of DEIS Plan 2017 include:

• Strengthening of the engagement between pre-schools and primary schools in communities;
• Establishment by Education and Training Boards of formal outreach arrangements with DEIS schools to encourage access through its existing education pathways to ensure continued engagement with education and training;
• Formal arrangements to ensure cooperation between schools and other service providers to support improved transitions through the school system and onwards to further and higher education;
• Access to a dedicated career guidance counsellor for all DEIS Post-primary schools;
• Greater prioritisation of National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) service to DEIS schools;
• Learning from ABC Programmes (under the remit of Department of Children and Youth Affairs) to be disseminated to DEIS schools for incorporation into teaching and learning where appropriate;
• Improved inter-agency working to achieve more effective supports in and around schools in areas such as In-School Speech and Language Therapy, School Meals, Home School Community Liaison, School Completion Programme and linkages with community, sporting and youth services;
• DEIS School Plans, to set specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time specific targets and to evaluate these annually.
• A renewed focus on attendance, participation and retention of Travellers, Roma and other students at risk of poor engagement with education and early school leaving.
• A review of English language supports in post-primary schools to improve access to the curriculum for students at this level.

There are now 902 schools in the DEIS Programme – 704 Primary and 198 Post Primary, with the Department investing over €125m in 2018 in the range of additional supports provided to DEIS schools. These supports are detailed in the DEIS Plan.

At the heart of the DEIS initiative is the requirement, and opportunity, for schools to determine their own needs, set their own targets, and use resources as they think best to target those students most at risk of educational disadvantage. There is a strong focus on literacy and numeracy and improving educational outcomes in these key areas with many of the actions in DEIS providing support in these areas.

The Plan also recognises the need for improved interagency working to achieve more effective delivery of the range of supports that are important to DEIS schools. Accordingly actions aimed at improving the school-readiness of preschool children, increasing the effectiveness of behavioural and therapeutic supports and integrating services that support school attendance, retention and progression are included. Actions in relation to school attendance and retention come under the remit of the Educational Welfare Service of TUSLA. Another important element of the supports offered to schools under DEIS is the School Meals Programme through which DEIS schools are prioritised by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.
Student Transition and Retention

As set out in our previous submission to the Committee on Education Inequality and Disadvantage, the latest Retention Report\(^3\) issued by the Department’s Statistics Unit shows an increase in Leaving Certificate retention rate for DEIS schools from 82.7% for the 2009 student cohort up to 84.41% for the 2010 cohort. Since 2005, non-DEIS schools Leaving Cert retention rate has been between 91.7% and 92.9% while the retention rate has increased from 78.4% to 84.4% for DEIS schools for the same period. While this represents a strong increase and a narrowing of the gap between DEIS and non-DEIS schools, it is evident that a gap still remains.

In relation to early school leaving, it may be noted that the EU2020 headline target for early school leaving is <10%. The national target set by Ireland is 8% and the EU average is currently 10.6% (2017). Ireland’s current share of early school leavers (i.e. 18-24 year olds with at most lower secondary education and not in further education and training) fell from 10.8% in 2011 to 6.1% in 2017 representing very positive progress in excess of Ireland’s target. Retention rates for DEIS schools have improved significantly since the introduction of DEIS. However, despite already exceeding our EU2020 early school leaving targets, a gap still remains between DEIS and non-DEIS schools. In order to continue to address this, there is a strong emphasis in DEIS Plan 2017 on supporting transitions across the education continuum and providing the necessary supports to ensure students complete their second level education and progress on to further and higher education.

The **Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL)** and the **School Completion Programme (SCP)** are two key supports for DEIS schools in these areas and operate as part of the integrated Educational Welfare Service (EWS) under the remit of Tusla. Tusla, which is the dedicated state agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children, works collaboratively with this Department to ensure that children’s participation in the education system is maximised. The underlying vision and thrust of the HSCL Scheme is preventative; therefore, it seeks to promote and develop real partnership between parents, schools and communities, in order to enhance pupils’ outcomes and learning opportunities, through improved attendance, participation and retention in the education system. Central to the HSCL initiative, is the identification of educational needs and the provision of a tailored and proportionate response to those needs, through a range of interventions, which are evidence-based, focused and structured. All DEIS Urban primary schools and all post primary schools are currently included in the HSCL scheme, which extends to 539 schools.

HSCL Coordinators also play a key role in effecting successful transitions through the education system – from pre-school to primary school, from primary school to secondary level, within second level from Junior to Senior Cycle, and onwards through appropriate pathways to further and higher education. The role of the HSCL coordinator is to empower parents to support their child’s education and to ensure parents are linked in with the various stages of the education continuum by facilitating engagement between teaching and other staff and parents.

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There has been a particular emphasis in the Irish context on the adoption of a whole school approach, which is recognised internationally, to enable schools respond to new and complex challenges linked to increasing diversity in society. This involves the entire school community (school Principals, teaching and non-teaching staff, learners, parents and families) in a cohesive, collective and collaborative engagement with external stakeholders and the community at large to effect better outcomes for all.

3. **Traveller and Roma Children**

The 2017 ESRI report “A Social Portrait of Travellers in Ireland” points to links between the employment prospects of Travellers and poor school attendance. It also states that Travellers face exceptionally strong levels of prejudice and that this plays a significant role in their access to the labour market.

As mentioned above, DEIS Plan 2017 includes specific actions in relation to Traveller and Roma education to promote improvements in school attendance and completion in order to improve educational outcomes and overall life chances for Traveller and Roma children and young people. The actions in relation to Travellers and Roma reflect the need for improved collaboration between the Department, Tusla and Traveller representative groups to achieve these objectives. At present, separate achievement data is not collected for Traveller and Roma pupils so it is not possible to establish the impact of the additional resources currently provided for them. This is an issue to be addressed in the context of the DEIS Plan 2017 Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to provide an evidence-base for future interventions.

A number of Traveller-specific supports remain in the system, which were introduced to facilitate the mainstreaming of all traveller pupils who had previously received their education under segregated provision. These supports include 141 alleviation resource teacher posts for schools with significant numbers of Travellers at a current cost of €8.46 million as well as additional pupil capitation for Travellers (at a rate of €70 per pupil for Primary, and €201 per pupil for Post Primary) at a cost of €1.11m. The Department has also introduced a number of specific initiatives to encourage the participation of under-represented groups, including Travellers and Roma, in higher education such as the establishment of a €5.7m “Higher Education Access Fund” to support students from under-represented groups, including Travellers, to access higher education.

In June 2017 the new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 (NTRIS) was published by the Minister for Justice and Equality following extensive consultation with Government Departments, agencies and relevant stakeholders. The Department of Education and Skills was a key participant in the development of this strategy and is participating in the Steering Group which was established to oversee the implementation of the actions contained therein. The education actions developed to improve outcomes for Traveller and Roma focus on access, participation and retention across the continuum, together with culture and identity.

**Access, participation and retention**

The most significant issue for Traveller and Roma children in the education system is that of school attendance, retention and participation. The statutory and policy remit in this area lies with the Educational Welfare Service of Tulsa which incorporates the function of the former Visiting Teacher
Service for Travellers which was disbanded as a separate service in 2011. Tulsa’s Educational Welfare Service (EWS) is currently developing a 2 Year Pilot Programme to target this issue in collaboration with this Department, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Department of Justice and Traveller and Roma representative groups, within the framework of the Education Sub Group of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy Implementation Group, which is chaired by the Department of Justice and Equality.

**Culture and identity**

The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy includes specific actions identified to address issues relating to Traveller and Roma culture, identity and heritage.

The Department currently supports awareness of Traveller culture through the curriculum and related initiatives in a number of ways, e.g. through the Primary SPHE syllabus, in its 'Myself and Others' strand and the Irish Traveller Movement’s Yellow Flag programme for schools which is an award for schools promoting intercultural understanding and celebrating diversity. It also continues to support the Holocaust Education Trust of Ireland (HETI) in providing some training for teachers which includes the Roma genocide by the Nazis. Holocaust education in Ireland has a strong basis in human rights and will invariably link historical issues to a better understanding of modern challenges facing minority groups such as Travellers in Ireland and Roma more generally.

At primary level, a curriculum is currently being developed in ‘Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics’. It is intended that the curriculum will help children to understand the cultural heritage of the major forms of religion, belief traditions and worldviews. It aims to support children in schools to live in and contribute positively to a diverse world.

The Framework Junior Cycle offers schools greater scope to shape learning experiences and develop short courses to suit students’ needs; where appropriate, this can certainly include provision for, and adaptation of the curriculum to best suit the needs and interests of Travellers and Roma. Organisations such as the Irish Traveller Movement, the Yellow Flag programme or Pavee Point may develop short courses (Junior Cycle - JC) or modules (JC or Transition Year - TY) that promote awareness of Traveller and Roma culture.

Since 2016, the reconfigured initial teacher-education programmes focuses on building teacher capacity to achieving learning outcomes applying knowledge of the individual potential of students, their disposition towards learning and their backgrounds, identities and learning styles to their teaching; assessment of learner needs and evaluation of progress. The programme also focuses on classroom management strategies for differentiated learning as well as knowledge and understanding of themes such as inclusion and diversity and how these are related to life experiences.

### 4. Migrants

The Migrant Integration Strategy (MIS) launched by the Department of Justice and Equality in February, 2017 identifies barriers to integration and education for migrants as well as a number of
specific education related actions. The main barriers to education identified relate to language and access to Third level education.

**Language**

At primary and post-primary levels, additional language support is provided for students who do not speak English as their first language. English as an Additional Language (EAL) resources are designed to allow individual students to participate in mainstream education on a par with their peers. The unique position of students in examination years and at senior cycle in post-primary school is recognised by the additional weighting afforded to them when applying for ongoing EAL support. This is to meet the additional requirements for proficiency in academic, as well as more basic or conversational, English, which is necessary at that stage in education. The provision of EAL supports also serves as a targeted response to potential early school leaving amongst migrant students.

The EAL Support Team from the Department’s Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) offer a range of supports to teachers. The work of the PDST is complemented by the work of the English Language Support Teachers Association. The EAL Assessment Toolkit which provides teachers with tests of English language proficiency for use with pupils for whom English is a second language requires some modification to make it more efficient and user-friendly and this work is currently being undertaken by the Department in conjunction with relevant education partners. In relation to exams, EU migrants can also present for a non-curricular examination in any of the other EU languages. This non-curricular language initiative contributes to encouraging students to maintain proficiency in their heritage language. Under the reformed Junior Cycle, schools may develop short courses for study in a range of topics, including new languages and cultures.

Adult migrants can access English language tuition in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), classes provided under the National Adult Literacy Programme through the Education and Training Boards (ETBs). Some ESOL tuition is also funded through the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI).

Goal two of the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 focusses on Active Inclusion and includes the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, one element of which is to provide a clear policy for the provision of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) for low-skilled and unemployed migrants and to assess language competency level on entry of ESOL learners to ETB provision. The SOLAS and ETBI report on English language provision and language assessment for low-skilled and unemployed migrants was published in February, 2018 outlines recommendations for good practice in ESOL provision. This report focusses on low-skilled and unemployed migrants, and together with its recommendations, provides a solid foundation to inform decision making on ESOL provision at levels 1-3 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

**Access to Further and Higher Education**

The current system of access to further education and training and Third level can be a barrier for some categories of migrants. At present non-Irish nationals in the following categories are entitled to free access to Further Education courses (Post Leaving Certificate (PLC), Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), Youthreach, the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI), Adult Literacy and Community Education) on the same basis as Irish nationals:
- EU Nationals;
- persons who have refugee status in Ireland;
- persons in the State as the spouse of an EU national, where the EU national has moved from one country to another within the EU to work;
- persons (including their spouse and children) who have been granted leave to remain in the State on humanitarian grounds;
- persons who have permission to remain in the State as the parents of a child born in Ireland;
- persons in the protection process who have been granted permission to work in Ireland.

The Department also oversees a pilot scheme to support school leavers who are in the protection process in accessing further and higher education.

**Post primary-aged migrants and unaccompanied minors**

Participation in education can be challenging for newly arrived migrants and unaccompanied minors due to language barriers and levels of previous engagement in education prior to arriving in Ireland. The City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB) supports these migrants through its Migrant Access Programme (MAP). This is a transition programme to prepare newly arrived migrants and refugees, including unaccompanied minors aged 14 – 18 for post primary school in Ireland, offering English, Maths, basic IT skills, and Lifeskills classes, after-school activities and intercultural exchange and summer programmes. The MAP operates an ongoing intake and progression policy and runs for 42 weeks in the year, from September to the end of July. Students transfer into mainstream education depending on individual circumstances, including level of English, previous education background, personal circumstances.

5. **Homelessness**

Children who experience homelessness face barriers which impact on their ability to engage with their learning, their peers and to reach their full potential academically. Such barriers may include unmet basic needs, psychosocial needs as well as academic needs:

A range of resources are available from the Department to support schools in dealing with identified additional educational needs, including those needs which may arise for children who are experiencing homelessness.

The staff of schools are very sensitive to the needs of children who are experiencing disruption in their lives and make every effort to support the additional needs they experience. Where they are aware of homelessness and where it is impacting on school attendance and participation they may engage with the Educational Welfare Service of Tusla and with the support services of the Department and in particular those of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).

Identification of Need and Early Intervention and Prevention Strategies are considered key components to supporting children who experience homelessness. NEPS works with schools in this area through the DES Continuum of Support framework. Students facing homelessness may have the same emotional needs and learning needs as other students, but the immediacy of those needs is heightened. NEPS psychologists can provide advice and guidance to Principals and teachers in relation to individual students needs and at a systems level in the development of a culture and
environment which supports connectedness and provides structure and stability, key elements which underpin learning and opportunity.

NEPS has played a central role in the development and promotion of the interdepartmental (DES, DH and HSE) Well-Being in Post Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (2013) and the Well-Being in Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (2015). These initiatives provide schools with a framework to develop a holistic climate to support wellbeing and support pupil mental health. In addition, NEPS psychologists support schools to implement early-intervention and prevention programmes, such as the Incredible Years Programme in Primary Schools and resilience building programmes, such as the FRIENDS Programmes at Primary and Post Primary levels.

DEIS schools may use their DEIS supports to meet the additional identified educational needs that may arise for pupils experiencing homelessness. These schools can also avail of Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) and School Completion Programme (SCP) supports provided by Tusla’s Educational Welfare Service (EWS) to improve school attendance, retention and progression which can be areas of particular challenge to pupils experiencing homelessness.

6. Alternatives to Mainstream Education

As set out in the previous submission to the Committee on Education Inequality and Disadvantage, while this Department’s policy is to support students in mainstream provision, it also provides supports in a number of out of school settings. This is delivered through schools and centres such as Oberstown Children Detention Campus, Tusla Special Care Centres, Youth Encounter Projects, Line Projects and Life Centres. Education is provided in these centres for children aged 12 to 17 who for a period of time are not in mainstream education. Supports are also provided through the Education and Training Board (ETB) sector to other out of school education providers such as Youthreach.

The national Youthreach programme is provided by the 16 ETBs and aims to help young people mainly in the 16-20 age group to make the transition from school to work through the provision of co-ordinated foundation training, education and work experience. Its beneficiaries are young people who find it most difficult to make the transition from school to work. There are 110 Youthreach education centres and 35 Community Training Centres, mostly located in disadvantaged areas. The age eligibility criteria may be extended up to age 25 as an exception in the case of lone parents, learners released from detention, Drug Court participants and individuals who have less than upper second level education and whose personal circumstances are such that the centre programme is the most appropriate option for them to pursue.

Youthreach is a full time programme, generally of two years duration. It is delivered in out-of-school settings nationwide. These are intended to be dynamic settings capable of innovation. A pillar of Youthreach is local centre management which enhances local responses to local social, economic and cultural environments and needs. The Youthreach programme aims to provide early school leavers with the knowledge, skills and confidence required to participate fully in society and progress to further education, training and employment. The precise configuration of the programme in each location is a matter to be decided locally and will be determined by individual learner and community needs and potential. In a needs-based service it is the learners’ needs that must define
the curriculum rather than the competencies and preferences of providers. Innovation and creativity are encouraged in the development of centre programmes and should utilise projects, collaborative learning and make extensive use of the physical and social environment in which the centre operates. The ESRI has been commissioned by SOLAS to conduct an evaluation of the national Youthreach programme. The evaluation is currently underway and is scheduled for completion later this year. The purpose of the evaluation is to generate policy-relevant knowledge concerning the outputs and outcomes of the Youthreach programme (i.e. Youthreach centres and Community Training Centres) and the effectiveness of this provision.

Another alternative to mainstream education is Youth Encounter Projects (YEPs), which provide educational facilities for children who have either become involved in minor delinquency, or are at risk of same, and have become alienated from the mainstream school system. There are five such schools, three in Dublin, one in Cork and one in Limerick. They are non-residential and each caters for up to 25 pupils aged between 10 to 16 years. A pupil may be referred to one of these schools by a number of agencies or by the Courts system. The schools have additional resources to provide a comprehensive life-skills programme in addition to the normal curriculum.

Action 88 of DEIS Plan 2017 provides for a review of current out of school provision to inform future policy in this area. Work on the implementation of this action has commenced with the establishment of a Working Group chaired by the Department and including representatives from Tusla and the ETB sector. It will identify the needs of the cohort of children who have disengaged with the mainstream education system or are at risk of doing so, in order to develop pathways for them and maintain their engagement within the education system. The Working Group are conducting a stakeholder consultation process, and as part of this the Department is currently inviting submissions from interested parties on the provision of education for young people (aged 6-16) who have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from mainstream education. The Working Group will also consult with young people currently in receipt of or have passed through this provision. The Department intends to publish a report on the outcome of these deliberations later this year.

7. **Home Tuition for Student on Maternity Related Absences**

As part of its overall Home Tuition Scheme, the Department provides funding for a home tuition scheme for students who are enrolled in a recognised school at post primary level and whose education may be disrupted due to pregnancy. 90 hours home tuition are provided under this scheme. The purpose of the Maternity Related Home Tuition Scheme is to provide a compensatory educational service for female students at Post Primary level who, due to their pregnancy, are unable to attend school. All applicants must have a current school place at Post Primary level. Maternity related Home Tuition is intended as an interim provision to assist female students to complete their education at second level. Where a female student is unable to attend school for a period before or after the birth of her child, the Department may sanction a grant to the parent/guardian or the student herself, if she is over 18 years old, to engage a suitably qualified tutor to provide up to 9 hours home tuition per week. The tuition can take place for 6 months from the date of sanction or to the end of the school year, whichever is the longer. The maximum number of hours that are granted under this scheme is 90 hours home tuition.
8. Increase participation and improve access routes to Further Education

As noted in our previous submission to the Committee of February, 2018 on Education Inequality and Disadvantage, the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-19 contains 5 strategic goals. One of these goals is to support the active inclusion of all citizens in society including the most disadvantaged and those who are marginalised and from vulnerable groups of society. The goal of active inclusion complements the strategic goal of providing skills for the economy through addressing the current and future needs of learners and employers.

The FET sector is implementing the active inclusion goal through the provision of supports to enable participation on the full range of programmes available as well as providing certain dedicated programmes to assist groups such as early school leavers and people with disabilities. FET also provides a range of literacy, numeracy and basic skills provision to support adult learners engage with society, progress in education and training and move towards employment. FET also has a central role in providing a more diverse set of options for school leavers, particularly through the development of the Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) programme and the expansion of options in apprenticeship and traineeship.

SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority, are also undertaking a programme of research and evaluation to improve the quality of the planning and delivery of FET.

FET Provision

Further Education and Training provides over 300,000 learning opportunities in programmes from level one to level six on the National Framework for Qualifications through the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and other partners. The table below sets out the range of FET provision available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme Type</th>
<th>Beneficiaries (numbers at 1 January 2017 plus all starter during the year)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Time Programmes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016+ Apprenticeships</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship Training (Pre-2016)</td>
<td>9,075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blended Training</td>
<td>585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging &amp; Foundation Training</td>
<td>813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Training Centres (part of the national Youthreach programme)</td>
<td>3,408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice Workshops</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Training Initiatives</td>
<td>4,097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Leaving Certificate</td>
<td>53,586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist Training Programmes</td>
<td>3,813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Skills Training</td>
<td>13,805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme</td>
<td>7,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youthreach</td>
<td>7,696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Full Time</strong></td>
<td><strong>104,398</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 2017 FET provided for a budget allocation of almost €638m for SOLAS funded FET provision. There was a total number of 324,503 opportunities made available to learners from SOLAS funded FET programmes and services in 2017. Approximately 60% of all provision was for individuals that require introductory level courses/ supports (across FET programmes up to level four on NFQ or equivalent) to assist them with progression to further education and to employment over a longer timeframe. However, as these are typically part time and less intensive programmes, they account for a smaller proportion of the total expenditure.

Of the 324,503 total places made available, 54,189 were specifically for the provision of Community Education. One of Community Education’s primary purposes is to facilitate (re)engagement in the learning process by those who are distant from education and the labour market. Community education also assists learners with a disability to participate in FET provision by adapting course content, resources and teaching methodologies to suit their abilities/needs.

**Barriers to Participation**

SOLAS published a national research project in 2017 that examined the extrinsic and intrinsic barriers to participation in FET. This included the identification of barriers to the participation of specific groups who are experiencing socio-economic exclusion and distance from education and/or the labour market. These groups specifically include the under 25’s, the long term unemployed, people with disabilities, and members of migrant communities.

The research centred around four main themes; motivational/dispositional, economic/social welfare, organisational and informational/guidance. The summarised areas for consideration include:

- Addressing the challenges of these specific cohort groups
- Reducing the complexity in the FET system
- Ensuring a clarity around the availability of social welfare while attending FET
- Clearly defining the entry requirements, course requirements, and the direct benefits of participating in a FET course for the learner
- Proactive engagement with all stakeholders, educators, and employers in an ongoing dialogue at national and regional level
- Outreach to employers and engaging them in a dialogue
• Strategic and targeted communications clearly defining the identity and the role of SOLAS in FET
• A clear overarching message to individuals from the cohorts identified in this research that FET is a direct pathway to employment or higher education.

As part of the annual Further Education and Training 2018 service planning process, the ETB sector funding applications to SOLAS will be required to provide details on existing and new initiatives to address barriers to FET.

**FET Programme Evaluations**

SOLAS is committed in the FET Strategy to conducting a series of evaluations of FET programmes to improve the quality, impact and relevance of provision. The first of the FET programme evaluations, carried out by the ESRI, examined the effectiveness of the Post Leaving Certificate programme. ESRI identified that PLC learners are more likely to be from less educated family backgrounds and have a higher incidence of special education needs than those who go directly to higher education.

The ESRI Report and the SOLAS response were published last month by the Minister. The evaluation confirms the positive role played by PLC provision in providing educational opportunities for a diverse group of learners and in enhancing their access to employment and higher education. Programme outcomes (employment and progression) were found to be broadly positive and particularly when examined against a matched group for counterfactual purposes. The study found that PLC learners are on average 16% more likely to be in employment compared to direct labour market entrants with the Leaving Certificate. They were 27% more likely to progress to higher education than those with the Leaving Certificate who went directly to the labour market. Those with job specific PLC qualifications were around 24% more likely to be in employment (in 2015) than direct labour market entrants.

Set out in the SOLAS Response are 45 recommendations for implementation to improve the quality of the learner experience, learner outcomes and overall programme efficiency.

A SOLAS led PLC Programme Improvement Advisory Committee, comprised of PLC partners has been established to oversee development and implementation of a three year programme improvement plan, based on the recommendations set out in the SOLAS response, which include the development of a framework for appropriate learner supports as well as a review of the distribution of PLC places, taking into account a number of factors including the deprivation index. The first meeting of the PIAC has recently taken place.

The programme of evaluations is continuing with work well underway on the evaluation of the Youthreach (by ESRI) and work also commenced on a combined evaluation of Vocational Training and Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) and the Specific Skill Training programmes.

**Apprenticeship and Traineeship**

The Government is conscious of the need to offer a wider range of post school options to learners. A key element of its approach is the expansion of the apprenticeship system into a range of new sectors of the economy as set out in the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland. The targets set out in the plan are below.
A total of 4,843 apprentices were newly registered in 2017 (4,508 on craft programmes and 335 on new programmes), along with 2,718 trainees.

**New Apprenticeships**

Budget 2018 allocated €122m for apprenticeship training which will support the delivery of 10 new apprenticeship programmes and over 6,000 more apprenticeship registrations in 2018 alone. To date eleven new apprenticeship programmes have been developed in:

- Insurance Practice,
- Industrial Electrical Engineering,
- Polymer Processing Technology,
- Manufacturing Technology,
- Manufacturing Engineer,
- Accounting Technician,
- Commis Chef,
- Two programmes in International Financial Services (Associate & Specialist)
- Two in ICT (Network Engineer and Software Developer which will get underway shortly).
Further new apprenticeships are to be submitted for validation to QQI shortly and, subject to successful validation, are expected to get underway in 2018. In addition a further 26 new apprenticeship programmes have recently been approved for further development into national apprenticeships. These programmes span a wide range of skills and sectors including construction, engineering, horticulture and agriculture. All of the new apprenticeships are flexible, ranging in duration from two years to four years and will be offered at levels 5 to 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications. It is estimated that the development process will take between 12 and 15 months.

**Promotional Campaign**

A digital campaign to promote apprenticeship is now underway with a dedicated Twitter feed #GenerationApprenticeship, a new apprenticeship website www.apprenticeship.ie, an Apprenticeship Ireland Facebook page and a LinkedIn page. The campaign seeks to promote the values of the apprenticeship model for both employers and prospective apprentices.

The campaign has also been designed to influence parents, teachers and potential apprentices on the career path and further educational opportunities emanating from apprenticeships programmes. In addition, the Education & Training Board SOLAS Authorised Officers play a critical role in promoting apprenticeship by visiting employers, schools and attending career fairs.

**Review of Pathways to Participation in Apprenticeships**

Furthermore as set out in the Action Plan, the Department in conjunction with SOLAS, is currently reviewing the pathways to participation in apprenticeship in a range of diverse groups which are expected to include:

- lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex young and older people
- travellers and Roma
- children in care
- migrants
- people with disabilities
- people from lower socio-economic groups
- ex-offenders
- women and girls

The review, which commenced last year, will be completed later this year.

**Traineeships**

Traineeships are between 6 to 20 months in duration, with at least 30% of learning being on-the-job and lead to a level 4 to 6 award on the National Framework of Qualifications. To date the following 8 new traineeships have been developed:

- Hospitality (level 4 & 5),
- Engineering (level 4 & 5)
- Digital Sales and Marketing
- Interior Systems
A new Five-Step Guide to Traineeship was launched on 16 November aimed at employers seeking practical information on how to develop a traineeship within their company. As part of expansion of traineeship nationally, the eligibility requirements have been expanded to include a broader group of potential participants, including those who are in employment. Trainees may include school leavers, older learners, those in employment and those who are unemployed.

9. Higher Education Equity of Access

Current Department policy on access to Higher Education includes a strong focus on access by under-represented groups:

Students with Disabilities

The current National Access Plan (NAP) 2014-2019 set an overall target for entry by people with a disability. In numerical terms the percentage target represents an increase in the region of 1,200 in the number of undergraduate new entrants with disabilities over the lifetime of the NAP.

The HEA and the DES are committed to continuing to support students and to ensure that all students with disabilities can access and participate in higher education on an equal basis.

The Department provides supports to assist students from under-represented groups, including students with a disability, to participate in higher education. In particular, the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) provides funding to students for the delivery of key services, reasonable accommodations and supports for learners with disabilities. The aim is to ensure that these students can participate fully in education or an equal basis with their peers. The FSD was reviewed in 2017 and the implementation of the recommendations is being considered.

Lone Parents

The report on ‘An Independent Review to Identify the Supports and Barriers for Lone Parents in Accessing Higher Education and to Examine Measures to Increase Participation’ was published in August 2017.

The Programme for a Partnership Government contained a commitment to prepare a report on the barriers to lone parents accessing higher education, and to publish the report’s recommendations. On foot of the completed report, a cross Departmental group was established, and its first meeting, chaired by the Department of Education and Skills, was held in January to respond to the recommendations of the review.

The Minister for Education and Skills announced two measures in Budget 2017 that affect lone parents:

- Making available €1m to support the recommendations from the review of lone parents
- Making available €1m for 100 bursaries (€10k per bursary) to be targeted at specific groups, including lone parents (but also Travellers, mature students etc).
These measures, primarily within the education sector, are complemented by measures that have already been announced by the Minister for Social Protection and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. These include:

- The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is reintroducing the Annual Cost of Education Allowance from September 2017. This comprises an annual payment of €500 for parents including lone parents that are participating on the Back to Education Allowance.
- The Department of Social Protection has also announced increases in the main supports provided to lone parents. This includes a €5-a-week increase to the One Parent Family Payment, Jobseeker’s Transitional Payment and the Back to Education Allowance.
- The Department of Children and Youth Affairs are introducing measures to make childcare more affordable using the additional €19m of childcare funding agreed in Budget 2017. The DCYA is also working on developing the Single Affordable Childcare Scheme (SACS). SACS will provide the type of flexibility and choice that is recommended in the review and has the potential to address a number of the issues raised in the review.
- The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government has recently completed the phased statutory roll-out of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme. There are benefits to a lone parent who transitions from Rent Supplement to the Housing Assistance Payment, as the latter does not preclude an individual from working or studying full-time.

**Student Grant Scheme**

The statutory based student grant scheme (aka the SUSI grant) is the main source of support available for full-time students attending Post Leaving Certificate (PLC), undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

Under the terms of the statutory based student grant scheme, grant assistance is awarded to students who meet the prescribed conditions of funding, including those relating to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment and means.

The Action Plan for Education contains a commitment to increase financial supports for postgraduate students with a particular focus on those from low income households. In response to this commitment, additional funding was secured in Budgets 2017 and 2018, to facilitate the reinstatement of full maintenance grants, from September 2017, for the most disadvantaged postgraduate students. This will benefit approximately 1,100 full-time postgraduate students who meet the eligibility criteria for the special rate of maintenance grant.

The Student Grant Scheme will support circa 78,000 PLC, undergraduate and postgraduate students in the academic year 2017/18 at a cost of circa €370 million.
Travellers

While progress is being made, participation in higher education among Irish Travellers remains comparatively low. The collection of data on Traveller participation rates in Higher Education remains a key issue as many students do not identify themselves as being part of this grouping.

Supports for under-represented groups to participate in Higher Education - Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) Fund.

Subsequent to the launch of the National Access Plan, the Department established the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) Fund. This Fund comprises dedicated funding to support access to higher education, which is Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) Fund, allocated on a competitive basis to higher education institutions to support particular priority areas as determined by the DES. €16.2m secured through the budgetary process for the PATH funding has enables three strands of the fund to be rolled out.

PATH 1 supports the objective in the National Access Plan to increase access to initial teacher education for students from the target groups identified in the National Access Plan such as Lone Parents, Travellers and students with a disability.

PATH 2 provides €6m to be invested in “The 1916 Bursaries Fund” over three years for the most socio economically disadvantaged students from under-represented target groups. Lone Parents, students with a disability and ethnic minorities including Travellers will also be target groups for this fund. These Bursaries are targeted at non-traditional entry and can support undergraduate study on either a full or part-time basis. Each bursary will be in the amount of €5,000 per academic year (and could be on top of a SUSI grant if the person qualifies for a SUSI grant). Awardees will be funded for the duration of their studies in each academic year.

PATH 3 will provide €7.5m over three years to a Higher Education Access Fund which is intended to support regional clusters of higher education institutions to attract 2,000 additional students from groups currently under-represented in higher education, including Students with a Disability, Lone Parents and Travellers. At least 10% of all places will be targeted at lone parents.

10. Education and Access Routes for young people in the Justice System

As set out in our submission on Educational Inequality and Disadvantage, Oberstown Children’s Detention Campus provides for the detention of children in custody in relation to criminal charges with a view to reintegrating the child into society. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs, in order to implement the commitment of government to end the detention of children in adult prisons, funded the Oberstown capital project which commenced in 2012 and concluded in 2016. A capital expenditure programme of €56 million was put in place for the project. The development has resulted in the provision of 6 new residential units, a new educational centre, a new administration building which includes facilities for meetings and a fully furnished health suite. All young people attend school while they are detained at Oberstown. The provision of education and access to appropriate training programmes is a core element of the supports provided to them while detained. Once a young person enters Oberstown, their specific educational requirements are assessed and an individual plan is put in place to address those needs and access to subjects that are
part of the national curriculum is available. All of the teachers are professional, qualified and experienced and encourage each young person to complete state exams and continue vocational training. Educational outcomes are measured in a number of ways from looking at improvements in literacy and numeracy to participation in state examinations, all with the ultimate objective of equipping young people to successfully reintegrate into society.

Youth Joint Agency response to Crime JARC is a multi-agency approach lead by An Garda Síochána to manage and address the prolific offending and criminal behaviour of young persons aged 16 to 21 who have committed 5 or more offences. It provides an operational approach for coordination between An Garda Síochána, the Probation Service, the Irish Prison Service, the Irish Youth Service (Oberstown Campus) and Tusla. It aims to place the young person at the centre of the process, identify their needs, strengths and risks and provide an interagency co-operation and coordinated response in addressing these. The DES is represented in this process by its Social Inclusion Unit.

In the area of rehabilitation and assisting offenders to maintain crime free lives, the Department provides for education in prisons and this is generally regarded as an integral part of the rehabilitation of prisoners. Educational services are available in all prisons and are provided in partnership with a range of educational agencies including the ETBs, Public Library Services, the Open University and the Arts Council. Literacy, numeracy and general basic education provision is the priority and broad programmes of education are made available which generally follow an adult education approach. Programme are adapted to take account of the diversity of the prisoner population and the complex nature of prison life. Junior and Leaving Certificate courses are available with the Department funding circa 160,000 teaching hours for the 16/17 academic year.
SPIRASI is the national centre for the care of survivors of torture. Since the center’s inception in 1999, we have provided multi-disciplinary services to more than 4,600 survivors of torture from over 100 different countries. From the above number, we continue to offer 3 levels of certified QQI English classes to more than 2500 students from the asylum seeking, refugee including survivors of torture background. The vast majority of survivors of torture are referred by health professionals, department of social protection and legal advisors are people seeking some form of International Protection status from the Irish state and those who have the right to stay but need support in navigating the Irish system. Annually SPIRASI actively supports a caseload of 600 survivors of torture from around the island of Ireland.

Spirasi’s main funders are the Health Service Executive (HSE), the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB, formerly the VEC), the Spiritans – Irish Province, Tusla (The Child and Family Agency), Asylum, Migration and Integration Funds (AMIF) the European Union and the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture.

The classes we offer to our vulnerable client group confirms the fact that language is a medium for interconnectivity and togetherness. It permeates boundaries and has the ability to dissipate that sense of apprehension and anxiety. We’ve all experienced that feeling of unease when we’ve left the comfort of our native linguistic environment. We feel at sea. However, there is a newfound sense of purpose and confidence if we manage to impart a few phrases or sentences, and get some kind of registered response from ‘the other’. In other words, we are delighted with ourselves.

In dealing with our client group and focusing on our experience without any reference to the numerous literature available, I have simply come up with a few bullet points based on our daily experience as seen below:
Barriers to education facing vulnerable groups

- **Financial barriers** constitute a significant barrier for migrants/refugees/asylum seekers who wish to pursue further education or training. Economic barriers that exist include the availability and access to childcare and transport. This is especially relevant to lone parents who struggle to attend courses that do not provide crèche facilities. Unfortunately the free pre-school year isn’t adequate enough to take up a course. Increasing the number of part-time courses may also be helpful.

- **Cultural barriers** that express themselves in the classroom are often a noticeable gender imbalance. This gender imbalance can often reflect the gender composition of the refugee population but it can also reflect the cultural factors prohibiting participation in mixed gender classes and caring responsibilities. In Spirasi we encourage partners to take classes on an alternate morning / afternoon basis to facilitate meeting childcare commitments.

- **Information** on the types of education open to migrants/refugees/asylum seekers is poorly distributed and leaves many unaware of the possibilities available to them. Full-time study can have implications for social welfare entitlements and many vulnerable groups are not aware of this. Moreover, information on grants and financial assistance is often too elaborate for vulnerable groups to understand especially in relation to their legal status in Ireland.

Information should be provided in a transparent way encouraging the use of **Plain English** that is free of jargon. This is of particular importance when motivating learners who are unemployed thus providing hope in an otherwise uncertain future. A simplification of what courses there are on offer would be advantageous.

The information must serve those with literacy and/or numeracy difficulties, computer literacy issues, English as a second language and those with special educational needs e.g. dyslexia.

- **Motivational barriers** can be an issue for many asylum seekers when accessing education. In the 10+ years we’ve been facilitating education-based group work with asylum seekers in Spirasi, the one thing that has remained throughout is the large numbers of learners in the classroom. Their attendance
has always been exemplary. However motivational issues cannot be ignored and we feel these must be addressed.

The lack of cooking facilities at Reception Centres can have an overall demoralising effect on the learner in the classroom particularly those asylum seekers who have been waiting a long time for a decision.

Other motivational barriers in accessing education facing asylum seekers are ongoing sources of severe stress including fears of being repatriated, barriers to work, separation from family, issues related to the process of pursuing refugee claims, and exposure to pre-migration trauma. All of these serious issues underscore the importance that specially trained doctors and psychotherapists play in mitigating the suffering of vulnerable groups and in helping alleviate the barriers to education facing these groups. The more doctors, therapists and teachers work together to help students/clients access education the better it will be for society as a whole in terms of employment and therefore integration.

Refugees and asylum seekers tremendously feel the pressure to leave the reception centre immediately after being granted Refugee Status. This can be a very stressful period and can have a disjointed effect on their classroom attendance often driving learners to living temporarily with friends, or to homelessness. Homelessness is a common fact of life now in any ESOL classroom dealing with refugees. Needless to say, worrying about whether you have a roof over you and your family’s head is motivation enough not to come to class.

When trying to access education in Ireland one of the difficulties that some of our more highly educated learners face is that of not having their prior educational and training experiences and qualifications valued. Being able to take free short courses to allow for conversion of qualifications might be something that would help. It is important that people are given the opportunity to study at the level that is appropriate to them, so that time and other resources are not spent repeating what has gone before rather than providing the opportunity to progress. Refugees should not be expected to have to start education all over again.

In general, asylum seekers are not entitled to free third-level (university or college) education. This barrier to education is likely to further enhance their exclusion from society.
Educators need to be aware when considering the teaching and learning environment and the needs of all students. Learning should be inclusive and should consider the needs of all adult learners in relation to their ethnicity, religion, gender, disability and so on.

With the appropriate training educators could be in a better position to meet the needs of learners from vulnerable groups and therefore have a greater impact on society.

To conclude, it is clear from the few points above that education is something greater than simply a tool to secure jobs. It is also a way of integrating vulnerable learners to mainstream schools and get them to reach their full potentials. Educating the vulnerable in society is often deeply intertwined with great human qualities like empowerment, transformation, control, independence, freedom, choice, opportunity.
AHEAD, The Association for higher Education Access and Disability is an independent organisation that works to shape a future where students with disabilities can succeed and to empower more students to succeed in education and employment.

AHEAD seeks to influence national policy on the inclusion of students with disabilities in education and employment through our research, the provision of information and hosting national and international events. We work collaboratively with the further and higher education sectors to promote an inclusive educational environment and we act as a resource to the sectors on the principles and practice of Universal Design for Learning.

This submission will focus on the barriers faced by students with disabilities in making the transition for secondary School to higher and further education and making the transition on to employment. It is based on the robust research including research conducted by AHEAD on the participation and experience of students with disabilities in education in Ireland. The report will also make recommendations for changes to the system to improve the experience of students with disability.
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1. Background

1.1 Policy of Inclusion
The government is committed to including students with disabilities into mainstream education and this is consolidated within legislation. An inclusive approach to curriculum development should have the capacity to meet the needs of diverse learners but it requires huge changes to be made to the education system. Inclusive education means the full inclusion of ALL children in all aspects of the curriculum, teacher training, buildings, activities. It cannot just rely on ADDING-ON resources implemented by resource teachers if it is to succeed.

Most barriers to learning for students with disabilities take place in the classroom and arise because the system was designed for the majority of children and discriminates against some groups, such as those with a visual impairment, because it does not respond to their particular needs. For example according to AHEAD research (2008) blind and visually impaired children need to learn how to use technology, not just as an add-on, but in the classroom to competency standards. Both the structure and curriculum needs to change if children with disabilities and other disadvantages are to be given the same opportunities as any other child. The child with different needs should be part of the classroom. To be fully included in education is a basic human right endorsed by article 24 of the UNCRPD and requires a review of the current definition of what is inclusive education, if it is to succeed.

2 Students with disability in higher education

Culturally, the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education has been evolving over the past 30 years. In the late 1980s and early 90s, two key actions were influential in getting the process started. University College Dublin (UCD) set up AHEAD in 1988 as an agency to promote the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education and in 1994, seeing the need for equity for students with disabilities, the Minister for Education set up the Fund for Students with Disabilities in higher education. This fund worked in two ways. Firstly, it removed the perceived financial burden on institutions to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities such as readers, scribes, eventually assistive technology, additional study supports and extra time in exams. Secondly, it facilitated the development of disability /access support services across the sector, which in turn provide this cohort of students with reasonable accommodations/supports, without which they could not meet their course demands.

Of equal significance is the evolution of innovative inclusive knowledge and innovative practice in higher education about how to support students with disabilities who learn differently. The sector has build a significant body of skill, including technology, with which to support a diversity of learner.
The participation rates of students with disabilities into higher education has increased from around 1% to over 6% in a ten year period, see chart 1 below. This means that there are now 10,000 students in education who would have been excluded fifteen years ago. This represents significant progress and suggests that government policy along with initiatives such as the DARE Scheme and disability support services, access initiatives in operation in HEIs are effective. The significant shifts towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the mainstream second level education system have generated higher expectations among students with disabilities and their parents, of full participation in higher education and prospects of a successful career.

Higher education has traditionally been designed for the average student who has no difficulty with academic learning. However, now that there is a diversity of students in higher education, greater attention needs to be paid to ensuring their success and moving to more student centred and flexible teaching and learning approaches in mainstream education.

Chart 1 Numbers of students with disabilities in higher education, 2016/17, AHEAD, pg 12

2.1 Challenges
The journey so far for students with disabilities into higher education has been successful, nevertheless it comes with a word of caution. So far the inclusion of students with disability
has been built on a model of add-on supports provided to students through disability or access offices through the Fund for Students with Disabilities (Doyle 2016). Twenty three years on from the introduction of the Fund (1994) it is clear that this model is obsolete and no longer sustainable and in need of an overhaul. The steady annual increase in the numbers of students with disabilities in higher education, together with the rising cost of adding-on individualised, specialised supports are overwhelming the system. In spite of the overall increase in the overall numbers of students with disabilities, this hides some startling areas of under-representation. Students who have a sensory or physical disability are under-represented across all programmes while the numbers of students disclosing a mental health issue is increasing, see chart 2 below.

![Breakdown of Students by Category of Disability 2016/17](chart2.png)

Chart 2 The numbers of students with disabilities studying in higher education, 2016/17, AHEAD 2018, pg 21

The answer to increasing numbers is to move to Inclusive Approach for all students. In the past, students with disabilities, with the provision of specialized supports, were expected to be assimilated into a traditional “Chalk and Talk” one size fits all system of teaching and learning. This does not suit many students in particular those with disabilities. After all how can a visually impaired student or a deaf student take notes? They cannot, but using technology and getting lecture notes in advance makes it possible. The biggest challenge today is make the whole campus inclusive so that students with disability have the same opportunities as other students to fully take part, to go on ERASMUS study abroad, work placement and make the transition to employment. Today’s students have come up through the education system with the expectation of being fully included in these aspects of college life.
2.2 Higher Education Recommendation:
A model for the provision of a fully inclusive learning environment for all students is complex and requires a shift in thinking at an institutional level. In this ever changing higher education environment **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** provides an effective framework to explore how mainstream teaching can be more inclusive to a diversity of students through inclusive curricula design and, flexible teaching practices and the continuing of student support services. Taking a **universal design for learning** approach to inclusion across the whole institution will provide an effective model for managing a diversity of students across this sector. The **UDL** approach is a model build on choice, the use of technology, creative and flexible teaching in the mainstream level 1. It requires the involvement of all staff in the first place, meaning it is everyone’s job to build a culture that respects difference and empowers all students to achieve. But it recognizes that there will always be students with disabilities who require expertise and additional supports provided through the disability support services, See Chart 3 below (AHEAD 2018).

**Universal Design for HEI**

![Chart 3 the UDL Pyramid, UDL A Best Practice Guideline, Erasmus, 2016, pg63](chart3.png)

**Recommendation**
The Performance Compacts agreed with individual HEIs should be linked directly with the 5 priority goals outlined within the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019 in particular **Goal 1 to mainstream the delivery of equity of access in HEIs**

Ensure sufficient funding to provide additional funding at levels 2-4 for students with identified additional needs.
3 Transition to Further Education

SOLAS have a very ambitious plan to deliver world class training to all students that incorporates strategic goals to include disadvantaged groups, such as students with disability. A key objective of the FET Strategic plan is Active Inclusion which means *enabling every citizen notably the most disadvantaged to fully participate in society including having a job.*

The FET sector cannot provide us with accurate data on the numbers of students with disability attending FET courses. Without this data we have no idea of the numbers of people with disabilities in FET. However we do know that in 2017 over 10,180 school leavers were granted reasonable accommodations in the Leaving certificate because of a learning, physical, visual, hearing, medical, sensory, emotional or behavioural difficulty. Over 3,000 of these students progressed via DARE to Higher education but we do not know where the remainder went. We can assume however that many progressed on to FET.

We do know that there are serious gaps and barriers within FET provision to be addressed if people with disability are to avail of the excellent learning opportunities offered by FET. A recent report by Amarach states that “*a lack of supports existed for active inclusion groups such as those with disabilities an.....many FET colleges remained inaccessible to those with disabilities.*” (pg87)

There is a real opportunity now for the FET sector to benefit from the knowledge, initiatives and learning in other sectors and to build an FET Sector that has the capacity to meet its active inclusion goals and to deliver an education that is universally inclusive across all of its great programmes for students with a disability. The FET sector requires deliberate and strategic planning based on measurable goals to enable it to reach best practice national and international standards.

AHEAD held a series of consultations discussion forums in 2016-17 with FET staff nationally and the following is the outcome:

3.1 Challenges

- There is no national data available on the numbers students with disability in FE nor of the type of disability to inform future practice.
- The support services available to students with disabilities are inconsistent and ad-hoc.
- The disability officer role is unclear in terms of the functions of the role and what are the essential tasks to be carried out,
- The Fund is available to PLC students but there is no systematic funding for other areas of FET such as youth reach, those taking up apprenticeships or VTOS.
• Support staff on how to deal with issues such as incapacity to do a course, diagnosis of disability, mental health, asperger’s syndrome and students with autism.
• Many of the buildings are inaccessible and would benefit from a designated budget for improvement of access.
• There are no systematic supports for employers engaged with the apprenticeship scheme to employ young people with disability.

3.2 FET Recommendations

Short term:
Staff were unanimous that amongst them they have valuable experience and expertise on inclusive practice. CPD and network opportunities for staff would give invaluable opportunities to share their expertise, ideas and to solve problems collectively.

SOLAS ensure the provision of sufficient funding to provide for reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities and remove the perceived financial burden on ETBs.

National longer term goals
2. Targets and strategic goals are required by ETBs to move towards the inclusion of disadvantaged groups.
3. SOLAS promote and adopt a Universal design approach to including a diverse body of students into its mainstream provision. Move towards a model of Universal Design for Learning
4. SOLAS could set up a standardised approach to data gathering within each ETB to provide a baseline of evidence to assess progress.
5. SOLAS could commission research into the participation of students with disabilities in FET. This research would provide an invaluable base-line for future progress and provide information to inform the development of service provision.
6. Establish systematic funding for students with additional support needs, (levels 2,3 and 4 of the UDL Pyramid see chart ) based on anticipated numbers and the cost of provision.
7. Work towards establishing standardised procedures to assure the quality of educational provision to students with disability and to comply with current legislation. A baseline requirement would be to:
   • Establish a system of needs assessment to identify the reasonable accommodations for students with disability
   • Ensure students have access to Assistive Technology and training

4. Transition to Work

According to the UNCRPD people with a disability have the right to access employment.
**Article 27 Work and employment**

1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.

The barriers to employment are well documented in WHO and NDA reports including the Comprehensive Employment Strategy. In spite of excellent 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} class honours degrees graduates with disabilities find themselves at the end of a very long queue for employment. Graduates with disabilities, in particular those with mental health issues and sensory disabilities are less likely to be employed than other graduates with similar qualifications.

4.1 Challenges

Many graduates with disabilities have not had the benefit of work placement or more casual work while at college and are approaching the jobs market totally unprepared. The careers offices in institutions tend to focus on careers fairs and placement officers have little or no understanding of the support requirements of employers or graduates in relation to disability related issues such as disclosure, reasonable accommodation and assessing workplace supports.

4.2 Solution: The AHEAD WAM Willing Able Mentoring Programme.

AHEAD runs a WAM internship fully paid programme for graduates who struggle to get a foothold on the labour market Support works and the WAM programme proves that with support employers are willing to tap into the valuable resource offered by graduates with disabilities. The WAM programme works with employers in the public and private sectors to offer fully paid positions at a graduate level to suitably qualified graduates with disability.

The results are 77\% of graduates who take up placements are in full time employment.

It is based on three key principals:

8. Competence to do the job
9. Providing a safety net to employers
10. Assessing the support requirements in the workplace.

A key objective of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for people with disabilities is to increase the numbers of people with disabilities into work. But this will not happen without the investment of resources in providing bridges and supports into work. Graduates with disabilities meet many barriers in seeking work, the negative assumptions and stereotypical thinking and need preparation for the jobs market. Similarly employers need support. A goal of the comprehensive Employment Strategy is to Engage with employers and to
support them to make the HR process and the workplace an inclusive place to work. AHEAD provides this support with the support of the Department of Social Inclusion.

One recent example is Enterprise Rent A Car who took a Graduate on a WAM work Experience in their airport branch. It took them considerable time and resources to ensure that her assistive technology fitted with their IT systems to enable the candidate to do the job. She is now a full time employee and Enterprice Rent a Car understand the support requirements and benefits of employing a blind candidate.

4.2 Recommendations:
Recognise the needs of graduates with disabilities in getting into the labour market and the support needs of employers

Institutions need to build bridges for their graduates with disability into work. They need to ensure that careers services and work placement services have responsibility for all their students and that they understand the needs of students with disability and have sufficient resources to provide a level of specialised support within those services.

One example of a highly innovative and ground breaking bridge to employment for students with intellectual disabilities is the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual disability Certificate in Contemporary Living for people with intellectual disability.

5. Education for young people with intellectual disabilities in higher education

5.1 Background
Young people with intellectual disabilities (15 to 29) and their families are a greater risk of poverty due to pervasive and persistent social exclusion and in particular exclusion from the employment market (Emerson, 2007). Analysis of the National Disability Survey (2006) highlights that just 29% of people with disabilities of working age are in employment (Watson et al., 2015), with the link to low employment levels attributed to low levels of participation in employment. This was a particular issue for people with intellectual disabilities and / or learning difficulties (Watson et al., 2015). The opportunity to enter the employment market for someone with an intellectual disability are significantly lower (one-third) than those without an intellectual disability. In education, there have been low expectations regarding people with intellectual disabilities which has resulted in limited capacity for these young people to participate in mainstream education and training programmes – and to make the normative transitions through the lifespan that are experienced by their peers.
5.2 Recent developments in higher education

Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID) was established in 2016 as an integral component of the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin. TCPID replaced the National Institute for Intellectual Disabilities (2005 - 2015) which offered a non-accredited Certificate in Contemporary Living for people with intellectual disabilities. TCPID equips young people who have intellectual disabilities with the requisite education and work readiness skills for future employment / further education and independent living. To achieve this, TCPID has developed a Certificate in Arts, Science and Inclusive Applied Practice which, for the first time in Ireland, consists of a nationally accredited programme (Level 5 QQI) that will enable graduates to compete for employment / further education programmes on a more equal level to their non-disabled peers.

TCPID has established business partnerships that provide work placements, paid internships, and the potential for paid employment. TCPID currently has 13 students, with an alumni of approximately 120.

5.3 Work Readiness and Employment Output - 2017 / 2018

Twelve paid internships (students from the original Certificate programme) have taken place. For example:

- 2 have been converted into a permanent role;
- 1 has been extended by 3 months;
- 3 have undertaken further paid internships.

In addition, one of our graduates has been working in a permanent role with one of our business partners.

5.4 The Alternative to TCPID

Many young people with intellectual disabilities have successfully completed second level education and would be capable of succeeding in education and work readiness programmes such as that offered by TCPID. However, they face limited choices post-school as provision of such courses is sporadic, not nationally recognised, focused on either education or work readiness (but not both). As a result, many of these young people transition to service providers, where their aspirations and opportunities for education / work readiness are limited.

5.5 Funding Student Participation

Service providers currently receive €15,000 per annum for each person with an intellectual disability. This is multi-annual payment. If there is a residential component to the service provision, the cost is approximately €80,000 per annum.
The student contribution for participation on the course in TCPID is €3,000 per annum (as for every TCD course). It is significant that, compared to their non-disabled peers, these students are not eligible to apply for a fee waiver or maintenance grant (SUSI).

TCPID currently relies upon philanthropic funding and support from TCD. With adequate funding, TCPID would be able to further develop its work and support the development of similar provision in other regional centres. There are nine other centres in higher education institutions that provide programmes that are similarly not state funded (e.g., Limerick, Sligo, Cork, Dundalk, Waterford). As a result, most of these programmes rely upon good will, with no guarantee of sustainability.

With adequate funding, TCPID would be able to take an annual cohort of 15 students. TCPID would further be able to extend the model of education and work readiness across these other providers, potentially realising an additional 100 student places per annum.
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Written submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills

Barriers to education facing vulnerable groups

March 2018

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1 I would like for formally acknowledge the assistance provided by Dr. Margaret Crean, post-doctoral fellow in the UCD School of Education in completing this report. I could not have completed it in time without her professional research assistance.
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Executive summary and Recommendations

Macro-level Issues

Policies to address the Intersectionality of Inequalities for Vulnerable Groups

There is compelling national and international research evidence that economic inequalities translate directly and indirectly into barriers to education for all vulnerable groups, not just those on low incomes and/or working-class-poor. While children with disabilities, those from ethnic minority, lone parent or immigrant backgrounds, Travellers, children in direct provision and other vulnerable groups such as those who are gay or lesbian, all experience unique barriers to education, in all cases those who are most adversely affected within these groups are those from poor families.

Recommendation 1.

We cannot resolve educational inequalities by modifying or working through the educational system on its own as taxation policies, housing, health, employment, welfare and childcare policies all impact on educational outcomes (Lynch and Crean 2018; Lynch 2018). Without equal access to economic and related resources there can be no meaningful equality of opportunity in education for vulnerable groups over time.

To promote substantive equality in education, there is a need to seriously reduce the economic inequalities in Ireland on an ongoing basis between the wealthiest 10% and the poorest 10% in particular. That is to say, public policies need to actively promote equality of condition, economically and socially, outside of schools and colleges so that there can be more equality of outcome within schools.

Recommendation 2.

Arising from Recommendation 1, Equality-Education-Proofing of fiscal, housing, health, transport, integration and rural and/or urban development policies needs to be undertaken on a systematic basis to ensure these policies do not exacerbate barriers for vulnerable groups in education, and that, where possible, they actively promote equality for such groups.

Where grant aid or financial supports are provided for vulnerable groups to overcome barriers to education (such as in HEAR and DARE in higher education), they need to be increased in line with the cost of living.

Recommendation 3

In Ireland, there is an almost perfect correlation between the amount and quality of education one gets and one’s future labour market opportunities (CSO 2017). The rise in precarious work across all classes of society in the past 10 years, especially in the less-skilled areas of the economy², has had a serious impact on education as it intensifies the

² 20% of young workers are on temporary contracts in 2015 compared to 15% in 2004. See the report by the Nevin Institute 2017 https://www.nerinstitute.net/blog/2017/05/18/the-growth-of-precarious-work-in-the-republic-of-i/
competition for educational credentials and, relatedly, for secure employment. Moreover, fear regarding employment and long-term economic security drives fear and anxiety in education.

Because precarious work is so pervasive, there is less and less incentive to stay in education for those in low-skilled areas especially. Ensuring that all forms of employment are as secure as possible, so that any given job guarantees a sustainable livelihood (and opportunities for further education and progression), is key to creating a more sustainable and less exam-focused education system. This is especially important for vulnerable groups as many of them enter the less-skilled sectors of the economy where there is often limited security.

**Governance and Policy-making**

Under the Education Disadvantage Committee Bill (2017) the parties that the Minister has to consult with when establishing this Committee are largely professional interest groups in education (patrons, national parent bodies, management bodies and trade unions). Their role is to ‘advise him or her on policies and strategies to be adopted to identify and correct educational disadvantage’. The Minister is not required to consult with groups representing the socially disadvantaged and vulnerable when setting up the committee although they are to be represented on the committee itself.

**Recommendation 4.1**

As professional interest groups in education tend to be well-educated, relatively successful, white, ethnically Irish and middle class, it is imperative that those who live with educational disadvantage are also consulted when setting up that Educational Disadvantage Committee, to advise the Minister ‘on policies and strategies to be adopted to identify and correct educational disadvantage’. The Education Disadvantage Committee Bill should be amended to allow for this.

**Recommendation 4.2**

The Education Act (1998) defines designated bodies with a right to consultation on a wide range of education matters as being patrons, national parent bodies, management bodies and trade unions. As with the Education Disadvantage Committee Bill (2017) this does not give any civil society group working on the ground with disadvantage or organisations of (not for) the disadvantaged or vulnerable any right to consultation on educational policy generally. This is a democratic weakness of the 1998 Act.

Civil society organisations representing the educationally vulnerable and disadvantaged directly (not professional groups working with them) should be defined as designated bodies under the Act and the 1998 Act should be amended accordingly.

**Inter-Agency Collaboration**

**Recommendation 5**

Because education is deeply linked to other social services including health, children and family support services, youth services, mental health services etc., it is vital that there is a formal structure and resourcing for inter-agency collaboration in addressing vulnerabilities at
local level. This is already a key recommendation for overcoming disadvantage in the DEIS 2017 Report of the Department of Education and Skills (Goal 4).

National Statistical Data disaggregated by level and type of vulnerability

Recommendation 6

There needs to be a systematic compilation of statistical data on the social background of candidates taking all national tests of attainment, including both the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations. While respecting the anonymity of individuals and schools, this data must be disaggregated by social class, rural and urban status, and the identity of candidates on terms of the nine equality grounds covered under the Equal Status Acts. Data on citizenship status is also vital information, as is information about parental education and housing status.

Without proper statistical data, there cannot be long-term planning to address barriers to education for specific vulnerable groups, many of which are too small and idiosyncratic to have their needs addressed in an omnibus programme (like DEIS) that is not designed to meet their specific needs. Small groups such as, Travellers, Roma, children in care, children whose parents are in prison, and Deaf children would all be cases in point.

Meso-level Considerations

Role of Schools and Colleges

Parents will always seek ways to advantage their own children both in and out of school. Schools need to regulated therefore in a way that minimises the opportunity for already-privileged parents to further advantage their own children through influencing school policy. Given what we know from extensive research in Ireland and abroad the following are key policy recommendations to reduce barriers at this level.

Recommendation 7.1

Schools with a wide social mix, in terms of social class, ethnicity, disability, Traveller and other statuses, are best for vulnerable children when these differences are managed carefully within schools, so that the vulnerable are integrated systematically and respectfully. This should be a stated objective of all schools.

Regulation of school selection needs to be implemented and monitored in a way that does not allow schools [and indirectly powerful parents] to exclude vulnerable children through direct or indirect forms of discrimination. Indirect discriminations are widespread and include targeting selected areas or primary schools when recruiting, having complex entry requirements that favour insider parents with knowledge, high voluntary contributions, costly (bespoke), uniforms, and selection on the basis of family history with the school (Lynch and Lodge 2002). While it is difficult to prohibit indirect forms of exclusion at the very least there should be a national policy noting that they be avoided as they are antithetical to equality in education. Indirect discriminations should be assessed in Whole School Evaluations and in
school appraisals in terms of a new **Equality and Social Inclusion Index** as proposed below under 8.3.

**Recommendation 7.2**

Given extensive Irish and international research evidence regarding the adverse impact of streaming, setting and tracking/banding on vulnerable children, it is vital that neither streaming or setting occurs in any form in primary school (for example by grouping children within class by tables into the top, middle bottom groups) or in the early stages (Years 1-3) in second-level schools. For this to happen, there needs to be an end to Foundation Level Irish, English and Mathematics at Junior Certificate level. In senior cycle, the Leaving Certificate Applied needs to be reviewed and overhauled as it is currently highly social class-biased in its uptake and its long-term value for students educationally is unclear.

**Recommendation 7.3**

Given that Eurostat figures show that a significant number of young Irish people (13% between the ages of 15 and 24 in 2016) are neither in employment, education nor training (NEETs), and that there are still a significant number Irish people over the age of 45 who have only completed lower secondary education, it is very important that these people have opportunities to participate in education if they wish to do so. This requires schools and colleges to offer more flexible, accessible and affordable part-time courses for returners including the unemployed, carers, immigrants, people with disabilities, former prisoners and those who have experienced mental illness. The policy needs to be proactive rather than reactive, involving guidance and a contact point in schools and colleges; and there needs to be an incentive for colleges and schools to promote this type of education on a flexible part-time (or full-time) educational basis. The returners need to be supported by State aid if they have not availed of further or higher education to date. Local Education Boards need to have a mandate to actively promote such policies and devote funding to them.

**Role of Teachers**

Positive, supportive non-discriminatory attitudes among teachers are crucial for enabling vulnerable children to perform well academically and feel at home in school.

**Recommendation 8.1**

Both in-service and pre-service teacher education needs to involve a core compulsory module on how to practice equality and inclusion for vulnerable groups. At pre-service level in particular, teachers should be assessed on their equality practices in classrooms as part of their overall teaching practice assessment. The Teaching Council needs to be mandated to ensure that this happens.

**Recommendation 8.2**

The Professional Development Service for Teachers’ (PDST) mission is *to promote reflective practitioners*. As the body responsible for teacher development, the PDST should include promoting equality and inclusion in schools and classrooms as one of its key objectives and provide in-service training and education for teachers accordingly. Where good equality practices and policies are operational in schools, these policies and practices should be documented and disseminated to other schools through the PDST.

**Recommendation 8.3**
Whole School Evaluations should include an Equality and Inclusion Assessment of teaching practices and policies in all schools. At the very least that would involve undertaking a short survey of students (depending on age) and/or holding focus groups with vulnerable groups within schools to assess the veracity of policies designed to promote equality and overcome barriers for vulnerable groups. An Equality and Social Inclusion Index should be developed for all schools.

**Recommendation 8.4**

**Use of Language and Labels** – Although not researched systematically in Ireland, teachers can and do use disablist language when commenting on children in class and when discussing individuals and classes with other teachers and professionals. Smyth’s (2017) research shows that children who are referred to as ‘slow’ or ‘weak’ are keenly sensitive to this type of labelling and find it demeaning.

A list of disablist and stereotypical terms (relating to age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, Travellers, Roma, colour etc.) should be compiled by teachers in consultation with vulnerable groups and the relevant bodies in the Department of Education and Skills, such as the Social Inclusion Unit and Inspectorate. The ultimate goal would be the adoption of a voluntary code among teachers and schools regarding respectful language-usage in schools, including language used between professional staff themselves.

**Role of Community Groups, Community Education and Public Libraries**

Ireland still has a reasonably high percentage of people who have left school without any formal qualifications (EUROSTAT 2016). Many of those are also the parents of future vulnerable children in school.

**Recommendation 9.1**

To overcome educational barriers for vulnerable young and older adult who have left schools there is a need to invest in Community Development and Adult Education (not only employment-led education and training) in areas of educational disadvantage both in rural and urban settings, and in Public Libraries. This should be an educational objective for all Local Education Boards with budgets allocated for this work.

Local community development and community education centres need to be supported on a systematic basis as these are often the first port of call for those who need support at local level to return to education and training (Fitzsimons 2016). There are excellent models of these community education programmes in Ireland (An Cosan in Tallaght and KLEAR in Kilbarrack) that could be replicated elsewhere.

**Recommendation 9.2**

Public Libraries are also a vital resource for low-income families, and for those who cannot readily access the internet at home. As observed in the DEIS 2017 Report Public Libraries ‘have a central role to play in supporting family literacy, providing a space where parents and children access free literacy and numeracy resources, including extensive digital resources’.

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3 In 2016 some 13% of Irish young people, aged 15-24 years, were neither in employment, education nor training (NEETs). This is much higher than in other EU countries: the figures were 4.6% in the Netherlands, less than 6% in Denmark, 6.7% in Germany and 7.7% in Austria.
Public Library resources need to be enhanced to limit barriers to education for vulnerable groups, including those in rural areas where there is poor internet access.

**Modes of Assessment in Public Examinations**

Most examinations in Ireland are either pen and paper (or their online equivalent) with primacy given to skills that can be tested through linguistic and mathematically-based intelligences. As the work of Howard Gardner (1983, 1993) and the ZERO Project in Harvard has shown, this is a very limited way to assess human capabilities educationally as all human beings have at least six other types of intelligences. Most of these either not supported formally in education (such as intra and inter-personal intelligences) or marginally supported (musical or visual-spatial, through Art and Design).

**Recommendation 10**

While the recent inclusion of Physical Education as a school subject is welcome, the more general failure to educate across different intelligences and abilities consigns many students to a sense of failure and increases their vulnerability in schools.

As this issue is not unique to Ireland, there is a need for an EU-wide initiative in Education to examine the possibilities of educating students across all their capabilities in schools and developing the methodologies achieve this. This is especially important for students who find themselves classed as relative ‘failures’ in the current system.

**Micro-level Matters**

**Private Costs for Parents and issues for Family Carers**

There are many barriers to education for vulnerable children that are experienced privately and may not be visible in public. Neither primary nor second-level education free at the point of access; even with the book grants, free meals and free transport, it requires substantial investment from parents via voluntary contributions, expenditures on extracurricular activities, books, and other school materials.

**Recommendation 11**

There is an urgent need to assess the full economic cost of ‘free education’ for parents for children up to age 16 and to offer financial, welfare or tax-related compensation for these costs for low-income families. Compensation needs to be given in ways that are accessible and private and do not demean those who receive it.

**Recommendation 12**

Those who engage in full-time family care work, most of whom are women, are generally unpaid and invisible in Ireland (Lynch and Lyons 2008). Given the nature of care work, especially with vulnerable adults and children, carers often cannot access education to improve their career and personal options after full-time caring ends. This leaves them vulnerable in later life, without either a career or pensions.
Education-related child care and respite-care supports need to be put in place to enable full-time carers to access education on a part-time basis. There is a related need for more flexible educational options that accommodates different carer roles, including lone parents, people with adult children with disabilities, and people caring for sick/disabled parents or other relatives.
1. Introduction

This submission has been prepared by Professor Kathleen Lynch. Kathleen is Professor of Equality Studies in University College Dublin. Equality in education is one of her major areas of research. She has published over 100 academic papers, and several reports on different aspects of inequality including social class, gender, disability, ethnicity, race, sexuality, religion, and age-related injustices. Her major books on education include *The Hidden Curriculum* (1989), *Equality in Education* (1999), *Equality and Power in Schools* (with Anne Lodge) (2002) and *New Managerialism in Education: Gender, Commercialisation and Carelessness* (with Dympna Devine and Bernie Grummell (2012, 2015). She published two papers this year on inequality in education, one specifically on the issues in Ireland, with Margaret Crean, in *Education for All? The Legacy of Free Post-Primary Education* edited by Judith Harford (2018) and the other in a major international text *The Sage Handbook of School Organization* edited by M. Connolly et al. (2018).

As an academic and activist, Kathleen played a key role in founding the UCD Equality Studies Centre in 1990 and the UCD School of Social Justice in 2005. She also initiated the setting up of the UCD-wide Egalitarian World Initiative Network (EWI) in 2005. She has been awarded several major EU, and Irish grants for her research. She served as an advisor to the EU Directorate General on Education and Culture (DGEAC) from 2007 to 2010 as part of NESSE (the Network of Experts in the Social Sciences in Education) during which time she authored a major published report on *Gender, Education and Employment* and also wrote the background paper for a report on *Early Childhood, Care and Education*. She has worked in a voluntary capacity with several voluntary and community organisations devoted to the promotion of social justice and equality.


She has presented on her research as an invited expert at numerous national and international fora, including EU-wide events organised by DGEAC in Brussels, and at conferences and meetings in the US, Australia, China, Turkey and several EU countries including Austria, Germany, Finland, Sweden, Poland and Spain.

Professor Lynch has advocated for an *equality of condition* approach to addressing educational inequalities rather than a simple equality of opportunities approach. In particular her work has demonstrated the central role economic inequality plays in generating educational inequality and the necessity of promoting a more socially just society more generally in Ireland if we are to have substantive equality in education.

She has also argued strongly for recognising the immorality of all forms of inequality, and especially inequality in education.
Drawing on Professor Lynch’s academic and professional expertise and knowledge of educational inequality, and given the limited time available to prepare the submission, this paper will focus primarily on how economic inequalities impact on educational inequalities for vulnerable groups and how all forms of inequality intersect at macro, meso and micro levels in ways that exacerbate barriers for vulnerable groups. The rationale for this is based on the extensive research evidence showing that barriers to education are greatly exacerbated by poverty and a lack of related resources for all vulnerable groups.

1.1 Equality in Education: Ireland’s Achievements

Ireland’s educational achievements over the last fifty years have been significant in aggregate terms. Ireland is among an elite group of countries with relatively high rates of educational attainment, a low rate of early school leaving and a high proportion of graduates from second-level schools entering higher education (Byrne and McCoy, 2017). Recent EUROSTAT (2016) data show that while inequalities in educational attainment persist in Ireland, relative to other European and OECD countries, the proportion of students who achieve very low grades on international tests in literacy, mathematics and Science (PISA) are among the lowest in Europe.4

Moreover, Clancy’s analysis of EUROSTUDENT surveys (2005-11) shows that access rates to higher education for blue-collar (working-class) students is higher in Ireland than in several other European countries, including Germany, France and Austria (Clancy, 2013).

Public investment, throughout the various stages of education, has had enormous dividends for Ireland both socially and economically. The investment returns on higher education in Ireland, for example, are measurable, and considerable in financial terms. In 2010–2011 alone, the gross income of Ireland’s public higher educational institutions was €2.6 billion; the colleges generated gross output nationwide of €10.6 billion for this investment (Zhang, Larkin and Lucey, 2015).

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4 Within Europe, Estonia had the lowest number of students who only performed at the most basic levels of literacy, mathematics and science at age 15 (11.2%) followed jointly by Denmark and Finland (13.6%), followed by Ireland, at 15%.

http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=sdg_04_40&plugin=1
other words, higher education pays back to the exchequer a considerable proportion of its initial costs by contributing to both the economy *per se*, and indirectly through taxation on graduate-related higher-earning individuals, which, in turn, provides a dividend for social expenditures. Moreover, deepening the quality and diffusion of high quality education has also benefited people individually, in terms of quality of life, which, in turn, enriches Irish society, culturally, socially and politically.

However, as with all aggregated data, the general picture does not tell the complete story. The policies pursued have not always led to the kind of reduction in educational inequalities within Ireland that many believed it could or would, especially in terms of social class terms.

1.2 Understanding the Contradictions of Education and their Relationship to Inequality

Education is a basic human right enshrined in Article 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and Article 13 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR) and Article 42 of the Irish Constitution. As such education is an *Intrinsic Good* for a person irrespective of its relative market value in terms of employment, as it a) enables the person to exercise capabilities, choices and freedoms generally in life, b) is indispensable for realising other rights and c) enables the person to overcome other social disadvantages.

But education is also a *Positional Good* that enables the person to gain social advantages vis-à-vis others, particularly in relation to employment. The more and better educational credentials one has the more likely one is to gain good and profitable employment and to be able to exercise political power and influence.

The issue of inequality in education only arises in relation to the fact that education is a *positional good* that enables one to gain advantages vis-à-vis others. This paper will focus primarily on this issue and the barriers faced by different vulnerable groups in this regard. As inequality is relational, it will also highlight how a barrier for one group generally operates as an advantage for another. And it will highlight the

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5 Regardless of its value to individuals, intrinsically or positionally, education is also a *Public Good*; it enriches cultural, social, environmental, political and economic life for all of society. The collective value of education is greater than the sum of its personal value to individuals
intersectional (interrelated) character of all barriers to education for vulnerable groups.

1.3 Three stages where inequality and barriers need to be addressed:

Macro, Meso, Micro

As educational opportunities are strongly linked to wider economic, cultural and social policies, inequalities in education for vulnerable groups are produced and reproduced outside the educational system as well as within it. These are the Macro-level barriers for vulnerable groups. They refer to the ways policies in housing, health, transport, childcare, and family welfare, and in employment and taxation, impact on those who are most educationally disadvantaged. They refer to the large scale issues that impact on education and advantage some groups while disadvantaging others.

The second stage or context where barriers arise for vulnerable groups arise within the education system itself; these are the Meso-level barriers for vulnerable groups. They include institutional and organisational barriers that arise within education. They refer to issues such as national policies regarding transfer to different stages of education, the fairness of public examinations and the accommodations and supports available for vulnerable groups.

Meso-level considerations also refer to what happens with schools and colleges in terms of selection at entry, the organisation of learning (streaming, tracking, banding), curricular options (higher, ordinary, foundation, LCA), teacher attitudes, and the ways in which schools and colleges manage diversity and inequalities within the school or college population itself.

The third stage where barriers arise are experienced is at the level of individual families and the individual child. They refer to how the cumulative impact of macro and meso-level barriers bear in on households and ultimately on individual children’s learning. These are the Micro-level barriers for vulnerable groups. They refer to the complex ways in which the idiosyncratic characteristics of a given childhood and
family context are cumulatively impacted by outside forces creating barriers for some and significant advantages for others. They also refer to the way family care arrangements can impact on vulnerable groups (such as when children become family carers) or full-time carers, and when people are excluded from education due to the demands of caring.

2. MACRO-LEVEL BARRIERS for VULNERABLE GROUPS

2.1 The Class Ceiling': Impact of Economic Inequalities

*Why Economic Inequality promotes Barriers for Vulnerable groups in Education*

A major international study of how economic inequality impacts adversely on the health and well-being of people across much of Europe and the OECD was published in 2009 by two public health specialists, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: why more equal societies almost always do better*. It shows that economic inequality not only impacts adversely on equality of opportunity in education but how it also promotes a climate of fear that promotes distrust, as well as anxiety and fear about the future, including fear among children (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). When there is economic polarization in society, people become fearful, they transfer that fear to their children and put pressure on them to succeed so they will not be among those who ‘fail’, or become ‘losers’. The fear of being consigned to a life of low-paid insecure work drives the intense competition in education, especially in the absence of opportunities for security without education.

Economic inequality drives the wealth-poor middle classes to focus aggressively on education, to maintain or advance their class position (Ball, 2003; Crozier, Reay and James, 2011). It also keeps the poor in their place as the middle and upper class fight to protect their advantages in education by maintaining the educational status quo.

Thus, the relational character of inequality must always be kept in mind, not only are vulnerable groups facing barriers in competing for valued educational credentials, those who are privileged are active simultaneously in maintaining and protecting their own privileges.
While vulnerable groups face several ongoing barriers in relation to benefiting from education, and some of these are highly group specific (such as the barriers for Travellers, deaf children, those who are in State (social) care, or who are in direct provision), all children and adults share one common factor that impacts on their ability to benefit from formal education, namely their access to the economic resources that enable them to compete equally with others. The more resources one has (including money, social networks, emotional supports, cultural capital such as insider knowledge of how the system works, and prior education) the more advantaged one is educationally. This fact applies to all groups, be they children with disabilities, children of lone parents, people from ethnic minority background, mature students or pre-school children, women or men. How these resources are translated into competitive advantage for different groups varies considerably, but the sociological fact remains that any vulnerability is exacerbated by lack of money.

Two major national studies by Annette Lareau (2006) in the US and Richard Layte in the UK (2017) both show how family resources impact on how parents interact with each other and relatedly with their children. Lack of money and resources increases stress in families, which in turn, impacts negatively on children emotionally and even cognitively; this has a downward spiralling impact on their educational performance. Very poor families in particular experience considerable anxiety over lack of resources, which, in turn, lead to personal conflicts; this means that time is invested in managing poverty and its attendant tensions so children’s education cannot be prioritised (Layte 2017).

2.2 Intersectional character of Inequality

Even though the Irish state has invested much in making education more egalitarian in terms of standardising and raising the quality of schools and teaching, this work is undermined by what is happening in other fields of fiscal and public policy. Economic inequalities in Ireland are among the highest in the OECD prior to social transfers (TASC 2015, 2016a); inequality has remained consistent over time, and was exacerbated during austerity from 2008-2014 especially among the poorest 10% (Lynch, Cantillon and Crean 2017). Such inequalities mean that children from poorer households cannot participate on equal terms with others within education as they do not have equal resources. While ethnic, disability, family and marital status all
have idiosyncratic influences on particular groups that adversely impact on their educational opportunities and attainments, an over-riding common ground factor that exacerbates other vulnerabilities is the relative lack of resources.

Moreover, children in Irish schools are well aware of the economic and social pecking order, and their relative chances of educational success vis-à-vis others in more privileged schools (Smyth 2017). Their aspirations and hopes are adjusted accordingly, as are those of their parents, and their teachers (Byrne and McCoy 2017) with a down-spiralling effect for those who are most disadvantaged.

The lowered expectations, and the tensions and anxieties that impact directly on learning, are also exacerbated by macro-level policies outside of education, such as housing. To take one example, we know from extensive research, in the US in particular, that having socially and racially integrated schooling is important for promoting equality in education for minority and marginalised students (Condron et al., 2014) (provided they are not segregated within schools into low streams or tracks) (Oakes 1990). Having ‘access to socially privileged’ peers matters and this cannot occur in a segregated schooling system. Yet, in Ireland barriers for immigrants in particular are being generated in segregated housing policies that result in particular schools serving highly selective vulnerable/privileged groups to the exclusion of others.ii

In a technical sense, DEIS schools are also an example of institutionalized social segregation that is closely related to housing segregation, albeit more on the grounds of social class than race (although race and class can and are often closely related). While these schools do great work, those who attend them are, by definition, denied access to peer groups who have educational, cultural and economic capital that the disadvantaged could access if they got to know each other personally.

**Recommendation**

To promote substantive equality in education, there is a need to seriously reduce the economic inequalities in Ireland on an ongoing basis between the wealthiest and the poorest in particular. That is to say, public policies need to actively promote equality of condition, economically and socially, outside of schools and colleges so that there can be more equality of outcome within schools.
3. MESO-LEVEL BARRIERS for VULNERABLE GROUPS

3.1 Role of Schools
An analysis of social class-related inequalities in education over a twenty six year period, using data from the School Leavers’ Survey, involving 55,000+ cases, from 1980-2006 highlight the existence of what is termed **effectively maintained inequality (EMI) in Irish education** (Byrne and McCoy 2017).

The patterns of social-class inequality over the period suggest that differences in a) the way children are tracked (streamed) in schools, b) the levels at which subjects are offered to different groups of students (foundation, ordinary or higher; whether there is a leaving certificate applied in place or not), and c) the level of funding supports available for students attending further and higher education, are significant factors in impacting on levels of inequality for different social classes. Most significantly they found, as have other studies, that students from working class backgrounds are also the most likely to be in lower streams (especially working class boys) and are less likely to take higher level subjects, in particular higher level mathematics. Smyth’s (2017) recent analysis of curriculum differentiations (tracking and streaming within schools) by social class confirm that these patterns are persisting. In addition, Byrne and McCoy (2017) observe that students from working class backgrounds are most likely to be taking the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) which does not advantage them educationally relative to others; the LCA is not offered in schools with a large middle class intake.

While schools argue that there are legitimate reasons for stratifying students into different tracks and settings, (including the pressures from parents of the educationally more advanced for streaming as well), the net effect, in educational terms, is that there are large cohorts of students, mainly from lower income working class households, who only take all or most subjects at Ordinary level for the Leaving Certificate; this precludes them from taking most University-level courses as they simply cannot get the points required on Ordinary level papers.

It is not surprising therefore that entry to higher education is highly class-stratified, and while the proportion of students attending higher education has increased for all classes since free education was introduced, those from working class and lower income backgrounds are significantly over-represented in lower points courses in the
Institutes of Technology in particular where they have fewer career options: at the other extreme, 50 per cent of students from Ireland's most affluent areas study at one of the three most elite universities in Ireland (UCD, TCD or UCC), four times the rate of those from disadvantaged areas (TASC, 2016b).

**Recommendation**

Given extensive Irish and international research evidence regarding the adverse impact of streaming, setting and tracking/banding on vulnerable children, it is vital that neither streaming or setting occurs in any form in primary school (for example by grouping children within class by tables into the top, middle bottom groups) or in the early stages (Years 1-3) in second-level schools. For this to happen, there needs to be an end to Foundation Level Irish, English and Mathematics at Junior Certificate level. In senior cycle, the Leaving Certificate Applied needs to be reviewed and overhauled as it is currently highly social class-biased in its uptake and its long-term value for students educationally is unclear. Grants for further and higher education for vulnerable groups need to be significantly increased as they are completely out of line with the cost of living. (see my paper submitted to this Committee already, and enclosed as an appendix here, on the dangers of loans for those who are poorest)

**3.2 Voluntary Contributions and Direct Expenditure as Barriers**

‘Free education’ is not free at either primary or secondary levels. Ongoing educational costs including school books, extracurricular activities and school materials are paid for by most parents in Ireland unlike other EU countries.

State subvention does not meet the full cost of compulsory education for those who need it. The back-to-school allowance for low-income families was €125 for a child up to the age of eleven, and €250 per child after that age in 2017. This allowance does not meet even half the costs involved, as the average cost of returning to school varied from €340 (primary) to €775 (second level) for a given child in 2017. The net effect of this is that it forces poorer parents into debt (Barnardos, 2017).

Although most second-level schools expect students to have a laptop or tablet, the cost of these is not covered and is circa €500.

As schools in Ireland are not fully funded the majority are required to supplement their income by requesting ‘voluntary contributions’ from parents, a policy that is
deeply inequitable given parental differences in ability to pay: schools with the poorest parents have the lowest voluntary contributions even though they are the ones that need it most.

Moreover participation in extracurricular activities (such as swimming lessons which many would regard as a basic life skill) are often only available to those who can pay (Barnardos, 2017). There are also several hidden costs in schools such as the cost of taking public examinations; it costs €116 to do the Leaving Certificate in 2018 although those with a medical card are exempt. To appeal a grade in a Leaving Certificate subject costs €40 per subject. For anyone wanting to do medicine they must take the HPAT at a cost of €130 and a course to prepare one costs a minimum of €250.

**Recommendation**

There is an urgent need to assess the full economic cost of ‘free education’ for parents for children up to age 16 (including the costs of extracurricular activities, books, school trips, examinations), and to reassess the financial supports necessary for vulnerable children so that they can participate fully in education. From the evidence available, it is clear that there is a need to introduce a revised system of financial, welfare and/or tax-related compensation for low-income families, including family and community supports at local level. Compensation and supports needs to be delivered in ways that are accessible and private so that they do not demean those who receive them.

### 3.3 How School Choice Promotes Barriers for Vulnerable Groups

School choice is legally protected in Ireland in a way that is not allowed in many other European countries. While there are historical reasons for this, it has unintended consequences in creating an educational market between schools (Tormey 2007). This market works to the advantage of those who have most privileged. It is those with most resources, namely middle and upper class families who can and do exercise their school choices most often (Cahill and Hall 2014; Hannan et al., 1996). They can and do move to schools that are more educationally advantageous to their own children, an option that is not available to poorer parents.
The State aid that is given to elite fee-paying schools is an indirect barrier to the vulnerable as it keeps those who are less privileged outside valuable social networks not just in school (Courtois 2018) but through college into future occupational life (Franzini and Raitano 2013).

**Recommendation**

School choice is a constitutional right but it is one that can and should be exercised through tighter regulation in ways that do not privilege the already advantaged. In alignment with the existing per capita funding arrangements, an *Equality and Social Inclusion Index* for schools should be developed that rewards schools for including the most socially excluded groups be these the children of low-income families, children with intellectual disabilities, Traveller children or the children of low-income immigrant communities. A threshold would have to be set so schools were eligible for this funding, and those schools that do not include vulnerable minorities could lose funding on a pro rata basis.

State aid to fee-paying schools is not equitable financially, and it creates an elite mentality that is socially divisive (Courtois 2018). Those who wish to have socially exclusive schooling for their children should pay the entire cost themselves.

**4. MICRO and MACRO interacting to Create Privilege**

**4.1 Private Investment of Parents: a Major Barrier to Equality for Vulnerable Groups**

One of the most significant findings from the ongoing *Growing up in Ireland* survey is that social class inequality in educational attainment literally increases with age (TASC, 2016b). At the baby stages, namely nine months old, the level of household income a child is born into has no correlation with their inherent cognitive potential (educational ability) at that time. By the age of nine years, the incidence of speech and language difficulties amongst children in the bottom three deciles (bottom 30% in income terms) are double the incidence for children in the top 30% in income terms.
The link between economic and educational inequality is reflected in the fact that at the age of thirteen, a 1 per cent increase in household income predicts a 6.5 per cent increase in verbal scores, a 5.2 per cent increase in numerical scores and a 5.8 per cent increase in the total Drumcondra Test scores (TASC 2016b).

The fact that poorer children’s academic performance relative to their more privileged peers increases with age is indicative of the fact that while schools can address some of the advantages that come from home, they clearly cannot address all of them. There is growing international evidence that out-of-school investment by privileged parents is a significant factor in perpetuating inequalities within education.

Why this is happening is related to the structure of the economy. Most households in Ireland own no productive wealth\(^6\), consequently parents rely on education to secure the future of their children. Over the past 50 years education has become the primary route to economic security and a major determinant of class positioning. While those with most resources cannot ‘buy’ superior educational credentials directly, they can protect their likelihood of acquiring these through investment in private (socially exclusive) schooling and tuition (Smyth, 2009).

*The Private Educational Market and its impact*

Ireland has a vibrant private ‘educational market’: as with other public services, those with sufficient resources are free to avail of these private services; they supplement public schooling with private investment. While fee-paying schools are one example of this, the use of private tuition (grinds) is an equally significant phenomenon. It is ‘common sense’ among those who are educational ‘insiders’ (Lyons, Lynch, Close, Sheerin and Boland, 2003, pp. 329-56) to get private tuition for their children prior to the Leaving Certificate in particular (Lynch and O’Riordan, 1998). And grinds are only one of the panoply of market services available for those who can pay for them. Summer camps, language travel and educationally relevant extracurricular activities are widely available for those who can pay.

The data from the *Growing Up in Ireland* study shows that most structured, out-of-school cultural activities are only fully accessible on a paid basis. The net effect is

\(^6\) The think tank Publicpolicy.ie reported that approximately 66% of the wealth of Irish households is in housing, John Fitzgerald *Irish Times*, Business, March 23\(^{rd}\) 2018. As this is mostly home ownership it is not a realizable asset for most people
that ‘those in the higher income families are much more likely to attend’ (Smyth, 2016, p. 96).

The market for out-of-school tuition in Irish and music reflects the longevity (and widespread acceptance) of privately funded education. Private tuition in Irish and music is so well established that it is rarely if ever framed as a grind. Given that 40 per cent of the overall grade for Leaving Certificate Irish is now given for oral Irish, parents who can afford to send children to the Gaeltacht are at a distinct advantage in the Leaving Certificate Examination. Almost 50 per cent of the overall grade in Leaving Certificate music can be given for performance; yet, it is extremely difficult to excel in performance in the Leaving Certificate without undertaking private tuition over an extended period of time and the costs are very high: in 2017, standard one-to-one instrumental music classes were advertised on the internet at €25 for half an hour. The costs are prohibitive for low-income families (Conaghan, 2015). The introduction of the Higher Professional Aptitude Test (HPAT) assessment for medicine is a more recent example of a class-biased selection criterion; both preparation for the test and taking it has to be privately funded.

The proposal to increase the level of continuous assessment in public examinations, including the Leaving Certificate, needs to closely monitored and regulated. There is ample evidence from other countries that any assessment that is undertaken outside of schools hours is inevitably going to advantage the already advantaged. Even though they do not engage in anything that is illegal, students from more privileged families are inevitably in a position to have and use resources that will advantage them in preparing their project, out of schools essay, art work etc. There is the added problem of monitoring the use of commercially-available online project materials, answers to problem questions, essays etc. that are widely available on the internet.

The relationship between private family investments in children’s education, especially out-of-school investment, in perpetuating inequalities in education is increasingly the focus of research attention internationally. A major study in the US (involving a meta-analysis of nineteen national studies over a fifty-year period) has found that social-class-based inequalities in educational attainment have risen in the US since the 1970s and these inequalities are directly related to rising income inequalities (Reardon (2011). Those with private wealth are increasingly using this to
advantage their own children, especially by buying extra educational resources outside the formal educational system that increases their children’s educational attainment (Duncan and Murnane, 2011).

Kaushal, Magnusson and Waldfogel’s (2011) findings demonstrate the scale of this development. Families in the top income quintile (richest 20 per cent) are spending almost seven times as much per child each year privately on their children compared with the poorest 20 per cent: they paid $9,000 per child for ‘enrichment’ activities such as out-of-school tutoring, athletic activities, test preparation, summer camps, second-language learning and cultural activities, compared with the $1,300 per child that families in the bottom quintile (20 per cent) spent.

**Recommendation**

The scope and scale of private family investment in children’s education in Ireland needs to be examined in detail in a national study as there is no substantive analysis of this to date. If, as is true increasingly in the US, parents are spending multiples per capita privately of what the State can invest in a given child, this creates enormous barriers for vulnerable groups that cannot be resolved in education alone. Reducing inequalities between households in terms of income and wealth is especially important in addressing this private-investment related inequality.

### 4.2 Intersecting Inequalities and Barriers for Specific Vulnerable Groups

One of the principal observations made in this submission is that the barriers that vulnerable groups face in education can be divided along macro (large scale, State-level), meso (medium scale, institutional and organisational) and micro (local, household or individual-level) grounds. These stages are all closely inter-related and any one of them can impact adversely on the other.

The second major observation is about the impact of unequal economic conditions especially, but also unequal political, social and cultural conditions at all stages. The vulnerability of any given group is exacerbated by lack of economic resources in particular as advancing successfully within education is heavily resource dependent. The reasons particular groups do not perform well in education relative to others is not a random outcome of personal choices, it is heavily structured and dependent on
the macro, meso and micro-level barriers operating across the educational system for different social groups.

Another important observation is that while there are barriers that are discrete for specific social groups these intersect with social class (income-related) inequities to compound inequalities in education. For example, social class impacts adversely with ethnicity and race in limiting educational opportunities for Traveller and immigrant children (Devine, 2011; Darmody, Byrne and McGinnity, 2014). This is not to deny the fact that Travellers and immigrant children also face unique barriers relating especially to lack of respect for their culture and way of life, their language, their religious beliefs and/or even their mode of dress.

Children with disabilities are currently more likely to come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds compared to the rest of the population (Banks et al., 2015). This creates a double disadvantage for those children as both their disability and their lower socio-economic backgrounds makes it more likely they will be placed in special school settings, or in very low streams which is educationally disadvantageous.

There are many children and adults with disabilities who are not from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds and these students experience unique barriers that are entirely due to their disability. A prime example would be the lack of knowledge among teachers and educators of Irish Sign Language which means that Deaf students cannot relate to their teachers or peers except through an interpreter, few of whom are available in mainstream schools or colleges.

I will make some brief observations here on two groups that experience intense and unique barriers, namely Travellers and immigrants, especially non-EU immigrants.

**Travellers**

Although a relatively small group in Ireland, accounting for less than 1 per cent of the population, research by the ESRI shows that Travellers stand out as a group that experience extreme disadvantage in education (Watson et al., 2017). Travellers are much less likely to have completed education to Leaving Certificate level: only 8 per cent have done so, compared to 73 per cent of non-Travellers; only 1 per cent of Travellers aged 25 – 64 years have a college degree compared with 30 per cent of
non-.Travellers. Travellers are more likely to have left school at an early age, with 28 per cent of Travellers over 25 years having left before the age of 13, compared to only 1 per cent of non-Travellers. When findings are adjusted for the fact that Travellers tend to be younger than non-Travellers (and younger adults generally tend to have higher levels of education in Ireland), the ‘education gap’ becomes even larger (Watson et al., 2017). Overall, the ESRI research shows that Travellers have not benefitted as much as non-Travellers from the general improvement in levels of education since the 1960s.

**Recommendation**

The need for an Integrated National Plan for Traveller Educational Advancement is urgent and self-evident. But for this to work, it must be a collaborative plan with Travellers and one that is linked into their plans for Traveller Accommodation, Entrepreneurship, Cultural Development, Health Care etc.

**Immigrants**

We also know from research that there are specific barriers for immigrants and other ethnic minorities in Ireland. Of particular concern, is the finding from the annual school census for 2013-14 that four out of five children from immigrant backgrounds were concentrated in 23 per cent of the State’s primary schools. While children of immigrant background now comprise approximately 12% of the primary school population, and 10% of the secondary school population, greater clustering of immigrants is evident in secondary schools in urban centres and in schools more generally in disadvantaged areas (Devine, 2013).

What this shows is that there is a high level of ethnic segregation in schools and, relatedly in housing which must be urgently addressed. If this pattern persists into a second or third generation (as it has in other European countries) this has serious implications for prolonging the barriers immigrants experience in advancing in education and society. The introduction of an Equality and Social Inclusion Index for Schools and Colleges, with rewards and sanctions if necessary, could help address this problem but it can also only be addressed, if housing, employment, transport and other changes are also introduced to preclude ghettoization.
4.3 Mapping the Intersectionality of Inequality and Barriers in Education

Table 1 maps out visually how inequalities and barriers can be understood for different groups in Ireland. Table 1 is informed by empirical research undertaken on education (Lynch, 1989, 1999; Lynch and Lodge, 2002; Lyons et al., 2003) and work on egalitarian theory and practice (Baker, Lynch et al., 2009).

Table 1: Dimensions of inequality and generative sites of inequality for social groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of In/equality</th>
<th>Re/distribution (Resources)</th>
<th>Respect/ Recognition (identities/difference)</th>
<th>Representation (parity in power and participation)</th>
<th>Relational Justice</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generative site of in/equality: social systems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic System</td>
<td>XX Social Class (working class, poor)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political System</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>XX Children, people with intellectual disabilities</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural System</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>XX LGBT/Deaf (Sign users)/ Ethnic minorities</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective System</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>XX children experiencing love and care deprivations; women, carers,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This matrix is adapted from Equality: From Theory to Action (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh, 2009)

What Table 1 shows is that, while the generative site of injustice (or the site where the major barrier arises in the first instance for particular groups) varies for different groups, all groups are affected by all types of barriers to a greater or lesser degree.

The Table matrix includes four key dimensions to be considered when discussing barriers to equality in education; inequalities in resources, inequalities in respect and recognition, inequalities in power and representation and inequalities in love, care.
and solidarity. These dimensions are listed on the **horizontal bar** of the matrix. On the **vertical side of the matrix** four **major generative sites of inequality** are outlined, namely those that arise in the economic, cultural, political and affective (care) social systems.

The matrix provides a framework that allows the four dimensions of inequality to be considered in tandem with the generative sites of inequality across social systems. It shows how a social system may be specifically generative of inequality for a specific social group (marked by two XXs) but also how the other social systems also intersect with that generative system to reproduce inequalities, marked by one X.

It also shows how social groups experience inequality across all four equality dimensions regardless of the generative site and core dimension of inequality they experienced in the first instance.

**One example**

Social class inequalities are generated by the economic system on the left hand column in Table 1 yet people from lower socio-economic classes experience inequalities in respect and recognition generated by the cultural system as well. In educational terms, resource inequalities among working class pupils compared with middle class peers, contributes to their lower attainment (Layte, 2017); but being working class also leads to misrecognition of one’s capabilities and lower expectations among teachers (Smyth, 2017) which compounds the impact of lack of resources. This shows how resource inequalities lead to respect inequalities.

We also know that schools as organisations are dominated by those from relatively advantaged social class backgrounds (Gillbride, 2013) and that those who dominate parents’ councils, for example, tend to be from the middle classes (Lodge et al., 2004). This shows how representation (power) inequalities interface with class or economic inequalities. Finally, we know that poverty undermines love and care in households leading to stress that adversely affects children’s learning (Layte 2017). Research from O’Brien (2008) and Feeley (2014) also show how affective practices (love and care) matter for good education. Feeley’s (2014) study in particular shows how those who have lacked love and care in schools, and well as in State care, had seriously limited educational outcomes. All of this clearly illustrates the intersection of economic and affective inequalities for generating inequalities in education.
Recent developments in education that focus on the outcomes of schooling in terms of grades and league tables rather than on the development of the whole person, and the process of learning itself, marginalize interest in care in schools and colleges (Lynch 2010). This has negative implications for those who are most vulnerable as they become defined as being of ‘poor market value’ implicitly if not explicitly.


While international evidence confirms that the relatively privileged have maintained their social class advantages within and without education for many decades (Blossfeld and Shavit, 1993; Marsh, 2011; Reardon, 2011), this is not to suggest that the quality of education in schools is inconsequential in challenging inequality. Irish research shows that the quality of teaching, the inclusiveness of the curriculum and assessment procedures, and school organizational arrangements are important for mitigating the impact of social-class, ethnic, racial and gendered injustices in society (Banks, 2014; Devine, Kenny and McNeela, 2008; Darmody and McCoy, 2011).

Weir et al., (2017) provide a literature review of international and comparable Irish strategies to address educational disadvantage. The evidence reviewed included a review of strategies to address class size, preschool education, teacher professional development and teacher expectations, parental involvement and the DEIS programme. Whilst highlighting some of the positive outcomes of various initiatives and the effectiveness of DEIS in particular, the review indicates the persistence of educational inequality in the face of a wide array of strategies and resources targeted at disadvantage. This paper highlights the intersecting structural and institutional (macro and meso) reasons why such disadvantages persist.

This affirms the fact that while education can significantly enhance a given individual’s capabilities and life chances, it cannot overcome structural (group-based) injustices arising from economic inequalities as the generative site of those injustices is not located within the education system in the first instance (Lynch and O’Neill, 1994; Lynch and Lodge, 2002; Lynch and Baker, 2005; Marsh, 2011).
It would be very difficult for educational (and economic) inequality to be sustained over time in democratic societies unless it was deemed morally justifiable. The moral justification for unequal outcomes in education is provided through widespread allegiance to a liberal code of equality of opportunity (EO). There is a belief that the EO principle is an acceptable guide to policy in the distribution of social goods: it is encoded in EU treaties, and advanced within member states by a variety of legally binding directives. Its legal status adds to its legitimacy as a mechanism for distributing social goods, including education.

In educational terms, equalizing opportunity is about promoting fairness in the competition for advantage. It implies that there will be winners and losers, people who do well and people who do badly. An ‘opportunity’ in this context is the right to compete, not the right to choose among alternatives of equal value. So two people, or two different groups, can have formal equal opportunities even if one of them has no real prospect of achieving anything of value. For example, a society that allows only 20 per cent of the population to attend third-level education could, in this liberal sense, give everyone an equal opportunity to do so, even though in a stronger sense it would clearly be denying the opportunity for third-level education to 80 per cent of the population. Under an equal-opportunities framework, the purpose of having a principle of equality in public policymaking is to provide a fair basis for managing these inequalities, by strengthening the minimum to which everyone is entitled and by using equality of opportunity to regulate the competition for advantage.

The problem with the concept of equality of opportunity is that it pre-supposes the persistence of structural inequalities; it assumes that there will always be major inequalities between people in their status, resources, relationships and power. There is an assumption that a mixed economy of capitalism and voluntary effort, a developed system of social welfare, a meritocratic educational system, and a specialized and hierarchical division of labour define the institutional framework within which any progress towards equality can be made. The task for egalitarians is to make adjustments to these structures rather than to alter them in fundamental ways.

In contrast to liberal equality of opportunists, promoters of equality of condition claim that inequality is rooted in changing and changeable social structures.
and institutions that promote inequality although it accepts that such structural and institutional changes are complex and take time. Equality of condition refers to the belief that people, individually and collectively, should be as equal as possible in relation to the central conditions of their lives, particularly in terms of their material conditions and the exercise of power. It is not about trying to make inequalities fairer, nor is it about giving people a more equal opportunity to become unequal; it is about ensuring that all of humanity have roughly equal prospects for a good and decent life. In education, it is not about just giving groups of people a formal right to education which in reality is unrealizable given pre-existing structural inequalities (e.g. due to lack of transport, money, books, or other cultural resources). Equality of condition recognizes the categorical and highly institutionalized character of social inequality that Tilly (1998) has identified. Because deep inequalities between peoples are encoded in laws and public policies in the form of property rights, relational and communication rights, and cultural and participatory rights and practices, equality of condition is focused on achieving changes in the organization of institutions, be these economic, political, cultural or affective.

Equality of condition also means paying more attention to how people are related, how the wealth of some is at the cost of the poverty of others, and how unequal power relations interface with inequalities of wealth, status, and other resources. In contrast to the tendency of liberal egalitarians to hold individuals responsible for their successes and failures in education, equality of condition emphasizes the influence of social class, race, disability, care responsibilities, sexuality, gender, regional location, and other factors affecting people’s choices and actions.

Ireland’s Educational System is not purely Meritocratic: addressing the issues

The equality principle governing Irish public policy, and particularly educational policy, is that of equality of opportunity which is theoretically based on merit. Those who adhere to the meritocratic position claim that those who work hard and are academically capable will do well in school regardless of their social background. The evidence does not support this claim: major social and economic inequalities inevitably undermine all but the thinnest forms of equality of opportunity in education.
because privileged parents will always find ways of advantaging their children in an economically unequal society. The inability of formal education to overcome social-class and related resource-based inequalities is a reflection of the general inability of liberal equal-opportunities policies to deliver social justice in an economically unjust society.

This presents a major dilemma for educators; even when schools do their best to overcome the many social class (and increasingly ethnic/racial/disability-related) disadvantages that students experience within schools and colleges, they cannot eliminate the competitive advantage of the most advantaged in any substantive manner given the impact of out-of-school resources. Yes, there are individual exceptions, but the exceptions are deceptive and dangerous when taken as examples (role models) of what is possible for the majority; they prolong the meritocratic myth that hard work and academic ability are all that is required to succeed relative to others. What works for a few individuals from disadvantaged groups does not work for the majority within that group.

We need to have a significantly more equal distribution of wealth and income to have substantive equality of opportunity in education. And, because all forms of inequality are intersectionally related, we need to address inequalities and barriers at macro, meso and micro levels simultaneously.

And for this to happen, fiscal, health, housing, transport, welfare, employment, childcare and educational policies need to be aligned with each other and framed in an egalitarian way. This means dealing with pre-distributional and post-distributional injustices in the taxation, welfare and other social systems, and addressing power respect, and care-related inequalities experienced by different groups at the same time.

Finally, given the relational nature of all forms of inequality in education, and in particular how the competition for advantage in an unequal society drives educational practice, it is important to remember that the vulnerability of some is exacerbated by the perpetuation of the privilege of others.

References


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\(^1\) This term was coined by my UCD colleague Luciana Lolich.

\(^2\) The fact that the majority of children in a number of primary schools in Dublin 15 are primarily from ethnic minority backgrounds, is neither desirable educationally nor socially but this is not the outcome of educational policies alone, it is directly related to housing policy.

\(^3\) Most Irish schools are private rather than public institutions in legal terms.

\(^4\) Equality of opportunity is a liberal concept. Liberal egalitarians typically define equality in terms of individuals rather than groups; while they vary between conservative liberal and left-leaning liberals, they all subscribe to the view that equality of opportunity means that people should in some sense have an equal chance to compete for social advantages. As they assume that inequality is endemic to society, equality of opportunity is about equalizing the distribution of educational (and life) chances within an unequal society. For a discussion on the difference between liberal ideas of equality and equality of condition, see Chapter 2 of *Equality: From Theory to Action* (Baker, Lynch et al., 2004).
Response to the Cassells’ Report on Higher Education:

Social Justice and Educational Considerations

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School of Education

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Summary of Main Points

1. The purpose of this paper is to respond to the Cassells’ Report on the future funding of higher education. It addresses the proposal that an income-contingent loans (ICL) system for students is the preferable option for the future funding of Irish higher education from a social justice and educational perspective.

2. The HEA National Access Plan (2015) is committed to promoting the increased participation of groups that are under-represented in higher education; an income-contingent loan system is likely to undermine this ambition.

3. Higher Education is not only a private good; it is a significant public good, and as such should be treated as an investment rather than a simply as a cost. The investment returns on higher education are measurable, and considerable in financial terms (Zhang, Larkin and Lucey 2015).

4. Higher Education has a significant social dividend in terms of improving quality of life, raising standards of education inter-generationally, enriching cultural life and facilitating political stability and public trust (McMahon and Deckert 2010; Williams et al. 2015).

5. Higher education is as vital for the development of Ireland in the 21st century as primary education was in the 19th and secondary education was in the 20th centuries respectively (AIB 2014).

6. The experience of income-contingent loans (ICLs) in Australia (where they have operated for over 20 years) show that they do not eliminate student poverty while in college, and neither do they ensure that students do not have to work while in college (James et al. 2007).

7. A large number of students who have ICLs in Australia (24%) are also taking out commercial loans to cover expenses in College; those who are poorest have the biggest loans (James et al. 2007).

8. The Australian data shows that loans are most costly for low-income students, and mature students (many of whom are women), as they have to borrow more, take longer to pay them back and have lesser access after graduation to higher-paying jobs.

9. Australian rates of participation for lower-income groups are significantly lower than those for Ireland at present.

10. Participation rates for mature students entering higher education in England have dropped by 40% in recent years due to the removal of grants and replacement with loans.

11. While the participation rates for lower-income groups has not altered significantly since loans replaced grants for fees in the UK, nevertheless, the most recent report (Sutton Trust 2016) shows that rates of participation have begun to decline in England relative to Scotland where grants still exist. The full effect of the introduction of ICLs to replace maintenance grants (2016/17) is not yet known.

12. The long-term impact of the debt incurred by student loans, for those from lower-income households especially is not known in the UK.
13. The terms of ICLs are never cast in stone; the rules for paying back student loans have changed over time in all countries, and always to the advantage of the lender (Sutton Trust 2016).

14. The amount of debt that students have in leaving college impacts on their future careers and family choices (Soederberg 2014). Current estimates for the UK suggest it will be in the region of £50,000 (sterling) for those who get loans for both fees and maintenance for their undergraduate degree alone (Sutton Trust 2016). This will exercise a huge constraint on both professional and personal (family) choices.

15. As many students in Ireland have to pursue a higher degree to enter their profession (secondary teaching being a prime example, which now takes 2 years full time with fees of at least €6,000 per annum), the cost of funding oneself through loans for 5 or 6 years to be a teacher are prohibitive.

16. The Cassells’ report did not examine the impact of an ICL system on different disadvantaged groups. A disaggregated analysis of this kind is essential.

17. The impact of an ICL system on students with disabilities needs to be examined. Students will disabilities do not have the same market options to other students so the cost of paying back loans could be onerous if loans are eventually called in.

18. Given that lone parents and women are more likely to take time of out the paid labour market due to child care costs, the likely impact of ICLs on women and lone parents must also be costed.

19. The impact of ICLs on ethnic minorities, including Travellers, and new immigrant communities also needs to be examined, as does the impact on mature and part-time students.

20. Given the level of indebtedness of Irish households ten years after the financial crisis, it is imperative not to impose more debt on families through introducing a loan system to replace grants. As already observed in New Zealand, Australia and the UK, there is a high default on student loans. Defaults are likely to be just as high in Ireland, not only given the level of household indebtedness but also due to the long established patterns of emigration (Corbett and Larkin 2017).

21. A system of Socially Progressive taxation could be implemented to fund higher education, be it in the form of a higher education graduate levy, higher contributions from graduate-intensive employers to a ‘Graduate Education and Training Fund’, or more direct taxes and contributions from high-income households towards fees (based on assets and unearned wealth).

22. Ireland cannot afford not to invest more intensively in higher education as it is currently contributing significantly less than the OECD average percentage of GDP (1.2% compared with 1.6%) towards higher education than its competitor countries (OECD 2016).

23. Finally, education is a human right and is indispensable for realising other rights. As the world population becomes more and more educated, realising rights, including employment rights, is increasingly dependent on being highly educated, not only for employment but in order to engage politically and culturally in a globalised world order.
1. Introduction: Benefits of Higher Education

The purpose of this paper is to respond to the Cassells’ Report on the future funding of higher education from an educational and social justice perspective. In particular it will address the proposal that an income-contingent loans system for students is a preferable option for the funding of Irish higher education. While the paper recognises that there is a shortfall in funding for higher educational institutions, due primarily to cutbacks during the financial crisis and a significant increase in student intake over the same period\(^1\). It provides substantial empirical evidence on the limitations of introducing an income-contingent loan arrangement in Ireland on educational, social justice and business grounds.

Privatising and individualising the cost of higher education is neither socially just nor educationally sound. Neither does it make business sense.

First, public investment in higher education enriches the capacity of the country to increase high quality, high paid employment across a wide range of areas. Data from the IDA shows the single most important factor contributing taken into account in making investment decisions was Workforce Talent (AIB, 2014).

Second, higher education is not just a private good, it is a public good. A published study of the economic dividends of higher education in Ireland shows that there is a four-fold return to the economy for investment in higher education ((Zhang, Larkin and Lucey 2015). Research from the US (McMahon and Oketch 2010 cited in Corbet and Larkin 2017) demonstrates the considerable social dividends coming from higher education in terms of strengthening democracy, improving social inclusion and political stability, reducing crime rates, and enhancing public welfare and wellbeing more generally.

Third, higher education has an intergenerational benefit in terms of enhancing future children’s educational abilities. The *Growing Up in Ireland Longitudinal Study* identified a 10% difference in achievement on the Drumcondra Verbal Reasoning Test between the children of those with degrees and those that have not attended third-level education. (Williams et al, 2016)

\(^1\) Figure A2.1 of the Cassells Report shows the drop in core income to higher education from the State for the period 2008-2015: government funding fell from 73 per cent of higher education income in 2008 to 52 per cent in 2015; this represents a drop of 21%. At the same time Figure A2.2 shows student intake increased to over 190,000 in 2015 from just over 150,000 in 2008. This represents an increase of over 25%. While student fees increased substantially over that time and now represents 22% of income compared with just under 5% in 2008, nonetheless, it does not compensate for the increased intake as higher education income overall declined from just over 1.9 billion in 2008 to 1.8 billion in 2015, all of which is due to reduced government investment.
Fourth, higher education improves the quality of civic, social and political education which in turn enhances the quality of social and civic life (in literature, music and the arts which not only have merit in their own right but also enhance Ireland’s attractiveness for tourists). Higher education also enhances the expertise and capabilities of health care, educational and other service providers which matters for the quality of health, education and other public and private services.

Finally, as income tax in Ireland is strongly progressive, well-paid employees (the majority of whom are graduates) pay considerably higher taxes than others (Collins, 2014). These taxes are, in turn, available to spend on public services. This is proof of the indirect dividend of higher education for social expenditures.

Not only does higher education enhance contribute to economic, cultural, political and intellectual life, it helps promote greater understanding of politics and the dynamics of democracy itself, thereby fostering political stability and security, especially when the gains from economic returns are distributed fairly in society.

2. Free Education has always been resisted

In considering how best to fund higher education it is important to have a long-term view of policy, and to learn from mistakes of the past.

In the mid-late 19th century, when free primary education was first proposed in Europe, it was vehemently opposed by property owners on cost grounds: in Ireland, rate payers claimed they could not afford it, while others claimed it might lead to social revolution as poor people would be able to read. In the mid-20th century, the Council of Education Report in Ireland (1960), (the Council of Education were the Expert Group in their time) rejected the expansion of free secondary education in Ireland for different reasons but with a similar intent. Although only 16% of the population was transferring from primary to secondary education in 1960, it suggested that there was no need for any change in secondary education (Coolahan, 1981, Irish Education, History and Structure, 79-81). The Council even claimed that the majority of Irish people would not be intellectually capable of benefiting from secondary education:

*An unqualified scheme of ‘secondary education for all’ would be both financially impractical and educationally unsound. Only a minority would be capable of benefiting from such education and standards would fall. The voluntary system has worked well and preserves a sense of the value of education. Better State grants and more scholarships are needed to further stimulate it*. (Report of the Council of Education, Ireland, 1960)

We are now in the 21st century and once again there is a danger of being short-sighted and limiting access to education, in this case, higher education, not by formally excluding
people, but by making it increasingly expensive, through inadequate maintenance grant support, increased fees and the removal of financial supports (grants for fees) for those on low and middle incomes.

Individualising and privatising the cost of higher education is educationally unwise, socially unjust and blind to the realities of globalisation in terms of Ireland’s position in a highly competitive global economy. Throughout the developed world, especially within Ireland’s competitor countries for high-end employment, there continues to be strong investment in higher education. While Ireland spends 1.2% of GDP on higher education, the OECD average is 1.6%. The small absolute percentages conceal very big real differences in relative expenditure; Ireland actually spends 33% less on higher education (as a proportion of GDP) than many of its competitor countries (OECD 2016). This is a worrying trend.

Education is something we are good at in Ireland. It gives us a competitive advantage and we need to enhance it and, in my view, make it as free as possible, not only on social justice grounds, but for educational and business reasons as well.

3. Student Loans in Comparator Countries: Dangers of Debt

Household debt remains a significant problem in Ireland, especially in terms of home owners who are in mortgage arrears: there were over 57,000 who were in arrears for 90 days or more, and over two thirds of these were in arrears for at least 2 year at the end of 2016. Given the profile of home owners (many of whom have school-going children) who are still in debt almost 10 years after the financial crisis, imposing more debt on their children seems to be not only socially unjust (given the bailout of the banks by the State) but also a high fiscal risk for the reasons presented in Corbet and Larkin’s (2017) submission to the committee. A loan system will further impoverish families already struggling with high debts.

While the Cassells’ report is adamant that Ireland will not introduce a US mortgage-style loans for students, there is no guarantee that whatever system of loans introduced will remain static; the evidence is entirely to the contrary. The terms of which loans have been offered (the timing of repaying, the interest charged, and whether or not loans are tied to income, have changed over time in all countries that offer student loans, including the US, Australia and the UK). The fact that changes that have occurred have always been to the advantage of the lender rather than the borrower in all Anglophone countries that provide student loans has been noted by the Sutton Trust in their recent review of the funding of higher education in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the US (Sutton Trust 2016). Moreover, when loans were first introduced in the US, it was

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2 *Irish Times*, Wednesday Nov. 9th 2016
never envisaged that they would become lifelong, mortgage-style loans; however, the
dynamics of the money markets have dictated otherwise (Goodnight et al. 2015).

Much of the commentary in Ireland about loans implies that they will come at no cost or
low cost, there is little evidence that this will be the case once a loan system is introduced.
In England, loans are paid with interest (currently 2.2%), but the government has stated that
this rate of interest will not remain static: it is assumed that it will rise.

In his forward to the report to the most recent (2016) report on the issue in England, the
Chairperson of the independent Sutton Trust, Sir Peter Lampl has noted the implications of
having students entirely funded through loans in England:

[But] young people in England are still leaving university with ever increasing debts,
especially now that maintenance grants are to be scrapped in favour of loans and the
repayment threshold is to be frozen. The poorest students will again be hit hard –
they will in future graduate with over £50,000 of debt, compounded by interest rates
of up to 3% above inflation. The size of this debt weighs increasingly heavily on
graduates, however manageable it may be. (Sutton Trust, 2016)

The dangers of going into debt for higher education are best seen from the US as it has
operated a loan system for a very long time. Student debt in the US has already surpassed
the country’s credit card debt (Schlesinger 2012) and now stands at well over $1 trillion US
dollars. Some regard it as the new ‘bubble’ waiting to burst (Goodnight et al., 2015). In
2010, 40 percent of households headed by an American under 35 were in debt for student
loans, and this is expected to rise. The student loan ombudsman has observed that the
average debt per head for the 40 million US citizens who have student debt is 30,000 dollars
(Chopra 2013).

What is rarely stated is that debt is a payment from the better off to the less well off. It is a
transfer of wealth from those who are poorer to those who are richer at a given time, very
often from younger poorer people to older and richer people. Taking on loans (including
student loans to pay fees) is about storing up debt and anxiety for the future. Loans and
debts limit choices: they have an opportunity cost. Being in debt is a form of control that
limits your future choices in a very real way including people’s ability to buy a home and to
start a family (Sanchez Bajo and Roelants, 2011; Soederberg, 2014).

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3 The Independent Commission in the UK noted that from the 2016-17 academic year, ‘maintenance grants
will be replaced with maintenance loans for new students from England, and that institutions offering high
teaching quality would be permitted to increase their tuition fees in line with inflation from 2017-18. There will
also be a consultation on freezing the threshold above which graduates start repaying their loans (in effect, this
would mean a real lowering of this threshold). The Budget also stated that, “The discount rate applied to
student loans – currently RPI+2.2% - will be reviewed to ‘bring it into line with the government’s long-term cost
of borrowing (2015: p. 6)”
If the financial crisis should have taught us anything in Ireland, it is having several thousands of euro of debt is not virtuous (even if people congratulate you on getting a mortgage\(^4\)); debts always have to be paid back at some time, and with interest.

4. **Australia: evidence on the impact of student loans**

As the Cassells Report has taken Australia as benchmark against which Ireland should be measured, it is important to examine the independent peer-reviewed studies and national data on both countries.

Professors Clancy and Goastellac (2007) undertook a study of the relationship between socioeconomic status and participation rates in higher education over a 20 year period involving, among others, Ireland, Australia, France, UK, Finland and Norway. They found that **Australia was the only country in which there has been no reduction in social group inequalities** – *in this instance over a period of almost two decades*\(^5\). This pattern is consistent whether or not we use a measure of social class [as] a measure of father’s education*\(^4\) (Clancy and Goastellac 2007: 151). At the time of the above study, a student loan scheme was in place in Australia for over 20 years while no such system existed in comparator countries\(^1\).

Ireland, and the UK (pre-loans), have shown some reduction over 20 years in socioeconomic inequality in rates of participation in higher education even with up-front fees (in the case of Ireland) and grants. Finland and Norway have both had a significant reduction in inequality in rates of participation and in both cases higher education is free (Clancy and Goastellac 2007).

In the mid-2000s, the rectors of Australia’s public universities commissioned a report on the impact of current funding (including income contingent loan) arrangements on students’ experience in higher education. The Report is based on a survey of almost 19,000 students in public universities, the largest study of its kind; it found that large numbers of students were experiencing financial anxiety even though they had access to a student loan system (James, Bexley, Devlin and Marginson, 2007). A summary of their main findings are listed below.

**KEY FINDINGS:** *Australian University Student Finances 2006: Final report of a national survey of students in public universities* by Richard James, Emmaline Bexley, Marcia Devlin and Simon Marginson, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne).

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\(^4\) The etymology (history) of the word mortgage is instructive: it comes from the French *mortgage*, literally meaning *death-pledge*. French peasants were often working until they died for the privilege of owning a house.

\(^5\) From 1980-2000
• The majority of students in public universities were in stressful financial situations and many found it difficult to support themselves week-to-week

• Full-time undergraduate students were in the most difficult situations, especially female students and low-income indigenous students, but so were postgraduates in taught courses

• 70.6% of full-time students work during term – average 14.8 hours a week and almost 13% (more than 1 in 8 students) regularly went without food or necessities as they could not afford them

• Female students were especially likely to have budget deficits – as they had less access to better paid employment

• Students from lower-income backgrounds worked longer hours and have higher loans and debts than better off students

• 40.2% of undergraduates felt that having to work adversely affected their study

While some students indicated that it would not have been possible for them to attend university without the student loan schemes, HECS-HELP and FEE-HELP (bearing in mind that grants-Irish-style are not available in Australia), there was considerable criticism of the levels of debt associated with these schemes. Many students questioned whether studying for their degree was worth it, given the debt they will have upon completion. The authors also note how having a system of state-enabled loans does not preclude students having other loans:

_A major finding of the 2006 survey overall is that 24.4 per cent of all undergraduate students and 20.2 per cent of postgraduate students reported they had taken a repayable loan or loans – excluding [government approved loans] HECS-HELP, FEE-HELP and PELS – in order to continue studying_ (James et al. 2007: 28)

While a significant of Irish students in higher education are living under financial strain, and the EUROSTUDENT Survey (HEA 2013) found that approximately 18% of Irish students are in serious financial difficulty, and this rises to 29% for mature students and 34% for students with dependent children, and for those household family income is from €20,001 to €35,000, nevertheless, the majority of Irish students were not in financial difficulty compared with their Australian counterparts within an income-contingent loan system.

While almost 71% of Australian students work during term (James et al. 2007), in Ireland, just 41% of full-time undergraduates work during term-time (22% during the whole semester and 19% from time to time during the semester (HEA 2013, Figure 4.1). Having income-contingent loans does not guarantee that students are not poor or that they do not also need to work during term. In many ways, students situation is even more financially precarious in Australia as in addition to living with financial strain in College, the
majority also have to work during term and leave college with significant debts which is generally not true in Ireland where just 13% of students have loans (mostly from banks or credit unions) (HEA 2013: Table 3.3).

Presenting Australia as a role model for Ireland on equality grounds is not justifiable therefore given that not only do Australian students leave college with higher debts than Irish students, a larger proportion of Australian students have to work while in college, and a significant number of them experience financial deprivation even though they have loans.

*National Rates of Participation: Ireland and Australia*\(^6\)

The participation rates for the two lowest socioeconomic groups in higher education in Ireland in 2012-13 were **26% for students from semi-unskilled manual working class** backgrounds and **23% for those from non-manual working class** backgrounds (HEA, 2015: 35). The participation rate for the lowest socio-economic group in higher education in Australia in the first half of 2016 was **16.9%**. The participation for entrants from the lowest socio-economic group that year was **18%** (Australian Government Department of Education and Training 2016) [https://docs.education.gov.au/node/43241](https://docs.education.gov.au/node/43241)

What is clear from this data is that participation rates in higher education are much higher for low-income groups in Ireland than they are in Australia even with the contingent loans scheme. **Income contingent loans in Australia have not enabled students from low-income families to gain the same level of participation in higher education as students in Ireland.**

On the grounds of equality and social justice therefore, there is no clear evidence that Australia is an ideal model for Ireland. In fact, the contrary is the case.

5. **Loans in England– Impact on Participation Rates**

The **Independent Commission on Fees** in the UK (2015) have found that the introduction of loans to cover the costs of fees has contributed to seriously reducing the participation rates for mature students from 2010-2015: the participation rate for part-time mature students fell by 40% while there was a drop of 10% among full-time mature students. Given that both mature and part-time students are more likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds

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\(^6\) The Australian government uses the ‘postcode’ method to determine socio-economic status (SES). Postcodes are four digit numbers that are assigned to particular geographic areas to assist Australia Post in delivering mail. Each postcode is a relatively large geographic region and contains several thousand people. Students’ SES is determined by applying the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) four indices for measuring SES to the postcodes of students’ home residence. Postcodes in the wealthiest top 25% of the index are classified as high SES, those in the middle 50% as medium or middle SES, and those in the last 25% as low SES. (The procedure has been questioned by major scholars in the field, see James, R., Baldwin, G., Coates, H., Krause K.-L., & Mcinnis. C. (2004). *Analysis of equity groups in higher education 1991–2002*. Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training.). The system is questionable for many reasons, not least as it means that those in the lowest SES groups may become invisible when amalgamated with other SES groups in a given region. It has been critiqued as a crude way of defining levels of inequality (Wheelahan 2009)
(including disadvantages arising from disability) to introduce a system of loans that would impact on their participation rates would be a socially regressive action on age grounds\(^6\).

There is also a gender dimension to this decline as mature students are disproportionately female, many returning to education after lengthy periods of caring. The increase in fees and introduction of loans were seen by the Commission as a major contributing factor to the decline in entrants from non-traditional families.

Moreover, the Commission found that even though applications from 18 year-olds were not adversely affected by the introduction of loans, ‘…applications from English students [where full tuition fees are funded through loans] have still weakened in comparison to those from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, where tuition fees have not been increased in the same way\(^7\)’. (Independent Commission 2015: 3). The Department of Education (UK) analysis of data on the impact of funding changes in England also notes that the 2013/14 cohort will have been the first cohort where all students were affected by government reforms to the student finance system, including an increase in the tuition fee cap, and that under this new scheme the percentage of students who are poorest (those who are eligible for free school meals) has declined for the first time in many years from 23 to 22% (Department of Education, UK SFR37/2016, 03 August 2016). Moreover, the percentage of students going to the more selective higher education colleges from state schools has also declined from 2009/10 to 2013/14 from 26% to 23% while the proportion of those attending from the more elite independent schools has risen.

6. **Higher Education: Paying through Socially Progressive Taxation**

Viewing the Irish system of grant aid and fees as regressive is only true if one takes a very short-term, individualistic view of the benefits and dividends of higher education. The Irish system of funding higher education is progressive in important respects that should not be overlooked.

As noted in the Cassells Report, the Irish system is one in which just over half students (52%) pay the current fee of €3,000 per annum and these are disproportionately students from better off backgrounds to a great extent. So the current system is progressive to some degree within this logic. It is recognised that those close to the marginal income thresholds for grants do face financial difficulties, and, because assets and net wealth are not taken fully into account in grant-aiding students, students from families with valuable private assets but lesser earned income are not paying as much as they could for higher education.

\(^7\) Scotland does not have a student loan arrangement like England as it does not charge fees to Scottish students. Fees in Wales and NI are much lower than those in England.
There is scope for increasing the fee-income attained from those students whose parents own considerable private assets/wealth. This has been proposed many times in previous reviews of funding for higher education but never implemented. As major wealth inequalities do not arise primarily from wages or salaries, but from inheritances that are passed inter-generationally between families (Piketty, 2014), there is a strong case for increasing fees for such students or, if not, treating their subsidised higher education as a benefit-in-kind which is taxes accordingly.

As employers in several industries and professions, including pharmaceuticals, information technology, computing, software development, engineering, the legal profession, accounting, finance and investment, for-profit health care, security industries etc. (to name but a few) are major beneficiaries of publicly-funded higher education, it is entirely plausible that there should be a graduate levy on such industries and professions that derive expertise and profit from graduates. The Cassells Report recommended a more ‘structured support’ from employers did not examine it in detail.

A Graduate Education and Training Fund should be established, funded by graduate-intensive employers on a structured basis, to help contribute to the cost of higher education.

The extent to which having higher education funded fully through general taxation is more or less regressive depends on how much taxation the state can accrue from the higher income of graduates over time. First, as noted by Corbet and Larkin (2017) in their submission to the Oireachtas Committee, a very substantial number of college graduates do not earn high salaries as rates of pay vary by sector, type of degree etc. so this must also be borne in mind when claiming that the individual benefits are considerable. Furthermore, the labour market value of higher education is not just dependent on the subjects studied but on the status of the college where one studied. The status of a qualification and its market value (even though it may cost the same amount across colleges) is strongly influenced by the status of the university or college where it is rewarded (Sutton Trust 2016). In Ireland, students have no control over the college they attend as it is based on open competition so they cannot be held accountable for the reputation of their colleges as they have no control over it.

Another issue to bear in mind is that, in general, the Irish direct income taxation system is progressive. This means that those whose income solely accrues from their paid employment actually pay far higher taxes (including USC) and social insurance than those on lower-paying jobs as can be seen from Table 1 below. The head of the Irish Taxation Institute noted, in 2016, that Ireland’s income tax system was second highest in terms of progressivity in the OECD. This is not to say that Irish taxes on employment are high by

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8 *Irish Times*, Tuesday, September 20th 2016
European standards, as the OECD repeatedly notes that they are not, but it is to say that those who benefit from higher education are also paying significantly more taxation and this is one way in which those who do benefit from higher education do contribute to the costs of their higher education (Table 1). It is surprising that there has been no major study of the tax returns that accrue to the state from higher earning graduates.

**Table 1 Total Income Tax & Social Insurance as % of Gross Income:**
Irish Households – bottom (poorest) 10% to top (richest) 10%

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Class</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>5%</th>
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<td>Bottom</td>
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### 7. Globalisation: Crucial Role of Higher Education for Ireland

We are living in a global era where access to good quality higher education is increasingly the norm not only in Northern or Western Europe but also internationally in competitor economies. If Ireland wants to maintain its strong tradition, built up over the last 25 years, of offering investors and businesses the opportunity to hire highly educated and skilled workers, across a range of domains and disciplines, it must maintain its investment in higher education. *Data from the IDA shows that over 1,100 companies have chosen Ireland as a place to set up businesses and the single most important factor contributing to this investment decision was Workforce Talent* (AIB Survey of Investors, 2014). The AIB survey found that 96% of investors claimed that workforce talent was either critical (56%) or important (42%) in making their decision to invest in Ireland. While having access to the
European Market is critical for a slightly higher percentage (56%) of investors, fewer (30%) said it was important. Having a talented workforce was also prioritised above the corporation tax rate in the above survey. Given that Ireland attracts companies from a variety of sectors that require high levels of education including ICT, Life Sciences, Financial Services, Engineering, Digital Media, Games and Social Media, it seems highly questionable to put that type of investment at risk by forcing students into debt, especially in a country where families are already heavily indebted after the financial crisis.

In 2010–2011 alone, the gross income of Ireland’s public higher educational institutions was €2.6 billion; the colleges generated gross output nationwide of €10.6 billion for this investment (Zhang, Larkin and Lucey, 2015). In other words, higher education pays back to the exchequer a considerable proportion of its initial costs by contributing to both the economy per se, and indirectly through taxation on graduate-related higher-earning individuals, which, in turn, provides a dividend for social expenditures.

8. Education as a Human Right: recognising differences among higher education students

Under their terms of reference, the Cassells’ group was now taxed with examining the impact of their proposals for funding on different groups, including low-income groups, different genders, lone parents, people with disabilities, mature students and ethnic minorities; this is an unfortunate omission. Any proposal to change the funding structure of higher education will have a disaggregated impact.

It is imperative therefore that the impact of an income-contingent loan scheme on different groups is considered in detail. Neither people with disabilities, lone parents, those from low-income working class communities, poorer women nor ethnic minorities (including Travellers) have the same employment opportunities as young middle class graduates. Data from Europe shows that employment opportunities and rates of pay for graduates with identical degrees are highly stratified by social class in particular; this is also true for Ireland (Franzini and Raitano, 2013)

So to conclude, education is a basic human right and is recognised as such in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

Education is not a market commodity that should be provided on a ‘pay as you go basis’ because education is indispensable for realising other rights, including the right to political, economic and cultural participation. Higher education is increasingly indispensable for equal participation in the globalised social order.

Even if higher education does not have labour market relevance, it has an intrinsic value for the development of the individual, enabling the person to exercise capabilities, choices and
freedoms. Education also enables individuals and groups to overcome other social disadvantages and prior discriminations; it builds capacities to succeed and enriches cultural, social, political and economic life.

Ireland has ratified the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR) (Article 13) which **explicitly directs States to promote the right to higher education**: *States are obliged to work towards the progressive realisation of the right to higher education* (CESCR, General Comment No 13: The Right to Education (Article 13 of the Covenant), 21st sess, UN Doc E/C.12/1999/10 (8 December 1999) [44].

As the HEA National Access Plan (2015) is also committed to promoting the increased participation of groups that are under-represented in higher education, it is imperative that the funding system introduced does not undermine this ambition. The loan system being proposed would undermine the opportunities for disadvantaged groups over time for the reasons outlined above.

References


While a study by Denny (2014) on Ireland claims that the free fees regime had no impact on participation rates for lower income groups, his claims are questionable as the paper is based on data from universities alone (it did not include the Institutes of Technology and several other publicly funded colleges—which approximately half the students are studying). His analysis was undertaken on data over a very short period—from 1994-1998, some 20 years ago.

Part-time students enrolled at UK universities—a group often ignored in analyses and more likely than full-time students to come from disadvantaged backgrounds—dropped even more precipitously in the wake of the 2012/13 reforms, and with little sign of the recovery that full-time undergraduate numbers have shown. In 2009/10, there were 468,000 part-time first year enrolments at UK universities; by 2013/14, this had dropped by 40% to 282,000. The most recent data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) shows that this fell even further last year (2014/15), by over 5% compared to the previous year, to 266,000 part-time first year enrolments. According to the Independent Commission on Fees, “[while] it is not possible to assign fully independent causality to the fees regime when it is part of a complex set of variables driving these changes in demand [...] there is a strong suggestion that the [post-2012] fee environment has taken a toll [on part-time and mature students’ enrolment rates].” (Sutton Trust, 2016: 9)
Wider Policy Context

Education is recognised as a fundamental right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Irish state has obligations to promote and protect equal access and treatment in education. The issue of poor educational outcomes for Travellers has long been recognised and yet there remain stark inequalities between Traveller and the general population in relation to education.

As noted in the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy:

Travellers and Roma are among the most disadvantaged and marginalised people in Ireland. During the years of the financial crisis from which Ireland is emerging, those at the margins of our society frequently, and regrettably, suffered disproportionately from the effects of financial adjustments.

And Specifically, Travellers need targeted and additional support because:

A mainstreamed approach is sufficient when outcomes are identical for all components of the target groups, when evidence shows a clear gap between the situation of Roma and Travellers versus the rest of society (e.g. regarding their health and housing situation), policies should be adjusted and specific measures should also be developed.

Recognition of Traveller Ethnicity

On the 1st March 2017, Traveller ethnicity was formally recognised by the State in an address by the Taoiseach Enda Kenny in Dáil Éireann, a day described as historic and momentous for the Irish Traveller community and for equality in Ireland.

This National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy outlines commitments across departments and agencies in relation to Traveller and Roma in Ireland, it was developed after consultations with Traveller and Roma groups nationally and has included the development of a NTRIS steering group.

Key initiatives and developments arising from the development of this Inclusion Strategy include the following:

1. State recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group of the Irish nation;
2. Investment by the State in community-based support mechanisms to ensure greater retention of Traveller and Roma children and youths in the education system;
3. Increased funding to be invested by the State to promote knowledge of, and pride in, Traveller culture and heritage.

Wider Equality legalisation: The Public-Sector Duty

Travellers should also benefit from wider development in relation to equality and anti-discrimination legislation.

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1 National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017 – 2021 Foreword Minister David Stanton Minister of State for Justice at the Department of Justice and Equality with special responsibility for Equality, Immigration, and Integration June 2017
Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 places a positive duty on public sector bodies to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality, and protect human rights, in their daily work. This is an innovative development in Irish equality and human rights legislation and presents a valuable opportunity for public bodies to embed human rights and equality considerations into their functions, policies and practices.³

Section 42 states that:
(1) A public body shall, in the performance of its functions, have regard to the need to:
   1. eliminate discrimination,
   2. promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the persons to whom it provides services, and
   3. protect the human rights of its members, staff and the persons to whom it provides services.

Education

- Travellers remain very educationally disadvantaged. The majority of Travellers (70%) have only primary or lower levels of education.⁴
- There is a strong link between education attainment and employment in the Irish labour market and young people leaving school early face a far higher risk of unemployment. In 2012, only 35% of Irish people with no qualifications were active participants in the labour market compared to 50% of those with a Junior Certificate, 70% with a Leaving Certificate and 79% with a post-Leaving Certificate qualification (2012). Furthermore, lower qualifications generally lead to low skilled jobs and low earnings throughout the life course.⁵

90% of Travellers have finished their education by the age of 17

In 2011, just 115 Travellers had attained a third level qualification, just 1% of the population

With the onset of austerity in Ireland following the economic collapse, there were 85.5% cuts to Traveller education, with no supports put in place to help Travellers successfully transition to mainstream schooling.

Day to day realities

- Bullying
- Exclusion
- Poor lifelong opportunities
- Reduced time table
- Racism/discrimination
- Lack of culturally appropriate curriculum

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² IBID Page 12
³ IBID page 13
Introduction

A Social Portrait of Travellers in Ireland Dorothy Watson, Oona Kenny and Frances McGinnity,

Although a relatively small group in Ireland, accounting for less than 1 per cent of the population, Travellers stand out as a group that experiences extreme disadvantage in terms of employment, housing and health (Nolan and Maître, 2008; All Ireland Traveller Health Study, 2010; Watson et al., 2011), and that faces exceptionally strong levels of prejudice (MacGréil, 2011). In this report we draw on a special analysis of Census 2011 to examine in detail the patterns of disadvantage experienced by Travellers in the areas of education, employment, housing and health. The full population from Census 2011 gives a large enough number of Travellers to investigate. Rather than treating Travellers as a homogenous group, the study explores whether specific groups of Travellers (in terms of gender, age and region) experience particularly high levels of disadvantage.

Travellers are much less likely to have completed education to Leaving Certificate level: only 8 per cent have done so, compared to 73 per cent of non-Travellers. The term Travellers refers to ‘the community of people who are commonly called Travellers and who are identified (both by themselves and others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions including, historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland.’ (Ireland, Equal Status Act, 2000, Sec 2 (1)). Throughout this report, unless otherwise specified, ‘Ireland’ refers to the Republic of Ireland. Other general social surveys often have too few Travellers for meaningful analysis. A Social Portrait of Travellers Only 1 per cent of Travellers aged 25–64 years have a college degree compared to 30 per cent of non-Travellers. Travellers are more likely to have left school at an early age, with 28 per cent of Travellers over 25 years having left before the age of 13, compared to only 1 per cent of non-Travellers. When we adjust for the fact that Travellers tend to be younger than non-Travellers (and younger adults tend to have higher levels of education), the ‘education gap’ becomes even larger. Among Travellers and among the general population, women and younger adults were more likely to complete second level education. However, the pattern by age differs between Travellers and non-Travellers so that the gap in terms of completing second level is larger in the younger age groups. Among those aged 55–64 years, 97 per cent of Traveller and 49 per cent of non-Travellers left school without completing second level. Among those in the 25–34 age group, the figures are 91 per cent of Travellers and 14 per cent of non-Travellers. This suggests that Travellers have not benefitted as much as non-Travellers from the general improvement in levels of education since the 1960s. As noted above, women are more likely to have completed Leaving Certificate level. While Traveller women are more likely than Traveller men to have completed the Leaving Certificate, the gender gap is smaller than among non-Travellers. Traveller women still remain very disadvantaged in educational terms, with an estimated 92 per cent leaving school without having completed second level. The figure is 95 per cent for Traveller men.

Travellers were about 19 times more likely than non-Travellers to not be at work. The gap grows to Travellers being 22 times more likely to not be at work when we adjust for age, because Travellers tend to be younger and younger adults have a higher labour market participation rate than older adults.
We must note, as stated in the ESRI report, the difference in the improvements of educational attainment of the non-Traveller population from the 1960s onwards. However, it also important to take into account the historical assimilation policies of the Irish state since the 1960s onwards. The continuous denigrating and erosion of Traveller culture has led to severe inequalities within the community. If we are to be realistically able to address the issues that Travellers face on a daily basis, then we must acknowledge the state’s role in these policies. On the 1st of March 2017 the Irish state formally recognised Travellers as an ethnic community, with this statement been made it is only obvious that the next stage is to formally recognise the damage that has been inflicted on the Traveller community as a result of the state’s denial of Traveller culture, history and way of life and the policies, that were so ardently supported and followed by the various institutions of the Irish state. The state needs to accept to make amends to this terrible injustice it must and should address the issue of reparations, reparations that will go towards the reviving of our language, our nomadism, our history and our place in Irish society. When we look at the definition of reparations, it states that it is to make amends, to truthfully accept that the state has gotten it wrong for 50 years it must a make amends. Enda Kenny in his statement to the dail on the 1st of March 2017 stated a people within a people, the status of ethnicity in name only will not and cannot make amends for the oppressive policies of the Irish state, it must be addressed with genuine and concrete policies and supports for the Traveller community.

In the 50 years or so that has passed since the Report of Itineracy, Irish society has changed immeasurable, education attainment in the sedentary population in Ireland is one of the highest in the western world. When we ask how did this happen we must look to the policies and the supports that were put in place for the population. It was one of great investment, pride and progressive thinking. We have just celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement and the how our relationship has changed with the unionist protestant community over that period of time. A key element of the good Friday agreement is the “Principle of parity of Esteem” we must and should apply the same principle when it comes to resolving the issues and problems faced by the Traveller community.

You cannot make up for the damage that was done to my generation and my peers, so what are you going to do for our children and our future?

It with this mind that we suggest some of the following recommendations:
• Culturally appropriate primary school programmes
• Traveller resource Teachers to be re-instated
• Traveller special needs assistance/Teachers to be employed
• Traveller home Liaison supports
• Government bodies should work with the Traveller community to develop a national strategy, to address the lack of engagement of male Travellers in education. In developing the strategy' the negative legacy of educational policies and practices in Ireland must be acknowledged and addressed.\(^6\)

• Specific training projects for young Traveller men, Traveller organisations should be resourced to develop a national network committed to supporting Traveller men in engaging in culturally appropriate education initiatives\(^7\).

• To ensure that an inclusive and culturally respectful education system is available to all, it is imperative that the education sector meets the needs of all, most especially Travellers and ethnic minorities. Therefore,\(^8\)
  a. Mandatory diversity awareness training must exist all educators
  b. Investment must be made in culturally appropriate learning environments
  c. Culturally appropriate learning materials must be developed for all sectors of the education system
  d. Acknowledging gender roles and then need for men to engage in relevant learning in an appropriate and safe space

• Traveller organisations should be resourced and funded to support the engagement of Traveller men in culturally appropriate education initiatives.

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\(^6\) It’s all about Education-Making education work for Traveller Men, National MABS, report 2016, Dermot Sreenan, Published national Traveller MABS

\(^7\) Ibid,

\(^8\) Ibid,
Submission by the Adult Educational Guidance Association of Ireland (AEGAI) to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills on the topic: Barriers to Education facing vulnerable Adults.

1. Introduction

The AEGAI is the representative association of the Adult Education Guidance and Information Services (AEGIS), working across the Further Education and Training (FET) sector within the sixteen Education and Training Boards (ETB’s).

The aims of the association are:

- To promote the Adult Educational Guidance and Information Services and advocate for the interests of both the members and their clients, ensuring a quality professional service is delivered country wide.
- To negotiate on behalf of our members to ensure appropriate levels of staffing and professionalism are maintained in all our services.
- To represent and promote the views of the AEGAI membership to appropriate external bodies.
- To update our members on new developments in the FET Sector and to work collaboratively with all stakeholders to create a shared vision of Guidance services throughout the life-span.
- To provide peer support, networking opportunities and share best practice among AEGAI members.

2. The Context of the Adult Educational Guidance and Information Service (AEGIS)

The AEGIS is a professional, impartial, national educational guidance and information service, located within the 16 ETB’S. Funded through SOLAS, the AEGIS supports more than 50,000\(^1\) service beneficiaries on an annual basis. The Guidance Counsellors in the AEGIS are professionally qualified to postgraduate level in guidance, as set out in the DES Course Recognition Framework document dated March 2016. The AEGIS were established in 2000 in response to the proposal in the White Paper *Learning for Life*. The White Paper recognised that adult guidance was emerging as the lynchpin in the lifelong learning model, thus enabling adults to make educational, work and life transitions in a fast moving technological and information-based society.

The AEGIS model is informed by national and EU guidelines for guidance provision. EU policy identifies “*lifelong guidance as core to a successful dynamic knowledge-based economy viewing it as an effective conduit between education and sustainable employment while promoting social inclusion*”\(^2\)

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\(^2\) Lisbon Agenda, 2000; [https://static.sys.kth.se/itm/wp/cesis/cesiswp106.pdf](https://static.sys.kth.se/itm/wp/cesis/cesiswp106.pdf)

Europe ET Strategy 2020

The rollout of the Solas FET Strategy underlined both the need for guidance, and the centrality of guidance in the Government’s employment strategy. The FET strategy recognised that the planning process must consider and identify how the needs of the learner, the employer and the community are met; and how effective guidance services can ensure a return on the tax payer’s investments.


As stated in the Solas FET strategy “*the Adult Guidance Service enables individuals and (therefore) communities to achieve their developmental, personal, social, career and employment aspirations. Guidance facilitates the acquisition of Career Management Skills and benefits employees throughout their working life.*”
The AEGIS provide a full-time, year-round, objective, professional, quality assured, guidance and information service. The service is underpinned by the following principles:

- Learner/Client centred
- Confidentiality
- Impartiality
- Equal opportunities
- Accessibility
- Transparency, Empowerment
  (White Paper, Learning for Life 2000)

3. Target Groups

The AEGS provides a comprehensive guidance counselling and information service to the following target groups as identified by the Department of Education and Skills Operational Guidelines 2012 (Updated from White Paper 2000)

It further highlights (page 114)

1. Development of national referral protocols between Adult Guidance Services and DSP and other National agencies- HSE, disability services etc
2. Widening of the remit of Adult Educational Guidance services to become the Adult Guidance and Information services for the FET sector and general public providing quality impartial education and career/vocational information and quality guidance provision through 1:1 guidance, group guidance and outreach provision  While the above is the vision the reality is that FET guidance strategy has been invested in our services to further the goals set out in the Solas FET.

- Adults and young people aged over sixteen years who left school with low or no formal qualifications or low literacy levels.
- The unemployed, particularly the priority groups identified as part of the Government’s Pathways to Work 2016-2020.
- The long-term unemployed and those at risk of becoming long-term unemployed, especially those over fifty years of age.
- Those not in work but not eligible to be on the Live Register.
- Those in the workplace with basic skills needs.

In addition to the above target categories, we now provide guidance and information to clients who come to our services via direct referrals from Intreo & DEASP case officers, including asylum seekers in direct provision, individuals with refugee status, and Syrians from the government relocation/resettlement programme.

4. The Role of AEGIS

The AEGS provides a service to the whole community, working closely with all the relevant statutory and local agencies i.e. Local Area Partnerships, Citizen Information Centres, Volunteer Centres, MABS, Local Development Programmes and Enterprise Boards). We enjoy very well-established relationships with our colleagues in second level guidance, Youthreach, Further Education Colleges, third level education and the Probation Service. We are an evidence-based service that has been evaluated on an ongoing basis and supported by ongoing supervision and continuous professional development through NCGE.

While the above is the vision, the reality is that the FET Guidance strategy has not been implemented to date and no funding or resources has been invested in our services to further the goals as set out in the SOLAS FET document.

As the SOLAS Amarach Report July 2017 P25 states:

“where appropriate guidance is absent and unavailable this has a direct negative impact on learner satisfaction, engagement and course completion. For Long Term Unemployed and disengaged learner’s guidance and counselling may also be needed to help with other personal problems which may have resulted in their current employment status, for example individuals struggling with mental health problems, alcohol or substance abuse problems require additional guidance counselling supports beyond the strategic needs of the learner regarding course choices or potential career paths
The ongoing work of the service includes:

- Provision of a professional guidance service to all referred clients on a one-to-one and group basis including workshops on a wide range of guidance and information issues to target groups within local communities. This includes personal development, stress and time management, QQI progression routes, information on courses, rights and entitlements, CAO, study skills, CV preparation and interview skills.

- Maintaining up to date and accurate information on local, national and European education and training opportunities through a drop-in information service to the public.

- Advocating and networking on behalf of clients with a range of local and national agencies such as third level institutions, HSE, Probation Service, and the National Learning Network, among others. Consideration should be given to the development of a protocol with HSE mental health services for appropriate referral. Participating and contributing to a range of local ETB, Partnership and Community Initiatives and programmes to develop services and supports for clients including

Building strong links with local employers, local enterprise offices and liaise with the newly appointed Regional Skill Fora managers.

5. Guidance and Employment

During the recent recession we managed to meet over 52,000 beneficiaries on an annual basis and supported them to access training and education to secure employment. In quantitative terms we can evidence the work we have done through our national client database and to see the good work the services are performing from a more personal perspective please see attached client case studies.

In a recent presentation to the National Guidance Forum 2016, IBEC stated “that an individual will have changed jobs on average ten times before the age of thirty-eight.”
As referred to in the Career Quake phenomenon “the foundations of the traditional concept of career are being shaken and in many cases destroyed.” Jobseekers must learn the skills of self-reliance, become “vendors of their own skills” and prove able to cope with periods of unemployment (CF Career Quake phenomenon, Tony Watts (ELPGN) and William Bridges).

The AEGIS are ideally to provide career management skills to learners on FET courses. This will enable the management of flexible career pathways and increase employability thereby empowering the self-management of skill.

6. Unique Strengths of the AEGIS

1. Highly qualified, experienced and professional staff working in a person-centred, impartial manner which facilitates vulnerable adults to make meaningful and informed educational/ training/ employment choices.

2. One to one meetings are a core part of our model; the time given to clients and the follow up, helps minimising ‘course hopping’ and drop out while enhancing individual employability.

3. Embedded in the community with highly developed networks, the AEGS is trusted and well placed to support the active inclusion of the most socially and economically disadvantaged. The AEGIS is well placed to work with people who are not currently active in the labour market as outlined in Pathways to Work 2016-2020, namely homemakers, qualified adult dependents, those ineligible for social welfare payments, those with a disability, carers (when caring is complete), lone parents and part-time workers.

4. The quality of the service provided by AEGS is continually evaluated by NCGE and DES through the AGMS quantitative and qualitative data gathered biannually on the Adult Guidance Management System (AGMS). To ensure that guidance is systematically evaluated (SOLAS 2014-2019) we would welcome the mining of the AGMS database for longitudinal analysis in respect of outcomes for service users particularly progression routes and employment. Supervision for guidance counsellors as per the IGC Code of Ethics together with regular CPD provided by NCGE, safeguards the professionalism of the service provided.

7. Future Priorities for AEGAI
• To continue to lobby SOLAS and DES for an expansion of our services to ensure that we can deliver a quality service to vulnerable adults.

• Initiating consultation with all stakeholders to inform the planning process on an ongoing basis. Guidance staff have an overview of the needs of learners and the gaps in programmes and services. Their insights and information can inform the development of the FET policy and strategy going forward within ETBs and the wider community.

• To support Ireland’s National Skills Strategy 2025 (DES) with particular reference to the promotion of new apprenticeships, traineeships, springboard programmes and other upskilling opportunities while ensuring that our model, ethos and values of guidance are not compromised within that process.

• Provide an effective service to isolated rural communities and regional urban centres experiencing long term unemployment with special reference to those over 50 made redundant.

• To be clearly identified, marketed and promoted on all National Employment and course databases and other web-based platforms.


• https://www.ncge.ie/fet-guidance/record-keeping-and-data-gathering

• https://www.ncge.ie/ncge/national-forum-guidance-first-meeting-2016

Joint Committee on Education and Skills

AEGAI Submission

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4. Europe ET Strategy 2020

5. Amárach Report
   www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/Barriers%20to%20FET%20Final%202017.pdf

6. ELGPN

7. AGMS
   www.ncge.ie/fet-guidance/record-keeping-and-data-gathering

8. AEGI Operational Guidelines
ADULT EDUCATION GUIDANCE INITIATIVE (AEGI)

OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES 2012
Purpose of these Guidelines

These guidelines are for Vocational Education Committee (VEC) and Waterford Institute of Technology staff managing, administering and delivering adult education guidance services funded by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) under the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI).

These guidelines are set out in three sections:

- Aim and Objectives
- Terms and Conditions
- Guiding Principles

General queries on these guidelines or the AEGI should be addressed to:

Further Education Section,
Cornamaddy,
Athlone,
County Westmeath
Kevin_Hogan@education.gov.ie

Guidance queries should be addressed to:

Jennifer McKenzie, Director
National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE),
Prussia Street,
Dublin 7
Section One
Aim and Objectives

1. The overall aim of the AEGI is:

   To offer a guidance service to adults which includes impartial adult education information, one-to-one guidance and group guidance, which will help people to make informed educational, career and life choices.

2. The AEGI is based on an integrated model of adult educational guidance counselling which is:

   - inclusive of the pre-entry, entry, ongoing and pre-exit stages and is
   - inclusive of personal, educational and vocational guidance;
   - working in partnership at local level, meeting a spectrum of guidance needs of the target groups, employing a range of methodologies including information provision, one-to-one guidance, group guidance and outreach provision;
   - based within the VECs/other managing providers;

3. Guidance is a key aspect of further education programmes and should be available at all stages including pre-entry and pre-exit on an integrated basis. Under the AEGI, individual AEG Services (AEGS) provide personal, educational and vocational guidance which supports learners to make informed decisions (for example, about course choice and certification if required, progression plans, recognition of prior learning, etc). AEGS provide ongoing guidance which also supports the learner’s motivation to continue with a programme, especially where previous educational experiences may have been negative.

4. All AEGS should be offered free-of-charge to any person who is in one of the target groups identified at (20) below.
Section Two: Terms and Conditions

- Administration
- Management Structure
- Role of the NCGE, the National Advisory Group and the DES
- Integrated Service Approach
- Target Groups
- Eligible Costs

Administration
5. The AEGI is administered by the DES on an annual calendar year basis.

6. The VEC/WIT submit financial reports to the DES three times annually. AEGS complete twice yearly reports via the Adult Guidance Management System (AGMS) for DES which is co-ordinated and monitored by NCGE. These reports provide quantitative and qualitative reports for quality assurance purposes. NCGE publish the Executive report of these twice yearly reports onto the AEGI Web based-Handbook for review and reference purposes.

Management Structure
7. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO)/Head of Student Life and Learning in WIT has overall responsibility for all VEC activities including the AEGS. The AEG Coordinator has responsibility for the day-to-day management of the staff of the AEGS, including supervision of Information Staff and/or other guidance counsellors, and for planning and evaluation of the service as deputed by the management structure.

8. The AEG Coordinator (and in WIT, the REGSA Coordinator) should work as part of an integrated Adult Education Service which may also include Adult Literacy, Community Education, Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE), DEIS Family Literacy, Skills for Work, the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) or the Prison Education Service.

9. The AEG Coordinator should develop and agree appropriate adult education guidance programmes for these programmes and AEGS staff should deliver those programmes in consultation and co-operation with staff in the further education programmes listed above. AEG Coordinators and staff should also liaise with staff in the other further education programmes (Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) and Youthreach).

10. The organisation of the AEGS and its management, e.g., in relation to “catchment areas”, is a decision for the CEO/Head of Student Life and Learning in WIT. The CEO/Head of Student Life and Learning may delegate responsibility for the management of the funding allocated under the AEGI to relevant adult education service managers.

11. AEGS staff should be recruited in line with Circulars 70/2004 and 15/2007 and the provisions of Circulars 22/2009 and 23/2009 on public sector appointments must be adhered to.

Role of the NCGE, the National Advisory Group (NAG) and the DES
12. The DES provides funding for the AEGI through VECs and WIT and provides funding for the NCGE. It appoints and chairs the NAG.

13. The NCGE is an agency of the DES whose role is to develop and support quality guidance provision in the education sector as part of lifelong learning in accordance with national and international best practice. NCGE provides advice, support, materials and resources for guidance counselling in the education sector and provides continuing professional development (CPD) for guidance practitioners.

14. The NCGE’s role with regard to the AEGI is to:
   - support AEGS nationwide in partnership with the DES, VEC/WIT, AEG staff, external evaluators and other relevant organisations and agencies at local and national level;
   - provide advice as appropriate to AEGI staff to assist them in resolving operational and strategic issues;
   - Provision of CPD for AEGS staff.

15. The NAG comprises representatives of DES, NCGE, IVEA and the AEGAI. Its terms of reference are:
   - To identify policy issues emerging in adult guidance and to discuss solutions with a view to informing the policy decisions;
   - To build on the experience and to continue to support the development of models of good practice for provision of guidance to hard to reach groups;
   - To consider how best practice outcomes can inform policy, practice and evolution of the service; and
   - To review and evaluate relevant AEGI reports.

16. A wider group of interested stakeholders will meet less frequently, but at least once a year. The purpose of this group will be to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to input into the direction of Adult Guidance policy. The group will comprise NAG members and:
   - National Co-Ordinators of Further/Adult Education Programmes
   - The NCGE Management Committee
   - FÁS
   - DSP
   - National Educational Welfare Board
   - AEOA
   - AONTAS
   - NALA

**Integrated Service Approach**

17. The AEG Co-ordinator, the AEO and other relevant service managers should ensure that a comprehensive plan is in place to ensure that adult education services work cooperatively together on an intra-agency basis (Local Area plans drawn up between AEGS and Adult Literacy Organisers under ITABE could inform the plan). This plan should be developed and agreed with the CEO and relevant members of the VEC senior
management team and the AEO should report to the CEO on its implementation on a regular basis. The foundation of such an integrated approach includes communication, information sharing and joint planning and reporting and a formal forum for this should be established.

18. Within approved centres a team approach by staff to planning, development and review should be adopted to maximise the coherence of the overall programme. This should apply both within individual programmes and between different programmes.

19. An integrated service model depends on more than ‘regular meetings’. Examples of features of such an integrated model include a common VEC database (recognising that the AEG Services currently have a separate confidential client information database), pre-course placement sessions, operational planning meetings, joint brochures and publicity, generic course descriptions and outreach meetings.

20. AEGS staff (in collaboration with other VEC personnel and as designated by the AEG Co-ordinator) should participate in networks and partnerships with other local organisations including key community and voluntary interests, employers, employment services and relevant state agencies, including the Department of Social Protection.

21. AEGS, under the direction of the CEO/AEO/AEGS Coordinator, should make sure that there is appropriate liaison with local and regional welfare offices to ensure the referral of unemployed people to further education programmes in accordance with Circular 76/2011 - Interim Protocol to enable referral of unemployed people to Further Education programmes funded by the Department of Education and Skills.

**Target Groups**

22. The AEGI targets individuals and groups that experience particular and acute barriers to participation and are more difficult to engage in the formal learning process. A list of these groups (which are the same target groups listed in the BTEI and ALCES operational guidelines and should be understood to include VTOS participants) is set out below.

- Adults and young people aged over 16 who left school with low or no formal qualifications or low literacy levels
- The unemployed, particularly the priority groups identified as part of the Government’s activation agenda.
- The long-term unemployed and those at risk of becoming long-term unemployed, especially those in the older age groups
- Those not in work but not eligible to be on the Live Register
- Those in the workplace with basic skills needs
- Disadvantaged women who have particular experience of barriers to participation
- Disadvantaged men, including those experiencing rural isolation
- Lone Parents and others with caring responsibilities that may prohibit their participation in full time courses

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1 Young people aged over 16 years of age are eligible to participate in BTEI and Adult Literacy programmes. Community Education programmes are open to those over 18 years of age and VTOS for unemployed people over 21 years of age. Where a young person aged between 16-18 years of age presents, AEGS staff should deal with them appropriately and in line with VEC child protection guidelines.
• Travellers
• Homeless People
• Substance Misusers
• Ex-offenders
• People with Disabilities
• People for whom English is not the mother tongue, who require language and literacy supports
• Former residents of designated education institutions and eligible family members.

Eligible Costs
23. The Department’s AEGI allocations may be used for the following pay and non-pay costs:

• Pay of staff
• Co-ordination, management and administration
• Technical support
• Overheads using existing premises, equipment and materials
• Outreach provision
• Publicity

24. Pay costs may include costs related to co-ordination and administration and the provision of supports such as staff training and supervision of guidance counsellors as set out in Appendix 5.

25. Any transfer of AEGI funding to any other programme must have the prior written approval of the Department. Such a decision should be formally recorded in the committee’s proceedings and be identified in the Financial Returns

Section Three: Guiding Principles

• Accessible;
• Appropriate;
• Confidential;
• Equality of opportunity;
• Impartial;
• Individual Ownership and Opportunity;
• Integrated;
• Quality Standards and delivery;
• Team Approach;
• Transparent
• Complaints handling.

Quality Standards and delivery
27. The AEGI web-based Handbook, managed by NCGE provides detailed national guidelines for AEGS staff and management on good practice in quality service provision and resources to support provision (www.ncgeaegihandbook.com).
28. The AGMS is provided to all AEGS and completion is mandatory for good practice in guidance client information management and for national qualitative and quantitative reports to DES/NCGE. This is a confidential guidance database with access to client information for AEGS staff only.

**CPD for AEGS staff**

29. NCGE provides an annual programme of CPD for AEGS staff, focusing on adult guidance provision to the designated target groups, in line with national priorities. Alongside this CPD programme, AEGS guidance counsellors and co-ordinators are required to attend regular guidance counselling supervision.

**Guidance awareness CPD for further education staff**

30. In-service training for further education staff (paid and voluntary) should include guidance awareness training in consultation with the AEGS Co-Coordinator

**Equality**

31. Equality legislation is designed to counter discrimination on the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion, race and membership of the Traveller community. Applied to adult education, the principle of equality requires that all learners be afforded the opportunity of reaching their potential in their social, cultural, political, economic and other roles.

32. Accordingly, the VEC are expected to develop a pro-active strategy or proofing mechanism to target and prioritise those most at risk, e.g. setting out an Equality Checklist. This will assist in optimising client access to, participation in and benefit from AEGS, and in counteracting barriers arising from differences of socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity and disability. Guidelines on Equality Mainstreaming for the VEC sector are available from the Equality Authority: [www.equality.ie](http://www.equality.ie)

**Accessibility and Inclusiveness**

33. The principle of access and inclusiveness means that barriers to participation are removed. AEGS must ensure that services are available on an outreach basis to those who are at most risk of being marginalised. Geographical considerations are important in this respect.

**Local Consultation and an Area Based Approach to Planning**

34. Strategic planning forms a key element in provision of quality guidance service. AEGS are required to engage in strategic planning, both within VECs/WIT and as a guidance services in themselves, and as set out in the Web-Based Handbook. AEGS should involve themselves in local planning and should consult with relevant local actors and providers to identify needs, avoid duplication and ensure that priorities are addressed. Local advisory groups for the AEGS provide opportunity to ensure coordinated approach for guidance provision in local areas in consultation with relevant local, county and regional plans of local development agencies, County and City Development Boards, DSP etc.

35. Publicity and awareness-raising promotional work, including the services of the impartial information and guidance in AEGS, should take place in the broader context of the single programme for adult learning established for specific geographical areas
within each VEC/WIT. Such an approach will ensure that adult learners are directed to the service that best suits their needs.

**Innovation**

36. Innovative approaches to guidance delivery should be considered by AEGS, including telephone provision, and e-guidance. The development of models of guidance to suit the needs of the target groups is supported at local and national level by NCGE which should be consulted for advice on this area as appropriate.
Appendix 1
To the Chief Executive Officer of each Vocational Education Committee
November 2004

Circular 70/04
Pay and Conditions for Adult Education Guidance Counsellors and Adult Education Guidance Co-ordinators

1. Background
The White Paper on Adult Education, “Learning for Life”, sets out proposals for the development of an adult educational guidance service to support participants in VTOS, adult literacy and adult and community education programmes. Funds for this have been earmarked as part of the National Development Plan 2000-2006, with the aim of having a comprehensive service in place by 2006. Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the project have been approved and there is now a service operating in 25 areas.

A structure for the employment of the Adult Education Guidance Counsellors and Adult Education Guidance Co-ordinators, covering recruitment, and pay and conditions, as set out below, has been devised.

2. Recruitment
Appointments to the position of Adult Education Guidance Counsellor and Adult Education Guidance Co-ordinator will be made by the Vocational Education Committees, where the VEC is the sponsor of the initiative, or Institute of Technology, where appropriate.

Where an adult guidance service involves the management of staff, the promotion of outreach, the supervision of quality standards, the evaluation of the service, and guidance and counselling, this role will be deemed to be that of an Adult Education Guidance Co-ordinator.

In cases where the guidance counselling function is operated without such supervision and management duties, the person in question should be employed as an Adult Education Guidance Counsellor.

Within the VEC sector, suitability for appointment will be determined by means of an interview conducted by a selection board composed of:

- 1 VEC representative (to be a member of a VEC)
- One CEO or nominee
- One representative with expertise in the sphere of adult/community education or guidance
- One adult guidance professional.

Such boards should pay particular attention to candidates’ expertise in Adult and Community Education and Guidance.
In other cases, it is recommended that the interview board should include at least one representative of the management structure, one adult guidance professional and one representative of the broader sphere of educational, guidance or community interests.

Where the service is already managed by an Adult Education Guidance Co-ordinator, and additional staff are being recruited, the co-ordinator should be a member of the interview board.

3. **Qualifications and Experience**

To be eligible for employment as an Adult Education Guidance Counsellor or Adult Education Guidance Co-ordinator, applicants must hold one of the following:

- A post graduate diploma in Careers Guidance or Careers Guidance and Counselling or
- A Masters of Education (Guidance) or
- A Master of Science in Counselling or equivalent post graduate qualification recognised by the Irish Association of Counsellors and Therapists or the Institute of Guidance Counsellors.

Experience in the field of education or training, youth work, community development or social science, or a teaching qualification as specified under Memo V7 and/or Circular 32/92, is also desirable. Where the area includes a Gaeltacht, it will also be necessary that the Selection Board be satisfied as to the appointee’s competence in the Irish language.

**Other Relevant Experience** - Teaching, education/training experience in adult or youth work or employment services.

4. **Appointments**

Successful candidates will be subject to an initial probationary period of one year. Staff already employed in Adult Education Guidance Projects, which have received a Service Agreement covering the period up to 2006, will be deemed to have satisfactorily completed the probationary period, provided they have been employed in the project for at least one year.

Those with qualifications reckonable for recognition as teaching qualifications under Memo V7 or Circular 32/92 may be awarded permanent posts on satisfactory completion of the probationary period, provided the adult guidance project has received a service agreement covering the period up to 2006.

In other cases, and subject to the project operating satisfactorily, a fixed purpose contract may be awarded following successful completion of probation i.e. employment will be continued subject to

(a) the continued operation of the Adult Education Guidance Initiative; and
(b) the scale of the Adult Education Guidance programme approved in the area being continued.

In the event of an Adult Education Guidance programme which has been operating satisfactorily for a period in excess of 3 years no longer being required in a scheme, the issue will be the subject of national discussions between the Department, IVEA and TUI.

5. **Salary Scale -- Adult Education Guidance Counsellors**
6. **Qualification allowances**

Qualification allowances will apply as per the allowances payable to teachers, updated as appropriate by subsequent pay increases, subject to a maximum rate being paid equal to a primary degree (pass or honours) plus a Higher Diploma in Education (pass), as specified from time to time in Department circulars.

7. **Allowance for Co-ordination Duties**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adult Education Guidance Co-ordinator</th>
<th>1.10.02 €</th>
<th>1.1.04 €</th>
<th>1.07.04 €</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+ 1 information officer or Guidance</td>
<td>2,810</td>
<td>2,894</td>
<td>2,952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsellor (1 staff)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEGC + 2-3 staff</td>
<td>3,676</td>
<td>3,787</td>
<td>3,863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEGC + 4-5 staff</td>
<td>4,862</td>
<td>5,008</td>
<td>5,108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEGC + 6-7 staff</td>
<td>6,090</td>
<td>6,273</td>
<td>6,398</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A co-ordination allowance as shown above will apply when the guidance counsellor is responsible for the day to day management of the service, including supervision of Information Staff and/or other guidance counsellors, and for planning and evaluation of the service as deputed by the management structure.

8. **Placement on Salary Scale**

New appointees will be placed on the first point of the salary scale. Staff within the teaching service or Youthreach/Traveller service or other relevant public sector education or training or community services who transfer to the post of Adult Education Guidance Counsellor may be placed on the AEGC scale at a salary point immediately above the rate of basic salary which applied prior to the transfer.

Adult Education Guidance Counsellors currently serving in projects will be assimilated on to the new scale with effect from 1 September 2002.

9. **Hours of Attendance**
Adult Education Guidance Counsellors should work for 35 hours per week. Attendance should be at such times as necessary for the delivery of the Adult Education Guidance Service. Attendance outside of normal hours will be by prior agreement with the CEO/EO/AEO of the VEC, (or the project managing authority in other cases) and will be offset against normal hours attendance. Where at least 25% of annual attendance time is outside of normal hours, an additional three days annual leave will be allowed in the year in question.

10. **Superannuation**

   Where staff are in the employment of the VEC or an IOT, service will be pensionable under the conditions set out in the relevant Superannuation Scheme for the sector.

11. **Annual Leave/Sick Leave**

   Adult Education Guidance Counsellors shall have 30 days annual leave, excluding public holidays. Sick Leave arrangements will provide for full pay for certified sick leave up to a maximum of six months in one year, (or 183 days), followed by half-pay thereafter for a maximum of twelve months total sick leave (or 365 days) in any period of 4 years or less. Paid sick leave for absences for minor uncertified indispositions may be allowed up to a maximum of 7 days in a year, provided that absences exceeding 3 consecutive days are medically certified.

12. **Travel and Subsistence Allowances**

   Allowances in respect of travelling and subsistence will be payable in respect of approved journeys on Adult Education Guidance business at rates not greater than those sanctioned by the Minister for Education and Science from time to time.

13. **Duties of Adult Education Guidance Counsellors**

   The duties of the post will include, under the direction of the Adult Education Guidance Co-ordinator or CEO/EO/AEO of the VEC, (or the direction of the management structure for the community service or Institute of Technology in other cases) and in accordance with the overall plan for the service approved by the Adult Education Board:

   ➢ to provide guidance, counselling and information services to individual clients and to groups, and provide referral services to other agencies as appropriate

   ➢ to provide support and advice in the field of guidance and counselling to staff in Further Education centres, and support the development of an integrated curriculum of learning, guidance and progression

   ➢ to broker services with educational bodies and other institutions as emerging client needs are identified

   ➢ to share good practice from the sector and supporting the mainstreaming of relevant lessons into national policy and practice

   ➢ to act in a representative capacity if required on matters relating to adult educational guidance

   ➢ to assist in the management of resources, e.g. financial, premises, materials, personnel etc as appropriate, relevant to the needs of the local programme

   ➢ to keep records and prepare reports and submissions in consultation with the Adult Education Guidance Co-ordinator or CEO/EO/AEO as appropriate
14. **Additional Duties of Adult Education Guidance Co-ordinator**

The Adult Education Guidance Co-ordinator will have the following additional functions, under the direction of the CEO/EO/AEO of the VEC, (or the direction of the management structure for the community service or Institute of Technology in other cases) and in accordance with the overall plan for the service approved by the Adult Education Board:

- to co-ordinate the day to day operation of the Adult Guidance Service, including planning, supervision of staff, management of premises and resources, and maintenance of records,
- to support staff development, supervise guidance information services and staff, establishing quality standards and guidelines in line with national practice for the initiative,
- to provide an outreach service to adult education centres in the catchment area,
- to market and promote the guidance service, including the development of promotional materials,
- to develop appropriate networks and partnerships with local agencies in the field of education, training, welfare and community services,
- to monitor the service, reporting to the CEO/EO/AEO (or community or other management structure as appropriate) on developments and provision, and informing the work of relevant national agencies.

15. **Requirement to Obtain Appropriate Qualifications**

For those employed in the existing service as co-ordinators who do not have a guidance and counselling qualification, employment may be continued subject to the condition that the appropriate qualifications are obtained within a five year period from the date of this circular. Permanent posts may not be granted in the interim, and the arrangement will apply only where the Department is satisfied with the operation of the overall project. The Department is prepared to consider applications towards the cost of fees for appropriate courses from persons in this category.

16. **Implementation**

Chief Executive Officers are requested to make arrangements to introduce the terms of this circular as soon as possible. It will be a condition of participation in the scheme that the selected candidates participate in in-service training and networks supported by the Department of Education and Science and the National Centre for Guidance in Education and/or VEC, and that the projects supported through the measure fulfil the qualitative, quantitative and financial requirements set out by the Department, the National Centre for Guidance in Education and the VEC.

Pauline Gildea  
Principal Officer  
24 November 2004  

*Service Level Agreement*
Appendix 2

Circular 0015/2007

To the Chief Executive Officer of each Vocational Education Committee/Sponsor of Adult Guidance Projects

Pay and Conditions for Adult Guidance Information Officers

1. Background

The White Paper on Adult Education, “Learning for Life”, sets out proposals for the development of an adult educational guidance service to support participants in VTOS, adult literacy and adult and community education programmes. The service is being developed in phases as resources permit and is now available in 38 areas.

A structure for the employment of the Adult Guidance Information Officers, covering recruitment, and pay and conditions, as set out below, has been devised.

2. Recruitment

Appointments to the position of Adult Guidance Information Officer will be made by the Vocational Education Committees, where the VEC is the sponsor of the initiative, or other sponsor, as appropriate. Please see appendix attached outlining job description.

3. Qualifications

The Leaving Certificate or equivalent will be the minimum requirement.

4. Salary

The salary scale will be effective from the 1st June 2004 in the case of Information Officers who were in service on that date, or from the date of appointment, if subsequent.
Retrospective payments should take account of public service increases under the terms of sustaining progress and the benchmarking process.

5. Salary Scale

The agreed salary scale for those in the post with effect from 1st June 2004 is as follows:

€24,112 - €25,868 - €27,644 - €28,967 - €30,247 - €31,972 - €33,223 - €34,490

For information, this scale updated to 1st Dec. 2006 is as follows:


For the sake of equity as between currently serving officers, the scale in the case of currently serving officers will comprise two further long service increments on a personal basis as follows:

1st June 2004: LSI 1: €35,658, LSI 2: €36,832


Assimilation will be through placement on the next favourable point with effect from 1st June 2004.

Any currently-serving Information Officer who is already on a higher salary than the above will retain his/her salary on a personal basis.

6. Duties of Post

These are set out in Appendix attached – click here to view appendix (File Format Word 95KB)

7. Hours of Work

Information Officers must work for 35 hours per week. Attendance should be at times which facilitate the delivery of the Adult Guidance Service.

8. Pensions

Subject to the normal approval process applying to each post (where this has not already taken place), the pension arrangements will be the normal arrangements applying to VEC staff in the administrative structure, with similar arrangements applying where the sponsor is not a VEC.

9. Annual Leave

Annual leave will be 20 days rising to 22 days after 5 years' service, plus whatever days already apply (i.e. privilege days / closed days) to the particular VEC in which they are employed.

Any currently serving Information Officer who already has more than 20 / 22 days’ leave, as set out above, will retain his/her current number of days on a personal basis.
10. **Sick Leave**

Sick leave arrangements will be the standard arrangements that already apply to VEC staff in the administrative structure.

11. **Travel and Subsistence**

Travel and subsistence arrangements will be the standard arrangements that already apply to VEC staff in the administrative structure.

12. **Implementation**

Chief Executive Officers or other sponsors of adult guidance projects are requested to make arrangements to introduce the terms of this circular as soon as possible. It will be a condition of participation in the scheme that the selected candidates participate in in-service training and networks supported by the Department of Education and Science and the National Centre for Guidance in Education and/or VEC, and that the projects supported through the measure fulfil the qualitative, quantitative and financial requirements set out by the Department, the National Centre for Guidance in Education and the VEC.

13. **Enquiries**

Please direct any queries you may have to Eileen McBrien at above address, Tel: (01) 8892009, email: Eileen_McBrien@education.gov.ie

Breda Naughton
Principal Officer
19 February 2007

Circular 70/2004
Appendix 3
Circular 76/2011

To: The Chief Executive Officers of Vocational Education Committees

Interim Protocol to enable referral of unemployed people to Further Education programmes funded by the Department of Education and Skills

Introduction
1. The Government has embarked on a programme of institutional reform as part of labour market activation policy, the objective of which is to prevent the drift into and reduce long-term unemployment. Chief amongst these are the establishment of the National Employment and Entitlements Service (NEES) and the establishment of a new further education and training authority – SOLAS. NEES is designed to be a ‘one stop shop’ public employment and benefits service for unemployed people and SOLAS is designed to bring a unifying and central management structure to the further education and training sector.

Purpose of this Circular
2. As part of this programme of institutional reform, protocols will be agreed between NEES, SOLAS and Vocational Education Committees (VECs)/Local Education and Training Boards (LETBs) to ensure that the NEES can refer unemployed people to suitable education and training opportunities at appropriate intervals in accordance with case management activity. However, pending full establishment of both NEES and SOLAS, as well as the completion of the amalgamation of VECs into LETBs, the Government has decided that interim protocols should be agreed by 31 December 2011 so that they can be fully implemented on full establishment of both bodies. This circular is intended to act as that interim protocol.

3. The circular sets out some of the elements that should be contained in the local protocols and in two Appendices, gives an overview of Further Education, and a summary of each programme, including eligibility criteria.

Background to the Protocol
4. It is acknowledged that VECs, D/SP and FÁS are already engaged in a significant programme of transformational change. It is also acknowledged that there is already a formal referral process for unemployed people into FÁS training programmes under the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP), which is underpinned by IT systems and shared data. Finally, it is acknowledged that significant numbers of unemployed people
already access further education programmes, through recruitment by VECs, informal referrals from welfare offices, and on a self-service basis.

5. The protocol is not intended to replace the formal FÁS referral process or be its equivalent or to replace existing local protocols between VECs and welfare offices. Instead, this protocol is intended to complement that formal referral process. It should build upon existing referral protocols, where they exist. It should facilitate access by unemployed people to relevant and useful further education opportunities as part of their progression pathway.

Requirements of a Local Protocol

6. In order to implement this protocol, VEC CEOs should nominate a relevant staff member to act as a VEC contact person for the purposes. This could be the Adult Education Officer (AEO), Education Officer (EO) and/or the AEGI Coordinator/Counsellor. The D/SP regional/local offices should nominate contact personnel as well. This could be the County Employment Facilitator or Employment Services Manager. These contact points should arrange a familiarisation session for Employment Service Office and Social Welfare Local Office personnel with relevant VEC staff – AEGI staff and/or programme directors/co-ordinators/managers, as appropriate.

7. From the familiarisation session, VECs and welfare/employment service offices should agree relevant contact points, based on the aims and objectives of the various further education programmes, and the different courses being provided under those programmes, so that welfare offices can ensure access by unemployed people to relevant further education programmes, from their offices. This means that the local protocol should identify who manages each further education programme so that an appropriate referral can be made, e.g. for a referral to an adult literacy intervention, the Adult Literacy Organiser or AEGI Information Officer, as appropriate. In establishing the appropriate referral points, the protocol could build on enhancements to the NEAP and feedback from the piloting of D/SP’s new client profiling capability in order to better align referrals with appropriate programmes.

8. The AEGI Information Officer/other relevant VEC staff member could maintain a noticeboard in local welfare offices and/or arrange for information stands on signing-on days, in consultation with welfare office staff. Welfare office staff could maintain regular contact with VEC staff (and vice-versa) in relation to referrals in order to establish if contact or enrolment has taken place and to update on progress, e.g., completion or progression to another programme.

9. The SOLAS Implementation Group will seek an update on progress in implementation of this interim protocol for the end of the first quarter of 2012.

Seamus Hempenstall
Principal Officer
Skills Division
22 December 2011
Appendix 1
Background on Further Education

Post Leaving Certificate (PLC)
The Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) Programme is a self-contained whole-time learning experience designed to provide participants with specific vocational skills to enhance their prospects of securing lasting, full-time employment or progression to other studies. The programme caters for young people who have completed their Leaving Certificate and adults returning to education.

It is funded by the Department of Education and Skills. There are 32,688 PLC places nationwide, enabling around 38,700 people to participate in courses. 90% of PLC provision is in the VEC sector but there is some in a number of voluntary secondary and community and comprehensive schools. There are just under 200 approved PLC centres nationwide.

Most PLC courses are of one year’s duration. However, some PLC courses provide for progression over 2 years and a small number are of 2 years' duration. Since 2008, no new courses that are not at FETAC Level 5 or 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) have been approved, but some existing PLC courses offer certification from other bodies, like City & Guilds or BTEC. All approved PLC courses are listed on www.qualifax.ie.

Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)
VTOS is targeted at unemployed persons over 21 years of age. Its primary target groups are the longer-term unemployed, the low-skilled and disadvantaged. It aims to give participants education and training opportunities which will develop and prepare them to go into paid employment or on to further education opportunities leading to paid employment.

There are currently almost 6,000 places available nationwide. VTOS is delivered in both Core (stand alone) and Dispersed (Post Leaving Certificate) modes, at NFQ levels 3 – 6. People can combine Junior and Leaving Certificate subjects and FETAC modules under VTOS.

If eligible, participants receive a training allowance in lieu of their welfare payment as well as travel and meal allowances and can access childcare and guidance supports. Tuition, books and material are provided free of charge.

Youthreach
The Youthreach programme provides two years integrated education, training and work experience for unemployed early school leavers without any qualifications or vocational training who are between 15 and 20 years of age.

The programme is funded by the Department of Education and Skills. There are almost 6,000 places available nationwide under the Youthreach umbrella. Almost 3,700 of these places are provided by VECs in just over 100 Youthreach centres. The majority of the remainder of places are provided by FÁS in Community Training Centres.

The programme usually provides two years integrated education, training and work experience. Basic skills training, practical work training and general education are features of the programme, and the application of new technology is integrated into all aspects of programme content.
There is a strong emphasis on personal development, on the core skills or literacy/numeracy, communications and IT, along with a choice of vocational options and a work experience programme.

Learners on the Youthreach programme are entitled to receive training allowances. Additional allowances for meal, travel and accommodation are also available.

**Back To Education Initiative (BTEI)**

The overall aim of the BTEI is to increase the participation of young people and adults with less than upper second level education in a range of part-time accredited learning opportunities leading to awards on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) to facilitate their access, transfer and progression to other education or employment pathways.

The BTEI enables providers to increase participation through a wider range of flexible options which are appropriate to the particular circumstances of learners, enabling them to combine family, work or personal responsibilities with learning opportunities.

The BTEI enables providers to expand provision of courses leading to certification at NFQ Levels 3 and 4, provide a link to full-time further education and training and offer progression from literacy and community education programmes. It also facilitates participation in ICT training. The BTEI’s primary target group is adults who have not completed upper second level education, particularly the so called “hard to reach” that experience strong barriers to participation.

In the current context, the BTEI enables providers to address the skills needs of unemployed people, in particular the priority groups identified in the Government’s activation agenda, and to develop part-time education and training opportunities for low skilled people in employment to gain qualifications. The BTEI targets individuals and groups that experience particular and acute barriers to participation and are more difficult to engage in the formal learning process. A list of these groups is set out below:

- Adults and young people aged over 16 who left school with low or no formal qualifications or low literacy levels;
- The unemployed, particularly the priority groups identified as part of the Government’s activation agenda;
- The long-term unemployed and those at risk of becoming long-term unemployed, especially those in the older age groups;
- Those not in work but not eligible to be on the Live Register;
- Those in the workplace with basic skills needs;
- Disadvantaged women who have particular experience of barriers to participation;
- Disadvantaged men, including those experiencing rural isolation;
- Lone Parents and others with caring responsibilities that may prohibit their participation in full time courses;
- Travellers;
- Homeless People;
- Substance Misusers;
- Ex-offenders;
- People with Disabilities; and
• People for whom English is not the mother tongue, who require language and literacy supports.

**Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme (ALCES)**

Literacy is fundamental to personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social cohesion and employability. For the purposes of this circular, Adult Literacy is the provision of basic education, including reading, writing and numeracy skills, and ICT for adults who wish to improve their literacy and numeracy competencies to enhance their functional participation in personal, social and economic life.

The target cohort for adult literacy programmes are those adults with less than upper second level education. It is recognised that there are those who have upper second level education but whose literacy and numeracy skills are less than or equivalent to Level 3 on the NFQ and VECs may include this cohort for programmes. All VEC adult literacy programmes are offered free-of-charge to any person over 16 years of age who fulfil the criteria outlined in the points above.

Adult literacy programmes are generally focussed on learning outcomes at NFQ Levels 1-3. Sometimes minor awards or specific support at NFQ Level 4/5 is also provided. This will enable adults to be competent and confident in a range of skills which are essential for full and effective participation in society.

Adult literacy programmes include:

- Intensive Adult Basic Education (ITABE)
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
- Family Literacy
- Workplace Literacy (for county council workers.)
- Skills for Work
- Adult Refugee Programme

**Guidance**

Educational Guidance is an important part of participation in Further Education programmes and this is supported by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (www.ncge.ie). Research has shown that guidance provision increases retention/completion rates in programmes. Participants in Further Education programmes can access guidance support through:

- In PLC programmes, the school guidance counsellor.
- In Youthreach, through guidance and counselling provided as part of the Guidance, Counselling and Psychological Services programme for Youthreach, and;
- In VTOS, BTEI and ALCES, through the Adult Education Guidance Initiative (AEGI), see http://www.ncge.ie/adult_guidance.htm
## Appendix 2
### FURTHER EDUCATION– SUMMARY OF PROGRAMME ELIGIBILITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Objective and target groups</th>
<th>Full/part time/</th>
<th>NFQ Levels</th>
<th>Eligibility</th>
<th>Programme Duration</th>
<th>Income supports (depending on individual circumstances)</th>
<th>Educational Supports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PLC</td>
<td>Enable school leavers and adult returners (including the unemployed) to gain major awards to enhance employability for entry or re-entry to the labour market</td>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>5,6</td>
<td>Must be over 16 years old.</td>
<td>Academic Year (programmes are mainly one year)</td>
<td>Back to Education Allowance</td>
<td>Maintenance grant may be available. Guidance available through school guidance service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VTOS</td>
<td>Enable the unemployed, in particular the long-term, low-skilled unemployed avail of full-time opportunities to gain major awards at to enable progression to further education and training or higher education or employment.</td>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Must be over 21 and more than 6 months unemployed.</td>
<td>Academic year – courses generally 2 years.</td>
<td>Participants paid training allowance in lieu of primary welfare payment</td>
<td>AEGI, Childcare support may be available through the Childcare Education and Training Scheme (CETS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youthreach</td>
<td>Provide early school leavers between 15 and 20 years of age with opportunities to gain major awards to enable progression to further education and training or higher education or employment.</td>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Must be aged 15-20 years.</td>
<td>Academic year – courses generally 2 years.</td>
<td>Participants paid training allowance in lieu of primary welfare payment</td>
<td>Counselling available, Childcare support may be available through the Childcare Education and Training Scheme (CETS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTEI</td>
<td>Provide adults, including the unemployed and in particular, those with less than upper second level education, opportunities to acquire minor awards (modules) in areas of core skills and key competences, in order to enable progression to further education and training or employment.</td>
<td>Part time</td>
<td>1-6, mainly 1-4</td>
<td>Must be over 16. No other set criteria, but courses are provided free of charge for people with less than second level (leaving certificate) education.</td>
<td>Part-time modular courses up to 17 hrs per week or 400 hours annually. Can commence at various times during year.</td>
<td>Participants may keep welfare payment provided they are not receiving any other training payment.</td>
<td>AEGI, Childcare support may be available through the Childcare Education and Training Scheme (CETS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Literacy and Community Education</td>
<td>Programmes are designed for the hard-to-reach, the disadvantaged, those most distant from the labour market and the low-skilled to return to education in a way that suits them. It is delivered in typical and atypical modes on a highly flexible basis and is focussed on core skills and key competences (literacy, numeracy, personal skills, and communications) to build confidence and enable progression.</td>
<td>Part time</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>Provided to people over 16 with literacy/numeracy difficulties. Community Education programmes are targeted at people who are at risk of social exclusion.</td>
<td>Part-time modular courses, between 2-8 hours per week. Literacy programmes can commence at various times.</td>
<td>Participation on A/L C/E programmes does not interfere with welfare entitlements</td>
<td>AEGI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Circular 15/200
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

To: The Managerial Authorities of Primary, Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools and to the Vocational Education Committees

Implementation of Moratorium on Promotions in the Public Service

The Government has decided to implement a recruitment and promotion moratorium across the civil and public sector including the civil service, local authorities, non-commercial state bodies, the Garda Síochána and the Permanent Defence Forces with effect from 27th March, 2009.

The measures have an immediate impact for schools in relation to the filling of promotion posts other than those of Principal and Deputy Principal.

With effect from 27 March 2009 schools may no longer make any appointment to a post of responsibility including those that may have fallen vacant on or before 27 March 2009. Accordingly schools must immediately cease any arrangements to fill such posts. The replacement of holders of posts of responsibility who are on leave of absence and whose posts of responsibility would normally have been replaced in an acting capacity must not be filled as they are comprehended by this moratorium.

It is a matter for the school authority to re-organise and prioritise the appropriate duties for post of responsibility holders in the context of implementing this moratorium.

The Government decision provides for an exception to the above rule in respect of the filling of the first allocation of posts of responsibility in new schools. The Department will be in direct communication with new schools in relation to their entitlement to fill their first allocation of posts of responsibility.

This circular supersedes all previous circulars and notifications in relation to the filling of posts of responsibility.
Queries

Please note the following e-mail addresses in relation to any queries regarding this circular:

Primary Schools - mailto:PrimaryAllocations@education.gov.ie and

Post-primary Schools – mailto:Allocations@education.gov.ie

Hubert Loftus  
Principal Officer  
Primary Teacher Allocations

Anne Killian  
Principal Officer  
Post Primary Teacher Allocations

March, 2009

Information Note – Clarification of Circular Number 0022/2009

The Department has received a number of queries regarding the interpretation of Circular 0022/2009.

In order to assist schools with the implementation of Circular 0022/2009 the position is as follows:

1. Appointments to Principal and Deputy Principal posts can continue to be made in the normal way.

2. Appointments to permanent posts of responsibility (other than Principal and Deputy Principal) cannot be made including those that were vacant on or before 27 March 2009.

3. Appointments to acting posts of responsibility (other than Principal and Deputy Principal) cannot be made including those that were vacant on or before 27 March 2009.

3. With the exception of Principal and Deputy Principal Posts the Government decision also means that with effect from 27 March 2009 existing temporary or acting appointments to posts of responsibility cannot be renewed beyond their existing stated end date. If the existing stated end date is specified (e.g. end of current school year or other specified date) then the existing temporary or acting appointment to the post of responsibility must cease from that date and payment of the allowance will be automatically stopped.

4. Where the POR acting appointment was made on the basis of a fixed purpose contract, for the duration of the absence of the original holder, the moratorium will apply when that absence terminates or in the event of the acting appointee leaving the post in the interim for whatever reason.

Please note that in such cases school management authorities will be required to certify that they are in compliance with the terms of paragraph 4 as part of their notification to the Department about the continuation of these POR acting appointments beyond 31 August 2009.

These arrangements apply to all acting posts of responsibility including those arising from leaves of absences such as maternity leave, career break, job sharing and secondment.
5. As previously outlined the e-mail addresses for queries in relation to Circular 0022/09 are as follows:

Primary schools: PrimaryAllocations@education.gov.ie
Post-Primary schools: Allocations@education.gov.ie

May 2009
To: The Managerial Authorities of Community and Comprehensive Schools and to the Chief Executive Officers of Vocational Education Committees

Implementation of Moratorium on Recruitment and Promotions in the Public Service

The Government has decided to implement a recruitment and promotion moratorium across the civil and public sector including the civil service, local authorities, non-commercial state bodies, the Garda Síochána and the Permanent Defence Forces with effect from 27 March, 2009.

This Circular outlines the impact on Community & Comprehensive Schools and Vocational Education Committees is in relation to the filling of positions other than Teachers and SNAs. A separate Circular will issue from the Department in respect of Teacher and SNA posts.

Staffing positions other than Teacher and SNA posts

Positions other than Teacher and SNA posts in schools and VECs, including temporary appointments on a fixed-term basis, are comprehended by the Government decision. Accordingly, all such posts, however arising, may not be filled by recruitment, promotion or payment of an allowance for the performance of duties at a higher grade. Community & Comprehensive Schools and VECs are therefore requested to immediately cease any
arrangements to fill such posts. This also means that no appointments, whether permanent, temporary or by way of acting appointment may be made.

In exceptional circumstances the necessity for such posts may arise and will require the prior sanction of the Minister for Finance.

Additional Information on Department of Finance website

There is further information in relation to this Government decision on the Department of Finance website at www.finance.gov.ie some of which is in question and answer format.

Queries

Please note the following e-mail addresses in relation to any queries regarding this circular:

Community & Comprehensive Schools – ccfinancial@education.gov.ie and

Vocational Education Committees – financialvec@education.gov.ie

Matthew Ryan
Principal Officer
Post Primary Administration
30 March, 2009
Circular 76/2011

Appendix 5
Supervision letter to VECs 2003

Circulars 22 and 23/2009

Dear Co-ordinator

Re: Minimum Supervision Requirements for AEGI Staff

With reference to the terms of the Service Agreement between the project/VEC and the Department of Education and Science, we wish to outline minimum supervisory requirements for AEGI Staff.

Please note that we do not refer to supervision in a management capacity, but to "caseload supervision", i.e. a working alliance between the Supervisor and the member of AEGI staff, in which the staff member can offer an account or recording of his/her caseload or work with Clients, reflect on it, receive feedback and where appropriate, guidance. The objective is to enable AEGI staff to maintain an ethical competence, knowledge, skills, confidence and creativity so as to offer a high quality service and to maintain good practice.

Each project is required to provide a minimum of two hours of Supervision to staff per month. Funding is to be provided out of the existing annual budget allocated to each project by the Department.

A panel of qualified supervisors is available from the Irish Association of Counsellors and Therapists (I.A.C.T.). The Institute of Guidance Counsellors is in the process of selecting and training their own panel. Please find enclosed an information sheet and list of qualified supervisors from I.A.C.T. for your information. Further details can be obtained from the National Centre for Guidance in Education, if required.

Yours faithfully

Aoife Conduit
Further Education Section
Ext 6409

Appendix 5
NCGE

Adult Educational Guidance Initiative

Guidelines on the Provision of Adult Educational Guidance Services

to clients aged 16 and 17 years old

March 2014
Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult Educational Guidance Initiative</td>
<td>AEGI</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adult Educational Guidance Service(s)</td>
<td>AEGS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Education and Skills</td>
<td>DES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directors of Studies of Guidance Counselling</td>
<td>DSGC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and Training Board</td>
<td>ETB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and Training Boards Ireland</td>
<td>ETBI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institute of Guidance Counsellors</td>
<td>IGC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Centre for Guidance in Education</td>
<td>NCGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Educational Psychological Service</td>
<td>NEPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterford Institute of Technology</td>
<td>WIT</td>
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</table>
Introduction
The National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) is an agency of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) whose role is to develop and support quality guidance provision in the education sector as part of lifelong learning in accordance with national and international best practice. NCGE develops guidance materials, provides advice on good practice, supports innovation and pilot projects, disseminates information and organises Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for guidance practitioners. NCGE works in collaboration with relevant national agencies, experts and stakeholders.

The Department of Education and Skills requested the NCGE to develop Guidelines on the Provision of Adult Educational Guidance Services to 16 and 17 year olds to support the DES AEGI Operational Guidelines 2012⁠. These Guidelines are intended to support the Adult Educational Guidance Services (AEGS) nationally and should also be useful in informing their managing agencies, the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT).

The provision of guidance to young people, who have left school, with low or no formal qualifications, requires specific guidance interventions. Such interventions should be cognisant of the age of the individual and the legal requirements for the provision of services to children. The AEGS have traditionally worked with adults who are at least 18 years of age. Therefore, working with this new age cohort requires the development of policy, conducive to the needs and requirements of young people aged between 16 and 18 years of age.

NCGE wishes to acknowledge that these guidelines were developed in consultation with the Adult Educational Guidance Association of Ireland (AEGAI), DES Inspectorate, the Directors of Studies of Guidance Counselling (DSGC), the Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC), the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), and the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI). NCGE engaged legal training consultants to provide legal training to AEGI services to inform and support the development of these guidelines. NCGE is grateful to all of these organisations for their co-operation, collaboration, advice and information.

Definitions

Definition of a child
In Ireland, The Child Care Act, 1991\(^2\) defines a child as any person under the age of 18 years, excluding a person who is or who has been married. The legislation governing school attendance in Ireland is the Education (Welfare) Act 2000\(^3\). Under the Act, the minimum school leaving age is 16 years, or the completion of three years of post-primary education, whichever is the later.

Definitions of Guidance

**Guidance** refers to a range of activities designed to assist people to make choices and to make transitions consequent upon these choices. In the context of adult education these activities include: information; assessment; advice; counselling; teaching/careers education; placement; advocacy; feedback; follow-up; networking; managing and innovating systems change. *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education DES (2000)*\(^4\)

**Guidance in schools** refers to a range of learning experiences provided in a developmental sequence that assist students to develop self-management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives. It encompasses the three separate but interlinked areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance. (pg. 4 Department Guidelines, 2005)\(^5\)

**Guidance** facilitates people throughout their lives to manage their own educational, training, occupational, personal, social and life choices so that they reach their full potential and contribute to the development of a better society” *National Guidance Forum 2007*\(^6\)

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The Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI)

- The Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI) provides quality information and guidance to adults (i.e. those who are at least 18 years of age). Adults may access their local Adult Educational Guidance Service (AEGS) for the purposes of up-to-date impartial adult educational and other relevant information.

- The Department of Education and Skills’ AEGI OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES 2012 clarify the cohort of adults and young people who are also eligible for one-to-one guidance and group guidance as follows:
  - Adults and young people aged over 16 who left school with low or no formal qualifications or low literacy levels;
  - The unemployed, particularly the priority groups identified as part of the Government’s activation agenda;
  - The long-term unemployed and those at risk of becoming long-term unemployed, especially those in the older age groups;
  - Those not in work but not eligible to be on the Live Register;
  - Those in the workplace with basic skills needs;
  - Disadvantaged women who have particular experience of barriers to participation;
  - Disadvantaged men, including those experiencing rural isolation;
  - Lone Parents and others with caring responsibilities that may prohibit their participation in full time courses.

- The AEGI provides a model of adult educational guidance which is inclusive of: pre-entry, entry, ongoing and pre-exit stages; personal, educational and vocational guidance; working in partnership at local level, meeting a spectrum of guidance needs of the target groups, employing a range of methodologies including information provision, one-to-one guidance, group guidance and outreach provision;

- Any client, who is 18 years of age and over is considered an adult for the purposes of AEGI service provision;

- A person who is aged 16 or 17 years of age and is no longer in full time education may access the AEGS, in particular, those young people aged over 16 who left school with low or no formal qualifications or low literacy levels;

- The Department of Education and Skills supports and encourages the completion of upper second level education by all students. However, young people are legally entitled to disengage from second level education at the age of 16;

---

7 Young people aged over 16 years of age are eligible to participate in educational programmes under the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) and adult literacy programmes. (Community education programmes are open to those over 18 years of age. The Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) is available for unemployed people over 21 years of age.)
• It is not envisaged that the provision of information and guidance by the AEGS will replace the provision of guidance in post primary schools for this age cohort. In some circumstances, a referral back to the original school may be an appropriate course of action.

Guidelines for AEGI services on the Provision of Adult Educational Guidance Services to 16 and 17 year olds

These Guidelines aim to support the provision of quality AEGS guidance and information services to those young people aged 16 and 17 years of age. Those young people aged 18 and over are considered adults for the purposes of AEGS provision.

*The Adult Educational Guidance Services should develop local policy, in consultation with their managing agencies, the ETBs and WIT, on their provision of service to 16 and 17 year olds. The AEGS Co-ordinator should work with ETB/WIT management (CEO/EO/AEO as appropriate) to develop such local policy.*

The following should be considered in the development of such local policy:

1. **Engagement**
   Where a young person aged 16 or 17 years of age presents, AEGS staff should engage with the young person appropriately and in line with the managing ETB/WIT child protection policy;

2. **Provision**
   Adult Educational Guidance Services may provide adult educational guidance and information to 16 and 17 year olds in both:
   - group work and
   - 1-1 basis (with particular reference to the AEGI remit as outlined previously);

3. **Children First and Duty of Care**
   Given that a person aged 16 or 17 years of age is legally defined as ‘a child’, the AEGS should refer to *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children:* published by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.  

   And also to

   *Our Duty to Care: the Principles of Good Practice for the Protection of Children and Young People (Factsheets)* published by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs;

   The AEGS Co-ordinator should establish appropriate contact and referral procedures with the appropriate ETB/WIT designated “liaison person” for the Children First guidelines;

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4. **ETB/WIT Policy**
   The AEGS Co-ordinator should, in collaboration with local management, incorporate the ETB/WIT policy into the policy of the AEGS provision to 16 and 17 year olds;

5. **Links and Referral**
   AEGS Co-ordinator should make links to and liaise with their nearest local Youth Information Centre/Youth Services as appropriate. Clarification of roles of these services will support appropriate referral protocols;
   AEGS Co-ordinator should make links to and liaise with the guidance counsellor in the local Post primary schools to ensure clarification of roles and referral back to the schools where appropriate;

6. **Form of Consent**
   AEGS should establish a Form of Consent for provision of 1-1 guidance to *16 and 17 year olds* (to be signed by the Parent/Guardian/Young person as appropriate);

   This form of consent should consider the following:-
   - Request for Parent/Guardian consent to attend 1-1 guidance session/s where possible;
   - This Consent Form should outline the AEGS local policy on provision of updates or feedback to Parent/Guardian of the young person’s work/progress with the Guidance Service where appropriate;
   - Where parent/guardian consent is not available, the guidance counsellor should clarify to the young person:-
     - the nature of giving and withdrawing *their own* consent to attendance at 1-1 guidance counselling session/s;

   The Guidance Counsellor should also ensure that the young person is made aware of the following:-
   - the boundaries of guidance provision;
   - AEGS policy on referral to appropriate services;
   - AEGS legal requirements under Children First Guidelines;
   - the boundaries of confidentiality;
   - the guidance counsellor’s right to require further parental/legal guardian consent into the future if he/she deems it so necessary;
7. **Appropriate record of the guidance counselling session with 16 and 17 year olds**

In line with usual good practice in record keeping, AEGS should establish a local Client Record Form (16 – 17 year olds) to clearly document the agreed next steps/ plans/outcomes of the guidance session. This should be signed by the young person and the guidance counsellor and a copy provided to the young person. Engagement with the young person should be documented as appropriate within the NCGE -AEGI database, the Adult Guidance Management System.

8. **Group Guidance**

AEGS should establish a local policy on the provision of guidance to 16 and 17 year olds registered on/attending an adult education/community education programme. The AEGS Co-ordinator should collaborate and engage with the course /programme co-ordinator to ensure clarification and exchange of information to ensure the content of the guidance programme is suitable to those under 18 years. Such local policy should consider the following:

I. The age cohort of the whole group;

II. The appropriate content of the guidance programme given the age cohort;

III. Clarification of the requirement for informed consent to attend 1-1 guidance counselling session following the group guidance provision for 16 and 17 year olds;

IV. Forming a separate group guidance session if there are sufficient numbers within the group in the age range of 16-18;

9. **Provision of Information to 16 and 17 year olds**

AEGS should establish a protocol for the provision of Information to young people aged 16 and 17 years. Such a protocol should:

I. clarify the age of the client as under 18;

II. explain the AEGS policy on guidance and information provision;

III. explain the difference between the provision of information and referral to the guidance counsellor;

IV. develop a local AEGS Information Query sheet specifically for 16 and 17 year olds;

V. document and record the information provided to the young person;

VI. liaise with the AEGS Co-ordinator, who is the supervisor, in relation to information provision to this age cohort.
10. **Publication/Public Notice of Local Policy**
   The AEGS should ensure that the local policy on provision of guidance and information to 16 and 17 year olds is clearly visible in the AEGS offices;

11. **Staff Briefing and Understanding of Policy Issues**
   All AEGS staff should:
   
   a. understand their own role in relation to working with 16 and 17 year olds;
   
   b. be aware of their local AEGS policy and how to implement same and
   
   c. know who to approach if they require help with any area of these Guidelines or their own local policy;
   
   d. Notify the AEGS Co-ordinator and ETB / WIT management and NCGE if they feel they are not appropriately qualified to provide guidance to this age cohort.
   
   e. Under the direction of the AEGS Co-ordinator, staff should review and revise the provision of service to this age cohort annually. In line with ETB / WIT management policies, the local policy on the provision of service to 16 and 17 year olds should be reviewed and revised as appropriate.

12. **NCGE support for AEGI provision to 16 and 17 year olds**
   NCGE provides CPD to AEGI staff to ensure quality service provision to all clients. Where required, further CPD will be provided to support provision of guidance and information services to this age cohort.

13. **NCGE will liaise with DES, ETB / WIT management and AEGI services to review the development of these Guidelines as appropriate.**

14. **For further information on these Guidelines or AEGI, contact the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) nugeinfo@ncge.ie**

Jennifer McKenzie,
Director, NCGE,
Fitzwilliam Court
Leeson Close
Dublin 2
Jennifer.mckenzie@ncge.ie

14 March 2014
Appendix One

This Appendix contains sample form templates which may be of use (these Templates are based on those provided to NCGE by Mayo Sligo Leitrim ETB). Such templates will be available for download on the NCGE AEGI web-based handbook from 2014.

1. Sample Form of Consent – Parent /Guardian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DETAILS OF YOUNG PERSON:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile (of young person):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home phone no:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email (of young person):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other relevant information: <em>(Please mention any medical condition or special needs)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERMISSION:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I/We give the young person named above my permission to attend meetings with the Guidance Counsellor and/or Information Officer of __________ AEGS.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signed:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name (IN CAPITALS):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to young person:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile (own)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home phone:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative contact name &amp; no:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name &amp; phone of family doctor:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Sample Form of Consent – Young person Informed Consent

YOUNG PERSON INFORMED CONSENT FOR ATTENDANCE AT ADULT EDUCATIONAL GUIDANCE SERVICE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLIENT (AGED 16 OR 17 YEARS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile (of young person):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home phone no:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email (of young person):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other relevant information: (Please mention any medical condition or special needs)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Parent / Guardian / Next of Kin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name (IN CAPITALS):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to young person:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home phone:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative contact name &amp; no:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name &amp; phone of family doctor:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONSENT

I ______________________________________ give my own informed consent to attend meetings with the Guidance Counsellor and/or Information Officer of ________ AEGS. The AEGS has explained to me their policies and boundaries of confidentiality and their requirements under law of the Children First Guidelines. In understand that the Guidance Counsellor may require further consent from a parent / guardian in the future I understand that I am free to withdraw my own consent to guidance counselling at any time.

Signed: ________________________________
Date: __________________________________
Appendix Two

Sample Information or Working with 16 and 17 year olds

INFORMATION ABOUT SAMPLE ADULT EDUCATIONAL GUIDANCE SERVICE

‘Guidance facilitates people throughout their lives to manage their own educational, training, occupational, personal, social and life choices so that they can reach their full potential and contribute to the development of a better society’ National Guidance Forum Report 2007

The Sample ETB Adult Educational Guidance and Information Service provides, educational, vocational and personal guidance and information which supports learners to make informed decisions about their future. The service is impartial and takes a person-centered approach. What is discussed is treated with confidentiality unless a situation of danger is revealed or where the law requires the Guidance Counsellor or Information Officer to inform others.

WHAT IS INVOLVED FOR THE YOUNG PERSON?

The young person will meet with a qualified Guidance Counsellor for approximately 1 hour. There may be further follow up meetings as agreed with the young person and depending on their individual needs. There may be some small and large group work.

The young person may avail of meetings with a Guidance Information Officer who provides impartial and accurate information on local, regional and national education and training opportunities.

Where possible we request parental / guardian permission to attend the AEGS however we recognise the young person’s right to provide his / her own informed consent to guidance.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

If you have any queries about the above or about the work of the Sample ETB AEGS, please contact ……………….Co-ordinator AEGS at info@sampleaegs.ie

Appendix Three

Sample Contacts for the AEGS

Important contacts: Child Protection and Supports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Contact details</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child Protection Social Work Services,</td>
<td></td>
<td>Community Care Office,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Duty Social Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Protection Social Work Service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garda Siochana,</td>
<td></td>
<td>Keeping Safe training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSE,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETB / WIT Designated Liaison person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix Four

Sample Checklist for AEGS policy

To inform our local policy, the AEGS has considered and is informed by:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>DATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Copy of <em>Children First Guidelines</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Copy of <em>Our Duty to Care: the Principles of Good Practice for the Protection of Children and Young People</em> (Factsheets)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Copy of ETB / WIT child protection policy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Contact details of ETB / WIT designated liaison person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Public document on main office describing service to 16 - 17 year olds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Form of consent – parent / guardian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Form of Consent – young person informed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>List of referral contacts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Established link with Youth Information Centre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Established link with local post primary school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>AEGS Policy established on Date</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>AEGS Policy for review on Date</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>AEGS Staff aware of policy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>AEGS staff training required for this cohort?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Other relevant information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>ETB / WIT management have been involved in development of and provided with a copy of the final Policy document</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix Five

Sample Client (age 16 – 17 years) record Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programme:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals for this session</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions agreed before next session</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of next session</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client Signature:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today’s date:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 2016, the Adult Educational Guidance Services were based nationally in the 16 ETBs and WIT. The Services are now funded by SOLAS under the FET budget for ETBs. In 2016, in line with the SOLAS FET Strategy, the role of FET Guidance Programme Coordinator was established within NCGE.

SOLAS also funds the NCGE to provide supports to the AEGS, and to provide reporting mechanism for qualitative and quantitative data gathering to support FET guidance planning.

This summary report informs the Department of Education and Skills (DES) through the National Centre for Guidance in Education on the work of the 39 Adult Educational Guidance Services (AEGS) for the year ending 2016. It provides both qualitative and quantitative data on service provision. These reports generated by the AEGS twice annually highlight the key role of guidance in ‘enabling people throughout their lives to manage their own educational, training occupational, personal, social, and life choices so that they can reach their full potential and contribute to the development of a better society’(NGF 2007)

The report demonstrates the importance of guidance activities in an ever changing globalized economy where work patterns are changing and new roles and sectors are developing, requiring people to up-skill and re-skill throughout their lives.

Furthermore, the report highlights the core principles of guidance including informing, advising, enabling, advocating, networking, providing feedback and managing, all of which underpin the delivery of a quality guidance service. It demonstrates the vital role of the guidance information service in providing up to date accurate labour market intelligence to enable learners to progress to training and employment opportunities that are relevant to their needs.

The qualitative data demonstrates how client feedback informs practice, how the AEGS prioritise planning in their respective services to respond to learners’ own identified needs, changing management structures and prevailing government policy. Furthermore, the report reflects the collaborative team approach of the AEGS in planning, managing, leading and embedding the guidance services in the FET sector and in the community at large.

The report, through its qualitative and quantitative data, demonstrates how the AEGS continue to strengthen quality assurance and evidence base in keeping with the ELGPN Quality Guidelines 2015 which recommends a focus on 5 key elements of quality assurance for guidance services:
Service Provision and Improvement
Practitioner Competence
Citizen/User Involvement
Cost Benefits to Governments
Cost Benefits to Individuals

The report also details areas of professional development identified by practitioners as key to the delivery of a quality guidance and information service. Finally, the report, through its case studies highlights areas of good practice, through representation of practitioners’ work using case studies. The case studies detail the unique client/practitioner relationship which is central to the whole guidance process. They demonstrate the creative, collaborative and innovative practice of practitioners in their response to both learner and societal needs.

QUANTITATIVE REPORT
The NCGE Adult Guidance Management System (AGMS) data base provides statistical data on all aspects of service delivery and all data are available on request. This report focuses on key areas and presents the following analysis:

1. Total Beneficiaries for all services from 01/01/16 to 31/12/16

NCGE statistical report for the period January 1st 2016 to December 31st 2016 shows that the AEGS nationally had a total of 52,297 beneficiaries. This represents a fall of 2,174 on the previous year’s figures of 54,471. 30% of all beneficiaries had one to one guidance intervention, 44% of all clients benefited from guidance ‘in group’ and 26% presented as general public, availing of the guidance information service.
2. Graph showing total beneficiaries for key categories

The bar chart below shows that 40% of the 52,297 beneficiaries were the Unemployed (Activation Priority) 16,069, while 24% (9,599) were in the Long term Unemployed category.

Significantly, disadvantaged men comprise 9% of the 52,297 total beneficiaries, an increase of 3% on the 2015 figures. Disadvantaged women account for 6% of the total numbers, a fall of 3% on the 2015 figures. Early school leavers and those working with basic skills remain at 5% of the total numbers. It must be noted that there are overlaps in some key categories, for example, while lone parents account for 814 of the total numbers and those working with basic skills account for 2,149 of the total numbers, these figures are also reflected in the ‘unemployed groups’.

Another statistic worth noting is the 3%, 1382 ESOL students who require language and literacy skills, the 2%, 988 individuals who are not working and ineligible for the Live Register and the people with disabilities who represent 2%, 788 of total numbers.
3. Target category analysis for clients met from the 01/01/16 to the 31/1/16

The bar chart represents the traditional key categories as identified in the White Paper (Learning for Life 2000). Adult and Community Education (which now includes BTEI and non-formal community education) accounts for 45% of the 52,297 total beneficiaries, Literacy and VTOS each account for 9% of the total numbers and Pre-Entry Guidance at 23% reflects the numbers who initially access the guidance service via the AEGS Guidance Information Officer and then follow up with referred guidance appointments.

4. Age Group Analysis from 01/01/16 to the 31/12/16

The bar chart shows that 66% of all beneficiaries who accessed the AEGS were between the ages 25 and 57, while 29% of all beneficiaries were under the age of 25. These figures remain relatively unchanged from the 2015 figures.
5. Current NFQ Education Category for Clients from 01/01/16 to the 31/12/16

The bar chart highlights the education level of clients accessing the AEGS. 37% of the 52,297 total beneficiaries present with NFQ Level 5 while 42% of clients present with less than NFQ Level 5. Significantly, 16% of clients have NFQ Level 3 and 9% present with NFQ Level 2. These figures show no major change on 2015 stats.
Gender breakdown for Clients met from 01/01/16 to 31/12/16

The pie chart shows that 61% of the total 52,297 beneficiaries who accessed the guidance service were female and 39% were male. These figures show no major change on 2015 figures.
QUALITATIVE REPORT

The AGMS and Qualitative report provides an opportunity for the AEGS to reflect on their practice and service provision. Case studies provide examples of Guidance provision and client outcomes as appropriate.

Common themes that have emerged from Client Feedback 2016:

Clients’ needs are central to the whole guidance process and client feedback informs service provision. Qualitative data suggests that there has been a notable shift in what clients are looking for from the AEGS. During the years of economic decline, clients’ primary focus was on accessing third level education, now the AEGS report that there is a clear demand for a more targeted approach to securing employment. Clients are looking for more labour market related opportunities, skills enhancing courses, assistance with CV preparation, social media and interview skills. The AEGS have responded by providing workshops on interviews skills, CV preparation, training in the use of social media including Facebook, LinkedIn and on-line opportunities thus ensuring that clients are equipped with key enabling skills so they can reach their full potential in a fast changing world.

The AEGS have further responded by advocating to their ETBs for locally and regionally adapted, labour market- relevant courses that will enable clients to secure sustainable employment.

Links with Employers:

Furthermore, the AEGS continue to forge links with their local employers through the Skills for Work programme, DSP Employers Week, and Recruitment agencies in order to ensure a flexible suite of educational and training opportunities is available to meet the needs of individuals and employers.

The launch of the Regional Skills Fora is welcomed by the AEGS as this collaborative approach will enhance the quality of engagement with all the relevant stakeholders, SOLAS, ETBs, DSP, LEOs and employers, who together will meet the challenge of reintegrating the unemployed into the workforce.

Labour Market Information for Learners:

The AEGS continue to be proactive in facilitating client/employer relationships for learners on VTOS and BTEI programmes. One service has set up a local employer data base enabling a seamless transition for clients into work placement, while also giving an insight into potential employment opportunities for learners in the local area. Notice boards with employment posts and labour market information are now a key element of the guidance information area. The Information Officer, in one service, published a summary report for 'Where the jobs are', furnishing clients with valuable labour market intelligence.

Collaboration is central to guidance practice and guidance counsellors work in partnership with other stakeholders in order to enhance their work with clients.
Presentations from recruitment agencies, organised by guidance counsellors, offer up to date information on current employment trends and opportunities. The guidance counsellors use their labour market information to advise programme coordinators and tutors on what practical skills could be added to programmes to improve students’ employability. Examples cited include ‘Lifeguarding’ for the Sports and Recreation students; SNA module in light of the additional 860 Special Needs Assistant posts to be allocated by the DES; an introduction to mechanical and electrical skills at Level 3 as a first step for those who want to work in manufacturing and engineering type jobs or apprenticeships.

It is clear from the qualitative data that the AEGS have relevant, appropriate labour market information for clients and this information is fed back through the appropriate channels for the benefit of the end user.

**Social media:**

Client feedback indicates that social media particularly Facebook is the new trend in communications with learners, staff and others. Some guidance services, having reviewed their Facebook Page in 2016, are using the indirect feedback/analysis of fans, popular posts, trends etc., to shape a plan for the future use of their Facebook Page. Plans include defining the purpose of the FB Page and where it fits in the overall communication strategy, posting more jobs and employment features, as these were some of the most popular posts, include more photos, videos, graphics and learner stories, and ultimately grow the service through this form of media.

**Group Work:**

Clients surveyed in 2016 expressed a need for more group contact in the VTOS and BTEI groups. Services responded by scheduling specific days each month for group guidance meetings with VTOS learners. In one service, guidance counsellors participated in a SOLAS Guidance Pilot initiative where the guidance services engaged with BTEI groups at 3 month, 6 month, and 12 month intervals providing both group and one to one guidance interventions. Their progression was fed back to the programme coordinators and the findings were collated and disseminated to senior management. This exercise is to be repeated in 2016/17. The service involved hopes that this feedback mechanism will show the efficacy of Guidance in terms of student retention and progression.

**Learner Voice:**

Client feedback to the AEGS has also highlighted the need for the ‘learner voice’ to be heard in terms of course structure, delivery times, guidance provision and the establishment of an empathic information resource area for self-directed learning and research. The AEGS practitioners continue to advocate to management for a guidance and information service that represents the needs of all learners.
Identification of Gaps in Provision:

A re-occurring issue for the AEGS is the lack of part time provision on BTEI Level 5 programmes for those on Disability Payments, Single Parent Payment and Carers Allowance. These cohorts are effectively excluded from the labour market. Flexible course delivery is important to enable this group to stay in contact with the active labour market, thus minimising future welfare dependency and supporting social inclusion.

Funding for part-time BTEI courses for those on low income is another challenge for adult learners who want up-skill and improve their long-term employment prospects. AEGS staff have facilitated learners through group discussion to directly approach training providers (The Irish Hospice Foundation) and negotiate a cost effective tailored training programme.

The dearth of part time provision at Level 5 is also presenting as an issue for the 25+ age group, where finance, childcare costs, and transport, particularly in rural areas, are impacting on clients' progression opportunities. Meeting the challenges, the AEGS continue to lobby locally for more outreach centres, online opportunities, and information hubs, to address some of these issues. Some AEGS, who have suffered significant staff losses since the moratorium on recruitment, are developing on-line cloud based guidance resources, where information for learners can be shared. This innovative approach reflects the proactive methods used by the AEGS to provide an inclusive service despite the current recruitment embargo.

Client Specific Issues:

Feedback reveals that older clients 50+ experience particular and sometimes acute barriers to participation in education. They often feel that their age is an obstacle to future work opportunities, their confidence is eroded and often social anxiety and depression ensues. The experienced AEGS recognise the diverse and complex needs of these individuals and put in place additional measures to support the individuals through this transition period. The AEGS work with this cohort to help them recognise their valuable transferable skills and build their confidence and self-esteem. Sometimes, specific group work on resilience, coping skills and self-belief are deployed to help with the process. In cases, where mental health issues are evident, the AEGS enlist the support of the HSE or other appropriate referral bodies.

It is extremely difficult for the person who has been made redundant to navigate the sea of agencies that often cloud their pathway. Clients have expressed relief and gratitude to the AEGS staff for ‘listening’ and sometimes, it’s as simple as that. Clients need to be heard. Unfortunately, this is not always the experience. Clients have expressed confusion and frustration at the myriad organisations offering ‘guidance’. In some cases DSP payments have been withheld until the client engages with both the ETB and Turas Nua. These situations are replicated throughout the country and it is the ‘end user’, the client, who suffers needlessly.
Certainly, more orchestrated communication and collaboration needs to be developed to avoid these difficult and unnecessary experiences.

Feedback from Asylum seekers shows that many of these individuals, although, not always fluent in English, have third level qualifications from their country of origin. The current provision of studies at Level 3 is too basic to meet the needs of some of these learners and they have expressed frustration at their lack of progression. The AEGS in Sligo has already met with the local DSP Department and officials to address the situation locally.

**Priority Planning in 2016:**

**Common Themes emerging -**

Priority planning for the AEGS is dictated by clients’ own identified needs, management policies and practices and the prevailing economic climate. Ireland’s economy is on the road to recovery and clients’ expectations are shifting to a more work focused guidance intervention. The AEGS are reviewing and evaluating service delivery to reflect learner needs. They are working closely with course tutors and coordinators to provide a comprehensive guidance and information service that represents the needs of all learners.

The AEGS, in consultation with programme coordinators, plan, develop and deliver guidance and information workshops at appropriate points along the learning journey. Learners are introduced to Facebook, LinkedIn and other online resources that are crucial for today’s employee. Workshops are also delivered on Resilience, Self-Belief, Motivation and Stress Management.

The ‘learner voice’ mandates the AEGS to provide group guidance interventions at different stages of their learning journey. Learners on VTOS and BTEI programmes are seeking on-going targeted guidance interventions, for example, explanation of the NFQ framework at the beginning of the year, links to CAO courses and CAO workshops pre-application for college, interview skills at pre-exit stage. Feedback from BTEI learners in one service suggests that they are finding it challenging to have their voice heard. After lengthy discussion, the guidance counsellor was permitted to advocate to management on their behalf. Findings were presented to the BTEI coordinator who is now considering having a student representative or putting an anonymous feedback procedure in place. This approach has resulted in a strengthening of the teamwork and collaboration among ETB tutors, coordinators and guidance staff and the embedding of guidance into the curriculum.

The unemployed (DSP Activation Priority), identified as part of the Government’s activation agenda and the long-term unemployed cohort continue to be prioritised and supported by the AEGS. Central to the AEGS planning is the strengthening of local referral protocols with the DSP. While it is reported that some services are collaborating well with the DSP, other services are finding it
challenging to engage with this agency. Effective engagement with DSP is crucial to ensure appropriate client referral.

The delivery of a guidance and information service that serves the needs of all its clients is a key priority for the AEGS. The evolution of the VEC’s into ETB’s involved significant restructuring at various levels within the organisation and this has impacted the services in a number of ways. Guidance counsellors and Information Officers have been redeployed in a number of services increasing pressure on remaining staff. Many of the services are operating without a Guidance Information Officer and without accessible premises. Quality guidance provision is contingent on the resources of competent information officers who are equipped with up to date relevant labour market intelligence and skilled in the use of social media.

Many AEGS are reporting an increase in the number of clients accessing the services with mental health issues and specific learning difficulties. This is proving challenging for services who are not adequately resourced and whose staff need training to deal with the myriad attendant issues.

Collaboration with employers is becoming even more critical to the delivery of an effective guidance and information service; the AEGS are informed by employer feedback on future skills needs and labour market trends. Local labour market intelligence is key to the provision of targeted training and educational programmes. The AEGS in Co Longford is a prime example of the importance of networking with local industry. The ‘Centre Parcs’ holiday village which will accommodate 2,500 guests and offer more than 100 indoor and outdoor family activities will open in the near future with the promise of 1000 jobs in the hospitality, leisure, retail and management sectors. The AEGS in Longford are working with senior management, course coordinators and tutors to ensure that ETB education and training programmes are being tailored to accommodate this developing sector.

**Continuous Professional Development**

International research indicates that high-quality initial and continuing education for staff involved in direct provision of FET is essential to fostering better learner outcomes. (FET strategy 2014-2019)

The CPD for the AEGS staff is informed by the practitioners themselves, who through reflective practice identify areas of skills development that are essential to the delivery of a quality guidance service in a fast changing economic landscape.

CPD is provided by the NCGE annually, who acknowledging the diversity of the roles within the service, Guidance Coordinator, Guidance Counsellor and
Information Officer offer targeted training to suit the various roles. This CPD programme is funded by SOLAS within the NCGE SOLAS grant allocation.

CPD organised by the NCGE is supported by the ETB management who facilitate staff participation. The training for AEGS staff focuses on what they identify as relevant to their clients’ needs and these needs are continuously evolving.

The AEGS are seeking training in the use of social media as a promotional marketing tool to reach the target audience. Additionally, they are looking for support and up-skilling in areas around mental health including social anxiety, depression, suicide awareness and challenging behaviour. As many clients are now presenting with specific learning difficulties, AEGS staff require training and up-skilling in this area. Information on skills shortages and links with industry and employers were emphasised by other service providers as key to professional development.

Attendance at Guidance Counselling Supervision is a requirement of service provision, is funded in the AEGS Budget as mandated by DES and supported by NCGE.

**Case Studies**

The work of the AEGS practitioners is mirrored in the qualitative data, in particular the case studies, which demonstrate all elements of a holistic guidance process which serve the individual to reach his full potential in life. Collaboration and partnership with all key stakeholders are central to good practice and the case studies will reflect this approach and indeed the pivotal role the AEGS play in linking all agencies together for the benefit of the client.

The following five case studies from AEGS practitioners highlight good practice, the role of the Guidance Information Officer, and the quality of the client/guidance counsellor relationship. Furthermore, the case studies demonstrate the importance of guidance intervention for early school leavers who, through previous negative experience of the education system find it difficult to re-engage. They also confirm that ‘strengthened guidance, close to the provision of education and training, can be important in supporting young people in these decisions’ The Pathways to Work ‘Implementation of the EU Council Recommendation for a Youth Guarantee’ 2013 (Ireland)

The case studies also highlight the importance of a partnership approach particularly when dealing with the long term unemployed and clients with mental health issues and learning difficulties.
The 5 Case studies are presented with the permission of the AEGS services in Monaghan, Kilkenny, Kildare and Cork City. Identifiers have been removed or replaced to preserve the identities of those involved.

Kilkenny and Carlow ETB
Case Study
The Benefits of Guidance and Counselling for Early School Leavers

This case study demonstrates how the AEGS work with a client, who has dropped out of the formal education system. It shows how guidance and encouragement from the AEGS and the adult educational team can support learners to develop their personal skills and re-engage with learning.

Jim was referred to the Adult Guidance Service through the DSP-ETB Interim Protocol. He was 18 years old at the time and had left school at the age of 16. He experienced a range of difficulties while attending second level education and during his time at school he was referred to a Clinical Psychologist (HSE). He was diagnosed with extreme anxiety which prevented him from attending school on a regular basis. Consequently, he was tutored at home for most of his secondary school education. He did not sit any subjects in the Junior Certificate exam and effectively fell through the education system until he was referred to the Adult Guidance Service at the age of 18. When the Guidance Counsellor met Jim he presented as a very withdrawn, vulnerable, complex and anxious individual. He had difficulty relating socially and had fears in relation to group situations. From the beginning it was very important that the guidance counselling process would provide Jim with an open, supportive and encouraging environment, while also helping him to overcome his difficulties.

As part of the guidance counselling process an action plan in relation to Jim’s education and career was explored and established. From an educational planning point of view, it was essential to start with a good foundation (QQI Level 3 or 4), especially as Jim was aged between 18 and 23 would need to complete an appropriate level of education which would provide effective progression options. As part of the feedback from his career interest inventory a number of interests were identified including computers and accounting. To prepare for these future options Jim was referred to the QQI Level 4 course in general learning with BTEI. This course provided Jim with a part time learning option available locally, which would allow him to obtain an equivalent qualification to the Leaving Certificate. This suited Jim as he didn’t feel Youthreach was an option for him. While attending the BTEI course he continued to work with the Guidance Counsellor who supported him through the process.
There were a number of challenges:

- Client's condition, particularly his high level of anxiety, negativity and over analytical nature.
- Client's previous experience of education, which was very negative, "broken" and incomplete.
- Limited education options for client's age profile (18 - 23 years).
- Difficulties with client's attendance on BTEI course and the need to be in regular contact with BTEI co-ordinator in relation to providing support in order that he would continue with the course and achieve a qualification.
- Supporting client identify, embrace and work towards reaching his full potential

There were a number of key strengths:

- Client was a very intelligent individual.
- At the age of 18, client had youth on his side and had the potential to progress and succeed.
- Educational options for progression were available in the region and were accessible by local transport.
- Supportive relationships with Guidance Counsellor, BTEI Co-ordinator and tutors.
- Clear and consistent communication between Guidance Counsellor, client and BTEI programme coordinator

Key outcomes:

- Client's willingness to try his best to engage in the guidance counselling process, client recorded a high level of attendance at his guidance sessions.
- Client completed his BTEI course and achieved a full QQI Level 4 Certificate.
- Client applied to Post Leaving Certificate courses in computers on the basis of his QQI Level 4 Certificate.
- Client needs ongoing support as he continues his educational and vocational journey.
Kildare and Wicklow ETB

Case Study

Guidance service facilitation of clients with pressing mental health issues

The AEGS have recorded a large number of clients presenting with mental health issues. This case study demonstrates how the AEGS use active inclusion as a guiding principle when working with people with disabilities, who are not currently active in the labour market as outlined in Pathways to Work 2016-2020. Active inclusion is a European and Government priority and is supported by education and training policy. It means enabling every citizen, including those experiencing barriers to the labour market (for example, people with a disability, early school leavers or those with lower levels of skills) to fully participate in society; to access a range of quality services including education and training; and to have a job (FET Strategy 2014-2019).

Moreover, the case study highlights the significant role the AEGS and the FET sector play in helping people to lead fulfilling lives, supporting some of the hard-to-reach individuals and groups to achieve their potential and reducing the costs to society of exclusion.

Furthermore, the case study demonstrates the importance of the professional competence of the guidance practitioner as outlined in the ELGPN Quality Assurance guidelines 2015.

A 29 year old male referred to the guidance service in May 2016 by the HSE psychiatric services. He was under the care of the HSE following a suicide attempt. His background was long term unemployment, from the construction industry. The client was married with 2 children and a mortgage to service. A close friend had died 4 months earlier.

The meeting with the guidance service was traumatic for both parties. The client was distressed and the guidance counsellor found herself very affected. She allowed the client to see this reaction and it helped form a trusting working relationship. The client told how he struggled with his friend's death and financial worries. A client of Turas Nua, under pressure and terrified of losing his home, he had attempted suicide. The meeting ended with the client agreeing to try to move on and gain some qualifications. The local VTOS programme offered a Level 4 Employment skills course and he applied to start the following September. This course would allow him to up-skill and to plan his future. He then began a short partnership programme for unemployed men. The VTOS course began in Sept 2016 and to date he has completed 2 full modules. There have been ups and downs but the support and friendship he has encountered has kept him going. He" drops in" to guidance for a chat when he needs extra support but all are mindful of professional boundaries as he remains in the care
of HSE psychiatric services. He works with the guidance counsellor to explore career areas and future course choice.

There were a number of challenges:

- Client with ongoing mental health issues.
- Availability of suitable courses as starting points for return to education
- Ongoing, appropriate support from guidance service
- Collaboration with external agencies
- Observing professional boundaries

There were a number of key strengths:

- Robust local progression routes
- Strong inter agency networks developed over 15 years of AEGS Service.
- Teamwork between guidance and programme co-ordinators-particularly enhanced by service location in a FET multiplex
- Guidance service having the ability to provide adequate time to listen to the client and make appropriate impartial referrals
- Guidance counsellor employing professional guidance counselling skills
- The importance of congruence in the relationship between guidance counsellor and client

Key Outcomes:

- Client has reported that his self-esteem and optimism is greatly enhanced
- Client on track to achieve a full level 4 award
- Client has identified an achievable career goal and pathway to work in the health services
- An overall benefit to his family and to the local community is that, through cooperative interagency work, this man has progressed from unemployment and high risk of suicide to a functioning individual with solid employment prospects.
Cavan and Monaghan ETB

Case Study:

Journey from dropping out of college to achieving 1st class Honours and employment

This case study is an example of collaborative practice where the AEGS link the learner with all services within the ETB to create awareness around progression opportunities.

John, 20, had failed maths in his Leaving Cert so didn’t get a college offer. He started a QQI Level 5 Sports and Leisure course but dropped out after a short time. For the next 18 months he was unemployed, but occasionally helped a local builder. His mother was a client of AEGS around this time and mentioned how frustrated she was for him and encouraged him to make an appointment. With the help of the guidance service John managed to apply for and complete a full level 5 award in Professional Cookery (through BTEI modules) and used this to gain a place on a Level 8 in Building Surveying at DKIT. He recently achieved First Class Honours in Building Surveying and has secured employment with a construction design company in Baggot Street, who have promised to fund further studies for John. He is a mentor to his younger brother who is in first year of the same course. John got the BTEA while studying as he was out of formal education for 2 years.

John was offered a guidance appointment in October and over the next number of months he completed various Level 5 modules through BTEI. He had expressed an interest in cooking, but not as a career. At that time, the ETB was running some cookery modules part time, throughout the county. The guidance counsellor worked with John to ensure he had the correct modules to complete his award within the current academic year. He was unsure of what area in which he would like to work, but after discussion and research decided Building Surveying was the course for him. The Guidance Counsellor assisted him with his CAO application, and the Information Officer helped him with the SUSI application. The AEGS liaised with BTEA and DSP on his eligibility for a payment and this was eventually granted. John grew in confidence as he worked through his modules. Participants and tutors on the course were very eager to see him succeed in his studies, encouraging him all the way. He was delighted to be accepted onto the level 8 course, having the required 3 distinctions (and more) on his NFQ Level 5 award.
There were a number of challenges:

- John was initially immature and unable to believe that he could achieve his goals.
- Failing maths in his Leaving Cert knocked his confidence.
- Because he presented to the service late in the year, it was challenging to achieve a full award by the summer assessment time. This was essential in order to be considered for a place through the Further Education route.
- There were some challenges in relation to his eligibility for BTEA but these were dealt with by the guidance service advocating on John's behalf.

There were a number of key strengths:

- Accessing the guidance service, as he was in danger of drifting along, until eventually being called in by DSP and possibly placed on a course that may not have been of interest to him.
- The guidance service gave him the opportunity to consider his strengths, helped him choose career goals that were in line with his interests, values and ability.
- His interest in cooking served as a useful vehicle for his transition into the course of his choice (building surveying).
- Availability of the cookery course through the ETB
- Availability of a maths module through the ETB
- Encouragement provided by staff and students on his course
- Completed a maths module and got a distinction (through sheer effort).

Key Outcomes:

- John has achieved first class honours in his degree and is employed with a well-known design company
- John is off the live register and working in a 'future skills need' career
- He has grown in maturity and independence and confidence
- He is a mentor for his younger brother who has chosen the same course.
- Staff at the IT where he studied have given the AEGS great reports of his progress throughout his studies, and of his influence on 'new third level students'.
Cork ETB

Case Study

Working with clients with specific learning difficulties

The AEGS have reported a large increase in the number of clients presenting with specific learning difficulties. This is an example of professional practice where the guidance practitioner establishes a relationship of trust which allows the client to disclose his diagnosis and enables the practitioner to make appropriate referrals.

Initially the guidance counsellor met John in an adult education centre where he was participating in a BTEI programme. The guidance counsellor met with the entire group first and then offered each learner a one-to-one guidance session. John presented with several issues he wished to discuss including his current accommodation and travel arrangements. He had tried to move into digs close to the college which didn’t work out; however, he wished to continue with his studies and decided to make the two and a half hour bus trip to and from college each day.

John had completed an Applied Leaving Certificate 2 years ago. He mentioned in the first session or two that he thought he had ADHD and Dyslexia; John spoke using literal language and in high volume; John asked questions about careers, education and life that would be typically learnt by observation.

The guidance counsellor met with John every week over a period of months as he required additional support. As the relationship developed, John became more trusting and the guidance counsellor was able to probe a little about his specific learning difficulties. He referred to assessments which were carried out by Psychologists over the years. He was finally able to disclose that he had a condition called Asperger’s Syndrome. At first he was very private about this information but with time he was able to speak about it openly and freely. Being able to do so opened up the possibility of John applying to Aspect (outreach support for adults with Asperger’s Syndrome).
There were a number of key challenges:

- Teaching John about the various systems and how to use them, including helping John to understand the role the guidance counsellor and others had in supporting him.
- Due to John's short-term memory challenges, there was a need to remind John about appointments and paperwork, which needed to be followed up on.
- Much of the paper work supplied by the psychologists had conflicting assessment results and diagnoses.

There were a number of key Strengths:

- Despite John's external challenges he progressed very well with his studies and by the end of the year had completed several modules
- John enjoyed the course socially
- John's tutors were happy with his academic achievements and were very supportive of him.
- With the right support John had the potential to complete a QQI Level 5 going forward.

Key Outcomes:

- Guidance intervention enabled John to be accepted by Aspect as a client
- He was assigned a key worker to support him with his everyday living skills. He successfully completed the year and attained several Level 4 modules
City of Dublin ETB Dublin Inner City (DIC)

Case Study

Guidance Information Provision & innovation:

Ensuring the AEGS has accurate and up to date, relevant and useful information is key to the role and value of AEGS. Equally, making sure that the Information is disseminated as effectively as possible is vital, both to Service Users, Education Providers, but also in establishing the expertise and value of the AEGS to HSE, DSP and other agencies.

An integral part of the G.I.O. role in this AEGS is to provide information to over 50 local Adult Learning Centres in DIC. DIC AEGS developed a system of sharing regular adult education information updates using a short newsletter by email to a mailing list of over fifty local centres and services. The main aim of this newsletter was to briefly describe what the service can offer adult learners along with some upcoming education opportunities in the local community.

Cognisant of developments from the establishment of SOLAS and the recent reform of the Further Education and Training sector the Guidance Information Officer and the AEGS Coordinator recognised that the dynamic of the local education environment was presenting new challenges. There was a heightened need for collaboration between local organisations and the development of integrated information sharing systems became a vital part of these changes. Also significant was the evolving local landscape, so the team identified this time as the ideal opportunity to promote this service as an accurate and reliable source of local adult education and training information.

Share What Happened:

In addition to our already established list of contacts for local adult and community education centres and services, the Guidance Information Officer also began networking with local Department of Social Protection (DSP) Case Officers and Area Managers. This involved promoting the Guidance Service by email and in person to make sure all centres, services and personnel in the community were aware of the availability of the service for their learners and clients. As a result of this targeted outreach activity, G. I.O. began compiling a new database containing the contact details of local DSP personnel and it also afforded the opportunity to review and update our existing group of local community education/service contacts.
The G.I.O. then compiled and disseminated an Adult Education Information Bulletin by email to the contacts on the mailing groups. After initial contact was made, G.I.O. provided regular and up to date information on issues such as upcoming education opportunities, events and important application dates.

**Key Challenges:**

Some of the main challenges were

- Identifying the key personnel for the purposes of networking in local social welfare offices
- Receiving information for inclusion in the bulletin on time from adult and community education centres/services.

**Strengths and Potential:**

The reach and importance of the Information Bulletin has increased significantly and continues to grow through networking activities and word of mouth. The service is now a vital source of adult education information for a diverse range of local community education providers and support services. These include: adult and community education centres, home school liaison staff, ESOL tutors, Asylum Seeker/Refugee services, Youthreach, Community Training Centres, homelessness support services, drug addiction support services, mental health support services, social workers, disability support services, DSP Case Officers, Local Employment Services to name but a few.

The DIC AEGS Information Bulletin has become an effective tool of communication by highlighting important dates and events such as ESOL assessment and registration, new adult education classes and other relevant adult education news.

**Key Outcomes:**

The Adult Education Guidance Service, Dublin Inner City has enhanced its reputation in the local community as an excellent source of accurate and up to date adult education information. To quote a recent support worker in the community "I depend enormously on the information that you send out and want to thank you for the up to date information that your service provides"

Through collaboration and effective team work, the AEG service was innovative and effective in developing the ‘communication and
Information’ aspect of the AEGS, reaching and maintaining service users by sending information updates on a regular basis. Initial networking activities and more recently word of mouth has allowed AEGS to maintain and develop new working relationships in the local community ensuring that adults have the best and most up to date information by which to make realistic education and career choices.

Summary
The AEGS summary report 2016 shows the on-going collaborative work of the AEGS practitioners. It reflects the engagement with the traditional key categories as identified in the White Paper (Learning for Life 2000), Adult and Community Education (which now includes BTEI and non-formal community education), Literacy and VTOS. It also shows how the AEGS work in supporting the Long term Unemployed and the Activation Priority group.

The report demonstrates the unique client practitioner relationship which is key to the provision of an impartial client centred guidance and information service. It clearly demonstrates the impact of the AEGS across the ETB in terms of client referrals, retention and progression onto appropriate learning programmes. It shows the collaborative relationships and links that the AEGS have forged with the wider community and stakeholders resulting in the embedding of guidance into the wider community.

The qualitative data highlights the strong advocacy role of the AEGS in ensuring that the client voice is heard. Lack of suitable, flexible learning opportunities impact certain groups in the community and can lead to social exclusion. The AEGS continue to work with programme coordinators and senior management in the ETBs to address this issue. Asylum seekers throughout the country are frustrated at the lack of learning and progression opportunities available to them. One of the key principles underpinning the provision of a quality guidance service is accessibility for all clients. Some AEGS are working without suitable premises and resources, confidentiality is compromised and learners’ needs are not being met. The AEGS continue to highlight this issue to senior management.

The qualitative data also shows that changing work environments impacts the work of the AEGS; some services report an increased work load in terms of administration, weekly and monthly meetings, travel time and other roles which are allotted to them. This effects the time spent with clients on guidance activities. Staff losses in many services have resulted in the redeployment of Guidance Counsellors and Guidance Information Officers leading to increased pressure on remaining staff.

The report outlines the shift in clients’ focus, clients on BTEI and VTOS courses are looking for more targeted guidance interventions. They are more ‘job
focused’ and are seeking information on labour market opportunities, social media expertise and targeted training that will make them ‘job ready’.

The report shows that the AEGS are using social media as a marketing tool to promote their services to clients; some are using Facebook as a vehicle to elicit feedback from clients on current service delivery.

The qualitative data reveals that the AEGS are reporting an augmentation in the number of people with disabilities and learning difficulties accessing their services. Many clients are presenting with challenging behaviour with all its attendant problems. The AEGS nationally are looking for CPD in this area to meet the demands of this emerging group.

Qualitative data indicates that barriers to participation in education and training continue to exist. The dearth of part time ETB education provision together with childcare and transport costs are all contributory factors. Data also shows that the 50+ age group present with a diverse and complex set of needs, educational, psychological and emotional. Interventions for this cohort often require a multifaceted approach and ongoing support.

The report also reveals that clients are confused at the myriad organisations offering guidance; ETB guidance, DSP guidance, SEETAC/ JobPath and Turas Nua. As some clients are being coerced into engaging with more than one agency, the AEGS are looking for clarity for their clients around this issue.

That challenge also highlights the role of the Guidance Information Officer in the AEGS and the significance – and potential of the AEGS Guidance team in communicating reliable, accessible, effective and useful Information for all service users, clients, education providers and other agencies.

Critical to the delivery of a quality guidance service is competent professional practitioners, who engage in continuous professional development. The AEGS have highlighted a number of areas where they require up-skilling. Training in the use of social media as a promotional marketing tool to reach the target audience has been suggested by a number of services. Additionally, the AEGS are looking for support and up-skilling in areas around mental health including social anxiety, depression, suicide awareness and challenging behaviour. As many clients are now presenting with specific learning difficulties, AEGS staff also require training and up-skilling in this area.

For further information on this report, contact NCGE at ncgeinfo@ncge.ie

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