

Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills on the progression by members of the Travelling Community to second-level and third-level education

26 March 2019

On behalf of Education and Training Boards Ireland, and the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) that ETBI represents, I am very pleased to make this statement to the Joint Committee for Education and Skills on the examination of the progression by members of the Travelling Community to second-level and third-level education.

Our response was submitted as two separate submissions

1. Progression to second-level education
2. Progression to third-level education (Further Education and Training (FET) in the ETB sector)

ETBs are statutory authorities which have responsibility for education and training, youth work and a range of other statutory functions. ETBs manage and operate community national schools, second-level schools, further education colleges, and a range of adult and further education centres in communities throughout Ireland.

Further Education and Training (FET)

Members of the Travelling community have access to a range of programmes within Further Education and Training provision and are a priority target group in programme planning.

In evaluating the progression of the Traveller Community, it is noted that there are high levels of Traveller participation recorded within Youthreach provision. Youthreach programmes cater for young people over the age of 16 who have dropped out of mainstream education and offer QQI level 3 and level 4 Major Awards.

Despite literacy levels being frequently cited as low within the Travelling Community, participation of this group in literacy and numeracy programmes continues to remain low. These programmes are delivered on a part-time flexible basis to meet the needs of learners, but the challenge to increase participation remains.

Many of the other programmes delivered in ETBs across the country like Back to Education Initiative, Skills for Work, and Apprenticeship programmes which are all aimed at supporting adults who have low education attainment, who wish to progress further, or to develop personally but participation rates within the Traveller Community still remain low.

Community Education programmes designed to meet the needs of those in a specific community, records a significant number of the Traveller Community participating within this provision. Programmes like Men's Sheds and Women's Sheds can be the first step to further education and training for many.

Second-level education

ETBs have a long-standing tradition of supporting the educational development of members of the Traveller Community. As state schools, ETB schools are open to all pupils regardless of any aspect of their identity. Our schools' culture is underpinned by the core values of:

- Excellence in Education
- Care
- Equality
- Community
- Multidenominational

Ongoing research shows that family engagement in education improves student achievement, reduces absenteeism and raises the expectation of parents for their children. In the response to our evaluation of participation and progression by the Traveller Community it was noted that a

low rate of educational attainment by Traveller parents, their own negative experience of schools, are key influencers in determining the progress of their own children.

Whilst the new General Allocation Model affords schools a level of certainty relating to resource teaching allocation and the opportunity to be flexible and targeted in their application, consideration must be given to going beyond this model. This could be done in terms of the provision of resources and training specifically aligned to the principles and practice of intercultural education.

Barriers

Barriers to participation in Further Education and Training cited in the SOLAS Report 'Barriers to Further Education and Training with Particular Reference to Long Term Unemployed and Other Vulnerable Adults (2017)' include:

- Low Confidence and self-esteem
- Negative experience of education
- Childcare
- Transport
- Loss or reduction in benefits
- Suitability of courses
- Lack of awareness of Further Education and Training

Many of the barriers contained in the report referenced above could also be barriers to our second-level students progressing particularly in relation to low confidence and self-esteem and a negative experience of education.

As outlined in the Action Plan for Education 2019 it is a priority to continue to collaborate with Traveller representative groups to improve Traveller engagement and participation. The FET Strategy also relates specifically to active and social inclusion and to supporting the inclusion of all individuals to participate in FET programmes. These goals underpin the work conducted by ETBs in their engagement at local level.

Recommendations

While the participation of the Traveller Community is low in some areas as referenced above, continued engagement with SOLAS, Department of Education and Skills (DES) and consideration to the suggestions made below may result in increased engagement:

- Consideration to be given to the provision of an allowance on a pilot basis to those programmes that don't currently attract an allowance.
- Interventions need to be in place at the early stage of education and on a continuum to encourage ongoing participation with education.
- Clarity could be provided on a national basis around the retention of DEASP and other benefits, as on occasion, this can result in non-participation in education programmes as learners fear their benefits will be reduced.
- Schools need support in identifying and accessing services and resources beyond those provided by the Department of Education, a mapping exercise should be conducted and updated on an ongoing basis and be available for schools.
- Training programmes for teachers should be developed in a partnership manner with both Traveller support organisations and intercultural education groups.
- Specific priority be given to Traveller pupils who are not in the school system. Supports may be channelled through the Education Welfare Officer who would work with a reintroduced and repurposed *Support Officer for Travellers Service*
- Develop a framework to encourage schools, FET colleges and centres to evaluate current practice of engaging and supporting students from Traveller families.
- Given the transitory nature of Travelling culture, a system for specific administrative tracking of Traveller pupils from Primary to Post-Primary and Post-Primary to the Further and Higher Education system nationally, should be developed.
- A review of childcare provision to support the Traveller community in accessing education could be undertaken.
- Addressing the challenge of transport costs, which can be a barrier to participation needs should be considered further. This has a particular impact in rural areas.

Thank you for the opportunity to present and engage with you today on this topic of importance to all education providers.