



PATH Strand 4

Phase 2 - Enhancement of course provision in Higher Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

Call for Proposals



An Roinn Breisoideachais agus Ardoideachais,
Taighde, Nuálaíochta agus Eolaíochta
Department of Further and Higher Education,
Research, Innovation and Science

HEA | HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS

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Section A - Context for PATH 4

National Access Plan

In August 2022, the Department of Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) launched the **National Access Plan - A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-28**¹ ('National Access Plan' or 'NAP').

The National Access Plan articulates **the Ambitions** for equity in higher education system as follows:

***“that the higher education student body entering, participating in, and completing higher education, at all levels and across all programmes reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland’s population,
and
that our higher education institutions are inclusive, universally designed environments which support and foster student success and outcomes, equity and diversity and are responsive to the needs of students and wider communities.”***

At the core of the National Access Plan are five **Student-Centred Goals**:

- 1. Inclusivity**
- 2. Flexibility**
- 3. Clarity**
- 4. Coherence**
- 5. Sustainability**

Underpinning these five goals is an additional sixth goal that is also core to the Plan:

- 6. Evidence-Driven Approach**

Each of these goals are underpinned by objectives that will deliver outcomes for students and actions that describe how these outcomes will be achieved.

Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH)

The Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH)² is a strategic funding programme, established in 2016, for the delivery of equity of access objectives. It supports the implementation of National Access Plan objectives by providing funding to higher education institutions (HEIs) to deliver innovative measures to improve participation and retention of specific priority groups in higher education.

¹ National Access Plan - A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-28 - <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2022/12/National-Access-Plan-2022-2028-FINAL.pdf>

² More information on Programme for Access to Higher Education is available at <https://hea.ie/policy/access-policy/path/>

PATH was confirmed as a permanent fund in 2020 and currently consists of five strands:

- PATH 1 - supporting access to initial teacher education.
- PATH 2 - 1916 Bursary Fund for the most socio-economically disadvantaged students
- PATH 3 - supporting institutional capacity in developing regional and community partnership strategies for increasing access to higher education.
- PATH 4 – two-phase programme supporting inclusive, universally designed higher education environments and course provision for students with intellectual disabilities.
- PATH 5 – funding to support Traveller and Roma students in higher education.

PATH funding complements other investments in equity of access including core funding supporting access infrastructure in HEIs, the Student Grant Scheme as administered by SUSI and other targeted initiatives such as the Student Assistance Fund (SAF), Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD), as well as other DFHERIS-funded initiatives.

PATH 4

PATH 4 is supported by funding of €12m over a **four-year period** starting in 2022 and is being implemented on a phased basis as follows:

- **Phase 1 (2022) – Universal Design Fund - Supporting inclusive universally designed higher education environments for all** (once-off fund based on allocations to PATH-funded HEIs and approved project plans)
- **Phase 2 (2023-2025) – Proposals for course provision for students with intellectual disabilities** (competitive call for proposals)

Phase 1 supports the embedding of Universal Design (UD) approaches and inclusive practices in HEIs which will benefit all students and in particular autistic students and enable the building of capacity in HEIs for greater participation by students with intellectual disabilities in higher education. All HEI project plans under Phase 1 were approved in 2022 and are now in implementation stage.

Phase 2 will involve a three-year pilot to support an enhancement of course provision for students with intellectual disabilities and to inform future policy considerations in respect of students with intellectual disabilities.

PATH 4 is a key driver in delivering the following **objectives**, under the **Inclusivity goal** in the new National Access Plan:

- *To embed a whole-of-institution approach to student success and universal design*
- *To improve opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities to engage in higher education*

A list of HEIs covered by PATH 4 can be found in Appendix 1 and is consistent with the HEIs currently participating in the PATH programme.

Section B - PATH 4 Phase 2 – Call for Proposals

Phase 2 of PATH 4 consists of a **competitive call for proposals** for the enhancement of course provision in higher education for students with intellectual disabilities.

Starting in 2023, the total funding available under PATH 4 Phase 2 is €3m per annum (or €9m over three years).

HEIs covered by PATH 4 (see Appendix 1) are invited to submit proposals under PATH 4 Phase 2 for additional provision for students with intellectual disabilities. Additionality can be demonstrated through, but is not limited to, the provision of additional places, additional opportunities to engage with mainstream higher education, additional workplace opportunities, enhanced student experience, etc.

It is acknowledged that HEIs are at different stages on the development of provision for students with intellectual disabilities. **HEIs seeking to develop new provision as well as those already offering courses for students with intellectual disabilities are invited to submit proposals for additional provision.**

When submitting proposals HEIs should be aware that PATH 4 Phase 2 **fund is limited to €3m per annum** and when evaluating projects, the external panel will have regard to the need to fund a **diversity of proposals and reach regional balance**. HEIs should be mindful of this when presenting costs for their proposals.

Purpose of the funding

Phase 2 will operate on a three-year pilot basis and is intended to:

- **Enhance course provision** for students with intellectual disabilities across HEIs currently participating in the PATH programme, **including students with intellectual disabilities from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and other National Access Plan priority groups.**
- To support **future evidence-informed policy considerations** in respect of the successful participation of students with intellectual disabilities in higher education including:
 - an understanding on how **engagement in higher education can support real outcomes**, including employment, for students with intellectual disabilities.
 - establishing an evidence base for a full and holistic **cost of provision for students with intellectual disabilities** encompassing fees, cost of provision for institution, day-to-day expenses, transport, student supports, mental health, preparation for interviews, etc.

Phase 2 is also intended to contribute to the following:

- The implementation by HEIs of the **Inclusivity goal**, and its related objectives and actions, of the National Access Plan.
- To enable the creation of **inclusive built and digital environments in higher education** which can be **accessed by all**, and which supports increased engagement, progression, and **success for all students, benefiting all priority groups in the National Access Plan**, including students with intellectual disabilities.
- To develop the higher education sector's **capacity for inclusive teaching, learning and assessment** to enable greater opportunities for **participation in higher education by all students including students with intellectual disabilities**.

All proposals **must demonstrate**:

- Enhancement of provision
- Meaningful engagement to respond to student voice.
- Targeted outcomes and
- Integration of Universal Design principles and practices.

It is **not** the purpose of PATH 4 Phase 2 to address issues faced by students with intellectual disabilities which are beyond the remit of the higher education sector including the assessments and supports provided by other state bodies and agencies.

Section C – PATH 4 Phase 2 - Consultation Sessions

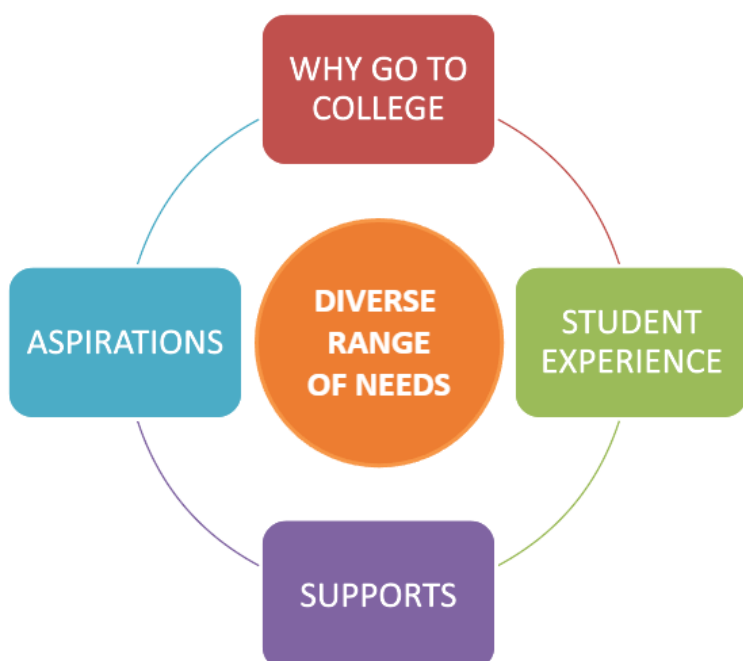
In preparation for the development of the PATH 4 Phase 2 Call for Proposals, the HEA hosted a series of in-person and online consultation workshops with the support of the Inclusive National Higher Education Forum (INHEF). The objective of the consultation workshops was to hear the voices of students with intellectual disabilities and to understand what this cohort of students want more fully from their higher education experience.

The student voice was central to the development of this call for proposals. The HEA met with 54 students (current and past) from 11 different programmes, some of which have been discontinued. The HEA also hosted three online sessions and heard from people with intellectual disabilities who have not attended university/college, their parents, and parents of students with intellectual disabilities who went to college.

The **Student Principles** outline below is the outcome of this consultation process and should inform HEIs in the development of their proposals for the provision for students with intellectual disabilities. **HEIs will also be required to show evidence of their own meaningful engagement with prospective or current students and their families about the type and content of provision to be developed, including what sort of outcomes students wish to achieve. HEIs are expected to demonstrate how the student voice has been incorporated into their proposal.**

Student Principles

'People with disability get pushed aside and people with disability have a right to go to college. We should be treated like any other person, to be independent, to meet my friends, to live in the community.' – Student X



A. Why go to college?

- Going to college is an opportunity to **learn alongside other people**, to **learn about themselves** and to **learn life skills**.
- Increased **sense of independence** and the opportunity to be an inspiration to others.
- Going to college **open new doors** and support this cohort of students to increase their **sense of belonging, confidence** and help them to find their own **voice** in society.

B. Student Experience

- Programmes should be better advertised, with **information** available, including pathways for progression, in advance so that prospective students and their families can consider those as a viable option.
- Programmes should present opportunities to engage in **co-learning modules, Independent Living, and Disability Rights and Advocacy** contents.
- **Flexible** learning and reasonable accommodations for assessments are crucial elements of course provision.
- Programmes should incorporate an element of **work experience**, giving the students the opportunity to become better employees and job ready.
- Besides the academic experience, students want the **wider student experience** e.g., making lifelong friends, joining clubs and societies, accessing facilities such as gym and library.

C. Supports

- **Student supports are essential**, and institutions need to understand the **diverse range of needs**. E.g., personal assistant, assistive technology, reasonable accommodation, a buddy system/ peer-support, applied Universal Design especially on physical environments, mental health supports, etc.
- **Transport** is an issue and a major barrier for students with intellectual disabilities. Besides the cost, students might need to rely on parents to bring them to college.
- Course design should bear in mind the needs of students, including timings of starts (travelling to college at peak times is not always possible), flexibility on assignment dates, expected outcomes, etc.
- **Financial supports** are needed, particularly to cover course fees and the increased cost-of-living.

D. Aspirations

- Pathways of progression allowing students to engage in other courses/modules, as well as progress to higher levels of study.
- Offer of courses at different levels and possibly module-based to allow students to build up on their development.
- **Getting a paid job**

“Permanent job means more than a job, means being part of society.” – Student B

E. Diverse range of needs

- The PATH 4 Phase 2 Call for Proposals should address the need for **different types of course provision to meet the needs of students with a diverse range of needs**.

Section D – PATH 4 Phase 2 Proposals

Evaluation Criteria

HEIs are requested to submit a proposal using the criteria outlined on the table below. Proposals will be evaluated based on the weightings of these criteria and **should not exceed 5,000 words (excluding appendices)**. The structure of the proposal submitted by each HEI should follow the headings below.

<p>A. <u>Overview</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a Title and Summary description of the proposal including a breakdown of all components of the project. • Outline stage of development (<i>Use options A to D</i>) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Existing provision with Additionality b. Enhancement of course provision (more modules, student experience) c. New courses (including those which were discontinued) d. Set up stage looking to build up capacity, infrastructure, and expertise leading to course provision. • Proposed NFQ level of a programme. <p><u>Declaration</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated point of contact for future correspondence with the HEA. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>In the case of a joint proposal involving more than one HEI, a lead HEI who will be responsible for correspondence with the HEA must be identified.</i> • Sign-off by President <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>In the case of a collaborative or joint project, the project plan must be signed off by the Presidents of all participating HEIs.</i> 	
<p>B. <u>Strategic Approach</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of meaningful engagement³ with prospective or current students and their families about the type and content of provision to be developed, including what sort of outcomes students wish to achieve. The HEI is expected to demonstrate how the student voice has been incorporated into its proposal. • How the proposal reflects on Student Principles outlined in Section C. • Evidence of the intended outcome for the student. • Evidence of collaboration with community partners, non-governmental organisations, other HEI's, representative organisations, schools and the further education and training sector in the development and implementation of the proposal. The HEI is expected to document the processes it has followed in developing its proposal e.g., demonstrated 	<p>30 marks</p>

³ Participation Matters: Guidelines on implementing the obligation to meaningfully engage with disabled people in public decision making (September 2022) - https://nda.ie/uploads/publications/NDA-Participation-Matters-Web-PDF_092022.pdf

<p>evidence of need and demand, consultation with partners and experts, identified employment prospects for students including engagement with employers, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A detailed communications strategy based on use of relevant communications design guidance⁴ e.g., how the programme will be targeted and promoted including among students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and other National Access Plan priority groups. • How the proposal supports the Inclusivity goal of the National Access Plan. • How the proposal aligns and supports the HEI’s strategic mission and objectives. • How the proposal will support students’ sense of belonging and inclusion on campus, including raising awareness among the wider community of students and staff. 	
<p>C. <u>Quality of proposal must address the following headings (other headings also permitted at HEI’s discretion)</u></p> <p><i>C1 - Details of Programme</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type of programme to be delivered including proposed content and NFQ level. • Detailed timelines and milestones for the duration of PATH 4 Phase 2 funding. • How the proposal builds and draws on projects implemented by the HEI as part of PATH 4 Phase 1 – Universal Design⁵ Fund. • Number of students to be enrolled on the programme on an annual basis. • Expected student outcomes e.g., progression, completion, life skills, transitions to employment or further study. <p>Programmes can be offered on a full-time or part-time basis and can also include elements that will enable students to participate in mainstream courses modules and to engage with work experience. Programmes that entail joint provision with other providers can also be included in proposals.</p> <p><i>C2 – Student Supports</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details of Student supports that will be put in place to aid the student including direct financial support and disability supports (see Section F in relation to conditions of funding). <p><i>C3 – Additionality, Collaboration and Regional provision</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HEIs must objectively demonstrate the additionality of the proposed programme in the context of their own provision. Additionality can be demonstrated through, but is not limited to, the provision of additional places, additional opportunities to engage with mainstream higher education, additional workplace opportunities, enhanced student 	<p>40 marks</p>

⁴ HEIs are encouraged to refer to the Customer Communications Toolkit for Services to the Public – A Universal Design Approach ([at - https://universaldesign.ie/products-services/customer-communications-toolkit-for-services-to-the-public-a-universal-design-approach/](https://universaldesign.ie/products-services/customer-communications-toolkit-for-services-to-the-public-a-universal-design-approach/)) and the Code of Practice on Accessibility of Public Services and Information Provided by Public Bodies ([at - https://nda.ie/publications/code-of-practice-on-accessibility-of-public-services-and-information-provided-by-public-bodies-nda-report](https://nda.ie/publications/code-of-practice-on-accessibility-of-public-services-and-information-provided-by-public-bodies-nda-report)).

⁵Framework for key UDE requirements in PATH 4 funding at - <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2022/07/PATH-4-FAQ-Appendix-1-.pdf>

<p>experience, etc. HEIs can also choose and are encouraged to collaborate with each other in the development and implementation of proposals under PATH 4 Phase 2.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details of whether the project will demonstrate additionality across more than one region/campus should be included. • <u>Additional weighting will be provided for projects:</u> which show a high degree of collaboration including collaboration leading to enhanced provision across regions. (For example, cluster led projects where a similar project is rolled out over more than one location or projects where institutions at a more advanced stage of their course provision for students with intellectual disabilities are willing to share their expertise to aid another regional location in commencing provision.) <p><i>C4 - Evidence Gathering</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and self-evaluation to be undertaken during project implementation. This should include areas such as student feedback and experience, engagement with partner organisations, student outcomes listed above, cost recording as well as cost-benefit analysis. 	
<p>D. <u>Funding and sustainability</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed budget for the duration of PATH 4 Phase 2 funding, including breakdown of costs (See Section F), pay and non-pay. • How the HEI proposes to leverage other sources of funding to complement PATH 4 Phase 2 funding. • HEIs should also demonstrate how its provision can be sustainably funded and continued following the completion of the three-year pilot phase. 	30 marks
Total	100 marks

The HEA will establish an **independent, external panel to evaluate proposals** and make funding recommendations. HEIs may be invited to make an oral presentation of their proposal to the panel.

Submission of proposals

Proposals under PATH 4 Phase 2 should be submitted to the HEA Executive at access@hea.ie by **Thursday, 12 October 2023**.

The HEA will host a **PATH 4 Phase 2 Information Session on Tuesday, 11 July 2023**. HEIs will have had a chance to consider the call for proposals and raise questions which will become part of a FAQ document.

HEIs are invited to submit questions on the PATH 4 Phase 2 Call for Proposals ahead of the Information Session to access@hea.ie by **7 July 2023**. All questions, including those raised at the Information Session event, and responses will be collated and published as an FAQ on the HEA's website.

Section E – PATH 4 Phase 2 Reporting requirements

Successful proposals will be required to report to the HEA on progress implementation on an annual basis with a reporting template to be developed by the HEA. Funding will be released annually on the basis of satisfactory reporting by HEIs.

As outlined in this document, part of the reporting will require detailed reports on the cost of the programme for the duration of the funding.

HEIs funded under PATH 4 Phase 2 will also be expected to participate in, and contribute to, the dissemination of their findings and the sharing of good practice at any PATH events that may be organised by the HEA.

Section F - PATH 4 Phase 2 Conditions of funding

The following conditions of funding apply:

- Funding under PATH 4 Phase 2 is for a maximum of three years and all funding must be spent by 30 September 2026.
- HEIs awarded funds under Phase 2 will be expected to commence work towards additional provision in Semester 2 of 2023/24 academic year and project implementation fully in place for the 2024/25 academic year.
- PATH 4 funding is not intended to be used on measures which are already supported by other Exchequer funding – although this may be considered where the funding stream for these activities has been or will be exhausted.
- Funding can be used to address capacity issues as part of the development and roll-out of course provision. While funding can support staff costs, HEIs should ensure that project plans avoid creating future liabilities or expectations beyond the lifespan of projects.
- Funding can be used to provide:
 - Financial support, as appropriate, to students who are financially disadvantaged to participate on PATH 4 phase 2 funded programmes e.g., financial assistance to assist in course costs and day-to-day expenses. Proposals should clearly show the amount of budget proposed for direct student financial supports.
 - Disability supports for students e.g., assistive technology, academic support, transport, personal assistants. Please note that in relation to the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) and students' eligibility to access FSD-funded supports, there are currently no proposals to change FSD eligibility requirements.
 - Measures to build awareness through training and events to increase students' sense of belonging on campus and as part of the overall HEI student population.
- HEIs must ensure that the funding is used in line with public financial procedures.
- Appropriate monitoring and control arrangements will be put in place by the HEA, to ensure that any unallocated or unspent funding is returned to the Exchequer by HEIs no later than the end of 2026.
- Funding cannot be used to support core grant-funded activities or schemes.
- Funding is for current expenditure only.

Appendix 1 – List of HEIs covered by PATH 4

- Atlantic Technological University (ATU)
- Dublin City University (DCU)
- Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT)
- Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dún Laoghaire (IADT)
- Marino Institute of Education (MIE)
- Mary Immaculate College (MIC)
- Maynooth University (MU)
- Munster Technological University (MTU)
- National College of Art and Design (NCAD)
- RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences (RCSI)
- South East Technological University (SETU)
- St. Angela's College, Sligo
- Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin)
- Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (TUS)
- Trinity College Dublin (TCD)
- University College Cork (UCC)
- University College Dublin (UCD)
- University of Galway
- University of Limerick (UL)