Appendix XXV – Policy for Learner Access and Widening Participation

SETU — Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta an Oirdheiscirt — South East Technological University

Policy & Procedure Title:

Policy and Procedure for Learner Access and Widening Participation

Effective Date	1st September 2016	**Version**	4.0
Approved By	Academic Council Governing Body	**Date Approved**	16th March 2016 31st March 2016

Form(s)	Responsibilities/ Owner
	Head of Faculty Vice President for Academic Affairs & Registrar Access Office and Student Services
Superseded or Obsolete Procedures	
Version 03 – June 2014 - Reviewed the Policy as scheduled to include widening participation and reflect changes to title of Faculty	
Version 02 – Carlow Access Programme Procedure 2010	
Version 01 – Direct Entry Policy – March 2003	

1.1 Introduction

Equality, transparency and inclusion of learners in Higher Education are upheld by European and National legislation including but not limited to, the Equal Status Acts 2000-2011 and the Disability Act 2005.

1.2 Policy

South East Technological University Carlow (herein referred to as SETU Carlow under the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area (ESG), Section 1.6[1] and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, Section 56, subsections 1-13[2] is committed to equity of access and opportunity for all staff and students. Additionally SETU Carlow is committed to the creation of a supportive and inclusive environment to reflect the diversity of Ireland's population and eliminate barriers to participation in higher education.

Access, transfer and progression in Higher Education are additionally informed by the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education[3] (National Access Plan), SETU Carlow's Strategic Plan 2023-2028 and European and National legislation and policy [4] measures.

SETU Carlow promotes and facilitates entry, participation, progression and successful completion of academic programmes by targeted groups, typically under-represented in higher education in particular, mature learners, learners with disabilities, first generation learners, and learners who experience social or economic disadvantage or lack of educational opportunity at third level.

SETU Carlow shall ensure that all applicants and learners are treated in a transparent, consistent and equal manner and promotes the principles of inclusivity.

2. Definitions

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[1] For more information on Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, refer to http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/
[2] For further details on the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012), see http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/Qualifications-and-Quality-Assurance-(Education-and-Training)-Act-2012.aspx
[3] Full details of the *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education* can be found at http://www.hea.ie
[4] As detailed in the HEA (2015), *National Access Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019*, p15, national policies and measures include;
The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016 (Department of Social Protection)
The National Disability Strategy (Department of Justice and Equality)
The Action Plan for Jobs (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation)
Pathways to Work Strategy (Intreo / Department of Social Protection)
Report and recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy (Department of Education and Skills)
Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: the national policy framework for children and young people 2014-2020 (Department of Children and youth Affairs)

Access

Access to higher education is based on the principle that higher education should be available to all regardless of age, disability, socio-economic disadvantage, gender or other circumstance.

Disability[5]

Under the Act, the term 'Disability', in relation to a person, means a substantial restriction in the capacity of the person to carry out a profession, business or occupation in the State or to participate in social or cultural life in the State by reason of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual impairment. Substantial restriction means a restriction that is permanent (or likely to be permanent) which results in significant difficulty in communication, learning or mobility and means that the person has a need for services to be provided on a continuous basis.

First Generation Learner

According to studies [6]first-generation students to higher education face unique challenges and barriers for entry to higher education. As the first person to attend third level education in their families, these students may feel less prepared for college life in comparison to others who have the benefit of exposure to parental or familial experiences of higher education. College attendance can be a factor which separates them from friends and family who may not place value on third level education, or may place a higher value on entering the workforce after secondary level. Access to higher education by first-generation learners' aims to demystify higher education amongst this group, lower the barriers to access and generate long term positive outcomes for the learner and the learner's family and extended family.

Irish Traveller[7]

Travellers are an indigenous minority who, historical sources confirm, have been part of Irish society for centuries. Travellers long shared history, cultural values, language, customs and traditions make them a self-defined group, and one which is recognisable and distinct. Their culture and way of life, of which nomadism is an important factor, distinguishes them from the sedentary (settled) population.

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[5] http://www.ahead.ie/disabilityact
[6] HEA publication, *Looking Forward; Investigating the Counselling and Support Needs of 'Non-Traditional Students' in Irish Third-Level Education* 2007, pp.12-15; p54
[7] http://itmtrav.ie/irishtravellers

Mature Student[8]

A mature student who is 23 years of age or older on 1 January in the year of application for entry to a level 6 to 8, higher education programme.

3. Purpose and Scope

The purpose of SETU Carlow's Access and Widening Participation Policy is to promote awareness and consistency of approach, to broaden participation and build pathways for all learners, specifically marginalised groups who have been typically underrepresented in higher education.

These groups are identified in the National Access plan [9];

- First time, mature student entrants.
- Students with disabilities.
- Part-time/flexible learners.
- Further education award holders.
- Irish Travellers.

SETU Carlow, through involvement with all key stakeholders shall promote widening of access, enhanced performance outcomes, greater flexibility in provision'[10]and the achievement of the priority goals specifically;

1. To mainstream the delivery of equity of access in HEIs.
2. To assess the impact of current initiatives to support equity of access to higher education.
3. To gather accurate data and evidence 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 to higher education with a particular focus on mentoring.

3.1 Financial Supports

The HEA manages two funds intended to provide financial support to the access initiatives of Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), namely the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) and the Student Assistance Fund (SAF).

Both funds are part supported by the Irish government and the European Social Fund as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020. Within the access program of policies, procedures and initiatives, SETU Carlow manages its allocation under both Funds to ensure compliance with regulations and to achieve the best

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[8] HEA (2015), *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019*, p.55
[9] HEA (2016), *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019*, p34.
[10] HEA (2011), *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*, p.25.

possible outcomes for the relevant target groups.

3.1.1 FSD [11]
Provides funding to support disability assistance and accommodations for eligible students under various specified disability categories, which include but are not limited to the following;
- Blind/visual impairment
- Deaf/hard of hearing
- Mental health issue
- Physical disability/mobility impairment
- Significant ongoing illness
- Specific learning difficulties

3.1.2 SAF
Intended to provide financial support to eligible students who are disadvantaged by unfavourable socio-economic circumstance.

3.1.3 Carlow Access Programme (CAP)
The CAP initiative is fully funded by SETU Carlow and is aimed at providing access, financial and disability supports to students from the specified target groups, predominantly those from lower socio-economic groups, first-time mature entrants to higher education, first generation learners, and students with disability. Successful applicants from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds benefit from reduced points entry plus financial support. Successful applicants with disabilities benefit from reduced points entry plus disability support.

3.2 Auxiliary Supports
The University promotes greater awareness of its Access Policy amongst targeted groups through its publicity material, and active engagement and collaboration with primary and secondary schools, ETBs and VTOS centres, and relevant representative groups and organisations in the community and neighbouring counties.

Outreach programmes, flexible access routes and supports for learners from under-represented groups have been developed, and will be underpinned by continual engagement with key stakeholders.

The University sets targets for access to and participation in programmes by target groups and will measure as appropriate through a Senior Management led University wide Access Committee. SETU Carlow will ensure that these targets are supported as part of mainstream institutional strategic planning.

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[11] http://www.hea.ie/en/policy/national-access-office/access-funding

3.2.1 Carlow Access Programme (CAP)

The CAP initiative is provides an access route to eligible students from the specified target groups, predominantly those from lower socio-economic groups, first-time mature entrants to higher education, first generation learners and students with disability through reduced points entry. Successful applicants from socio-economically disadvantaged groups also benefit from financial support. Successful applicants with disabilities also benefit from disability support.

3.2.2 Broad based entry

Broad-based [12]undergraduate programmes have been implemented in all faculties to enhance the first year experience, prevent premature specialisation and promote programme completion. In addition, established peer assisted learning contributes to positive student outcomes.

3.2.3 High Performance Entry

Achievement outside of the classroom in the areas of Sport, Active Citizenship and Entrepreneurship is recognised by SETU Carlow through the implementation of its High Performance Entry Scheme awarding up to 50 additional CAO points to students who show outstanding performance outside of the classroom setting.

3.2.4 Recognition of Prior Learning

Prior learning, experience, skills and knowledge are recognised by the University where appropriate to facilitate admission, and advanced entry to our programmes.

3.2.5 Teaching & Learning

Academic professional development, research and other activities are carried out through the University's Teaching & Learning Centre to establish a student centred learning environment and effective practice models for promoting pedagogical support for transitioning to higher education, progression, achievement of learning outcomes, and completion by target groups.

3.2.6 Collaborative projects

The University had devised and will continue to develop community based programmes, both locally and nationally, to make higher education accessible to people from all backgrounds.

3.2.7 Pre-entry activities

Interventions in primary and post primary schools include the development and delivery of stimulating, interactive activities targeting young people from primary and post-primary schools so that the aspiration for third level can be instilled at an early age. Activities

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[12] In line with (DES) 2015, *Supporting a Better Transition from Second Level to Higher Education : Implementation and Next Steps,* p.6, and (HEA), 2014 *Mission Based Compact between South East Technological University Carlow and the Higher Education Authority*, p.13

include but not limited to;
- Access Taster Days
- Sports Days and Events
- Student Shadowing Programme
- Portfolio Preparation Programmes
- Easter Revision Programmes
- Special Interest Programmes
- Summer Activity Camps
- Open Days
- Information Evenings
- School Visits
- Participation in College Awareness Week
- Parental talks and tours

3.2.8 Post –Entry Support
To meet the needs of diverse learners of the University, a wide range of post-entry supports may be provided, including but not limited to;
- Mature student inductions inclusive of ICT, literacy, writing skills classes along with an introduction to effective use of library resources
- Student Services Induction for all new students
- PAL Support
- Parent and guardian introductory talks and tours
- CAP financial support,
- SAF financial support
- Academic and learning support for students with disabilities
- Peer Mentoring
- Career development support
- Medical services
- Counselling services
- Lifelong learning – flexible progression routes; short programmes; collaborative / industry based programmes; Recognition of Prior Learning

4. SETU Carlow Policies underpinning this statement
The following policies and procedures support access, participation, progression and successful learner outcomes at SETU Carlow;

- Learner Disability and Learning Support for SETU Carlow
- Reasonable Accommodation Policy
- Admission Policy
- Carlow Access Programme Procedure
- Policy and Procedure for Recognition of Prior Learning Policy
- Policy and Procedure for Teaching and Learning

All staff members will be made aware of the University's Access Policy and its commitment

to facilitating compliance with this policy.