

Supporting the Civic Engagement of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities through access to Inclusive 3rd Level Education



Global PhD & Researchers Colloquium on Disability
Law and Policy, 26-27 April 2010

Background (1)

- In October 2008 UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth and Civic Engagement established at NUI, Galway
- First UNESCO Chair to be awarded in the Republic of Ireland - housed in the Child and Family Research Centre` – Chair holder: Professor Pat Dolan
- Objective of improving and enhancing the lives of children, youth and their families

Background (2)

- National Federation of Voluntary Bodies - a national umbrella organisation for 62 voluntary/non-statutory agencies who provide direct services to 22,000 persons with intellectual disability and their families in Ireland
- Synergy between objectives of UNESCO Chair and National Federation
- Partnership agreed between UNESCO Chair and National Federation in January 2010

Target 6: Strategic Goal 2: UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth and Civic Engagement, Strategic Plan 2010 - 2013

One of the elements of the partnership:

“In collaboration with CKI (Community Knowledge Initiative) and the National Federation of Voluntary Bodies, establish a programme to include people with intellectual disability in third level education in NUI Galway, guided by UNESCO’s guidelines on inclusive education.”

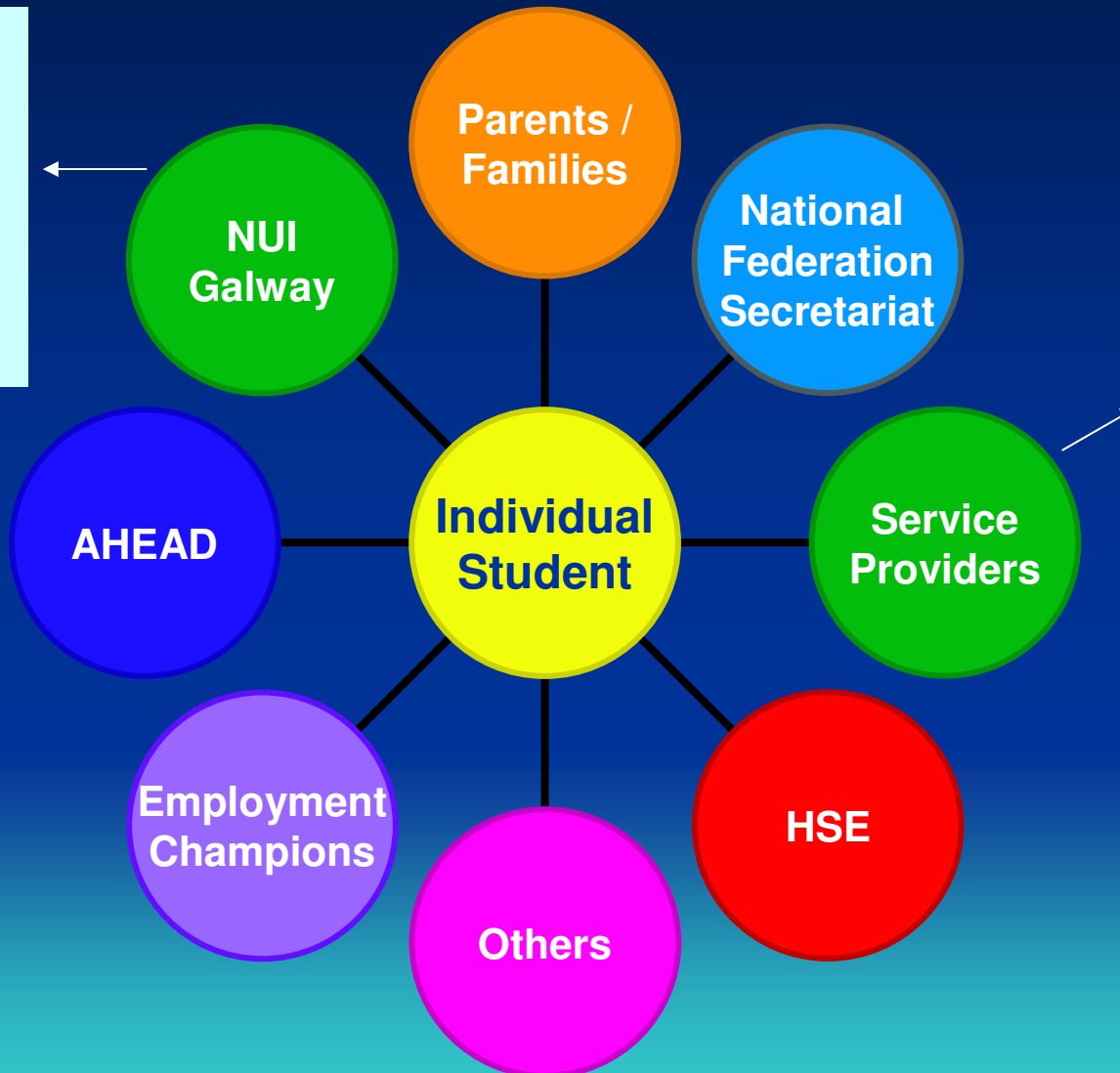
Pilot Project to Include Persons with Intellectual Disabilities in Third Level Education

- Aim of this project is to support the **civic engagement** of persons with intellectual disabilities through access to **inclusive 3rd level education** at NUI Galway
- The project will support persons with intellectual disabilities to achieve the **full college experience** - involvement in the academic, social and cultural life of the college
- Project Steering Group has been set up which includes representatives of all stakeholders

Involvement of all Partners

NUI Galway

- UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth and Civic Engagement
- Community Knowledge Initiative
- Child and Family Research Centre
- Centre for Disability Law and Policy
- Law Department
- Disability Support Service
- Access Office
- Learning Support Tutors
- Others



- Ability West
- Brothers of Charity Clare
- Brothers of Charity Galway
- Brothers of Charity Roscommon
- Western Care
- SOS Kilkenny

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006

In particular Article 24:

“State Parties recognise the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and life long learning directed to:

- a) The full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity;
- b) The development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential;
- c) Enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society.”

“5. States Parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others”

National & International Initiatives

- **Collaborations** with other national and international higher education institutions will be developed
- Learning will be gathered from initiatives underway in 3rd level institutions in Ireland e.g.
 - Trinity College Certificate in Contemporary Living (now being rolled out in a number of other 3rd level institutions);
 - Institutes of Technology e.g. Waterford IT, Limerick IT, Carlow IT, Dundalk IT, Blanchardstown IT etc.

International

- Canada, US, UK, Finland

National & International Research – key elements

- Inclusive Education as a pathway for an inclusive life
- Draw on **existing college resources and curricula** rather than developing a new or separate programme
- **Active Partnership** with all stakeholders (including **persons with intellectual disabilities and parents and families**)
- College experience **individualised** for each student (this is key) e.g.
 - Supports
 - Learning methods
 - Assessment methods
 - Educational plan
 - Flexible timeframe etc.

National & International Research – key elements

- **Work placement (meaningful work)** a vital element of college experience
- Utilising **Natural Supports** e.g. peer mentoring, contributes to overall success
- **College facilitator** working with the faculty to support each person and give guidance and mentorship
- **Students awarded portfolio / qualification** according to individual strengths and learning needs and within flexible timeframe

Methodology

hearing voices of potential students and
parents / families



Focus Groups

Persons with Intellectual Disabilities

- 10 focus groups completed with 64 persons with intellectual disabilities
- Easy to read information circulated in advance
- Purpose of focus group was to clarify each persons understanding of college, why they would or would not like to go to college, what they would like to study, and the benefits and challenges involved
- Participants came from a variety of settings e.g., members of an advocacy group; rehabilitative training; sheltered occupational services; mainstream VEC education; mainstream second level education; special schools; plc courses

Focus Group Findings (1)

- The majority of participants understood what college is all about and were very clear about their reasons for wanting to, or not wanting to, go to college

“Have more control over your own life”

“See all the different things that are out there that I can do more choice”

“When given the opportunity people can change things”

“In second level teachers told me I wasn't good enough and I believed them. Now I want to go, to be the first person in my family to go”

“You can be whatever you want if you go to college”

Focus Group Findings (2)

- Participants wanted to have the full college experience – involvement in the academic, social and cultural activities of the college
- The majority of participants want to be in classes with all the other students in the college

Focus Group Findings (3)

- Participants expressed an interest in learning something new and were prepared to face new challenges.

“Stretch your mind”

“Practical learning and other learning to broaden your horizons”

- Participants expressed great interest in a campus field trip to give them a clearer picture of what college is like.

Focus Group Findings (4)

- Participants were very aware of the challenges involved and the supports needed to overcome these e.g. funding, accommodation, transport, personal and family worries, exams and studying.

“Could need support on the bus”

“My parents might be worried about me – I’d need a mobile phone”

“Afraid of failing exams”

“Needs to be at right level for each person’s ability - so build on learning - as you learn more”

Focus Groups – Parents / Families (1)

- 6 focus groups completed with 32 parents/family members
- All unanimous that this was a necessary development
- For many parents it was their dream for their family member to go to college. *“We tend to underestimate our children and what they can achieve”.*
- Not alone would the educational benefits be of importance for their family member, but also personal development, the social aspects of being in College and the possibility of enhancing their lives.

Focus Groups – Parents / Families (2)

- Parents recognise that participating in mainstream subjects could pose challenges for their family members; however, with adequate supports and adaptations to subject material, individuals would benefit greatly from the opportunity of attending and participating in third level education.
- Challenges exist, but parents felt that these challenges could and should be met.

Findings from Focus Groups

- Provide a very **rich source** of material
- Knowledge gained from these focus groups will be crucial to the **rollout of a pilot** that meets the needs of students with intellectual disabilities
- Findings from focus groups will inform **teaching methods and adapting existing curricula**
- Ongoing **engagement with persons with intellectual disabilities and families** throughout the life of the project
- The **involvement and commitment** of all stakeholders is crucial to the success of the pilot

Myriad of benefits, including ...

- **Independent Living:** The skills and knowledge gained by the students with intellectual disabilities can be translated into living independently in their own community
- **Social Roles:** Supports persons with intellectual disabilities to connect with their own community and have positive valued social roles within their community.
- **Employment Opportunities:** Provides enhanced employment opportunities for persons with intellectual disabilities including opportunities for employment in non-traditional roles
- **Awareness, Assumptions and Expectations:** Raising awareness of intellectual disability issues in communities and challenging assumptions and expectations around disability. “Peers and classmates learn how the campus community serves as a microcosm for the community at large, with individuals with disabilities being woven into the fabric of our college culture” (Grigal & Hart, 2010)

Focus Group Facilitators

- Carmel Devaney, Lorraine McIlrath: NUI Galway
- Peggy Ryan: Parent & Family Representative
- Breda Casey, Edel Tierney, Orla Kelly, Alison Harnett: National Federation of Voluntary Bodies

Thank you