

Supporting the Civic Engagement of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities in Ireland



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF VOLUNTARY BODIES
Providing Services to People with Intellectual Disability

National Federation of Voluntary Bodies General Assembly
24 March 2010

Background – UNESCO Chair

- 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 (CFRC) at the School of Political Science and Sociology.
- Professor Pat Dolan, Director and Cofounder of the CFRC, appointed as Chair-holder



Synergy

- National Federation Research Strategy 2008-2013 developed
- Clear synergy between **UNESCO Chair's Strategic Plan 2010-2013** and the **National Federation Research Strategy**
- Similar values and principles in supporting children, youth and families
- Support development of evidence base for influencing positive change in people's lives
- MoU signed – 1st January 2010 for 3 years

Aim and Objectives of the Collaboration

The overarching aim of the collaboration is to support the civic engagement of persons with intellectual disabilities in Ireland.

Objectives of the collaboration include:

- Continuing to develop research proposals to support the development of an evidence base which will have the potential to influence positive change in the lives of persons with intellectual disabilities and their families
- Identifying a framework for positive civic engagement for persons with intellectual disabilities
- Supporting the research and teaching strategies of the UNESCO Chair and the National Federation of Voluntary Bodies

Aim and Objectives (2)

- Sharing of **best practice** information
- Supporting the **dissemination of joint research findings**, through high quality publications, websites and other dissemination activities
- Supporting the **inclusion of intellectual disability issues** in research studies
- Development of **joint funding applications** for future collaborations
- Providing **research opportunities** associated with Doctoral and Masters programmes
- Fostering **national and international cooperation and collaboration**



Monitoring & Reporting of MoU

- A **twice-yearly report** on the collaboration will be prepared for submission to the Board of Directors of the National Federation and to the UNESCO Chair.
- All **collaborative work** carried out by both parties will be **acknowledged** accordingly in all documents and publications.



2 projects currently underway

- 1. Children with an Intellectual Disability and their Social Support Networks**
- 2. Pilot Project to Include People with Intellectual Disabilities in Third Level Education at NUI Galway**



1. Children with an Intellectual Disability and their Social Support Networks

Michael Browne, PhD student in NUIG, undertaking research and developing an evidence-based policy framework.

National Federation will provide:

- Access to significant expertise through engagement with member organisations, persons with intellectual disabilities and families, and involvement in research.
- Access to a wide range of contacts in the areas of policy development and service delivery to persons with intellectual disabilities
- Resource material and links relevant to the proposed study on an ongoing basis.



2. Pilot Project to Include People with Intellectual Disabilities in Third Level Education at NUI Galway

- The aim of this project is to support civic engagement of persons with intellectual disabilities through access to 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



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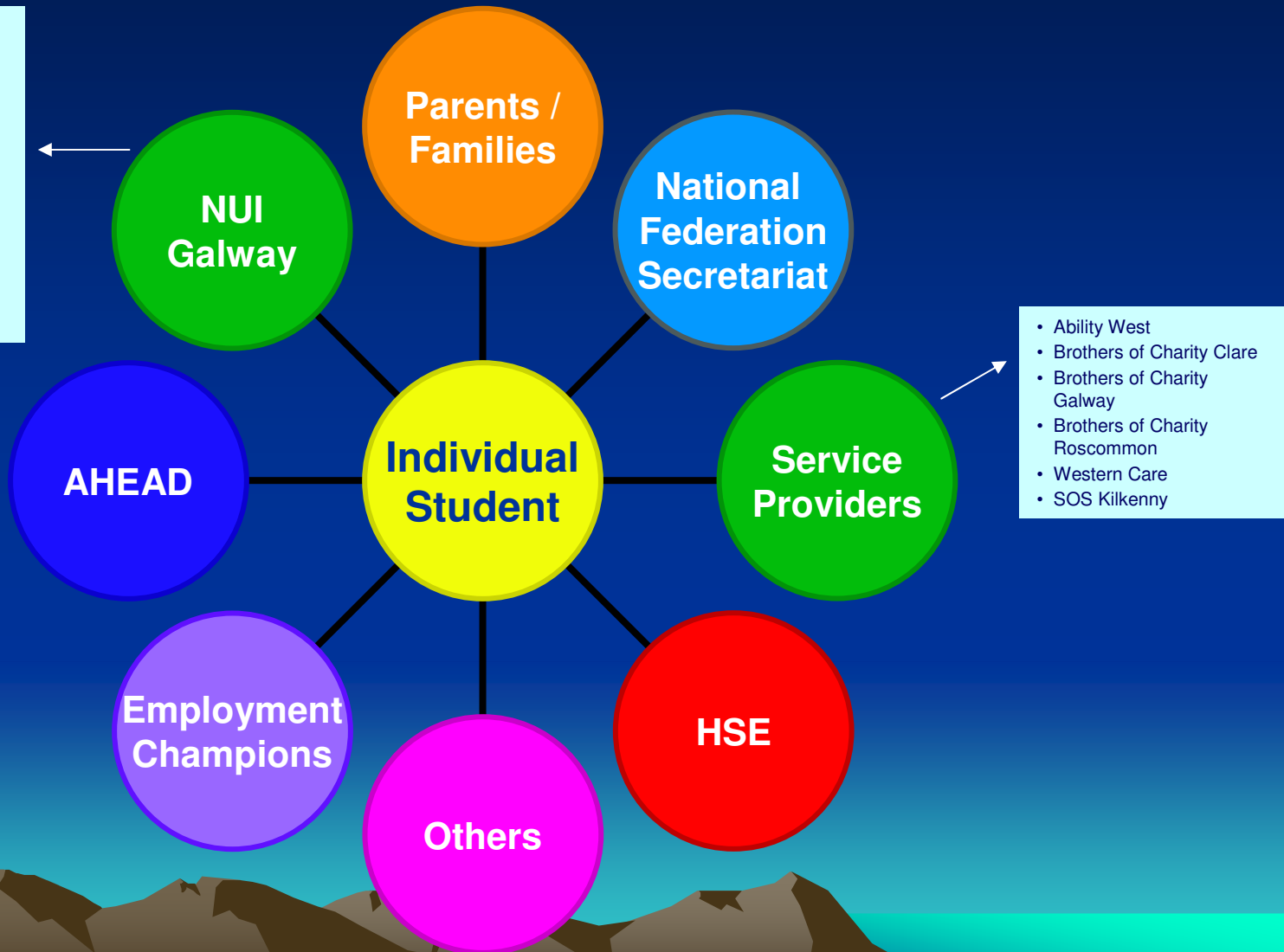
Inclusive Education Principles

- Underpinned by **UNESCO's guidelines on inclusive education**
- Aligned with the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** 2006, Article 24, 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”
- And consistent with the National Federation principles and values of inclusive education as set out in **EASPD's Manifesto on Inclusive Education (2009)**

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



Commitment

- The **involvement** and **commitment** of all stakeholders is crucial to the success of the pilot
- The commitment of National Federation member organisations demonstrated to date by **involvement in pilot project steering group** and **actively supporting focus groups** for persons with intellectual disabilities and focus groups for parents and families



National & International Initiatives

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

International

- Canada, US, UK, Finland

What is unique about this initiative?

Inclusive 3rd level education as a pathway for life

- Drawing on **existing college resources and curricula** rather than developing a new or separate programme
- **Active Partnership** with all stakeholders
- College experience **individualised** for each student (this is key) e.g.
 - Supports
 - Learning methods
 - Assessment methods
 - Academic plan
 - Flexible timeframe etc.

What is unique about this initiative? (2)

- **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 / certificate / degree** according to individual strengths and learning needs and within flexible timeframe



Methodology

**hearing voices of prospective students
and parents / families**



Focus Groups

- 10 focus groups completed (64 persons with intellectual disabilities from National Federation services in the West of Ireland)
- 6 focus groups completed with parents/families
- 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

Focus Group Facilitators

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



Capacity for Pilot

- Funding has been secured by NUIG for a part-time project co-ordinator (3 days per week) for two years for the pilot
- Other sources of funding will be sought to ensure the sustainability of the project following completion 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)

Thank You

