

# Further Education (FE) to Higher Education (HE) Progression Pathways

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## Abstract

The Irish Government launched the *National Access Plan (2022-2028)* on 31st August 2022 to drive equality of access to education. The aim of this initiative is to improve equity of access, participation, and success in Higher Education (HE) for disadvantaged students. This plan supersedes the previous *National Access Plan and Priorities to 2021*. The findings generated from the 2021 report indicate that although some progress has been made to support this integration from further education (FE) to HE, challenges remain with an acknowledgement that there is a need to establish transparent supporting structures for building coherent pathways from FE to HE. While previous studies (UNESCO, 2016 & 2018) argue that few graduates of initial vocational training aspired to higher levels of education, nevertheless higher-level qualifications are now a common expectation among people and in industry, reflecting increased ambition, labour market demand for higher-level skills, and the need to continually upskill and/or reskill. The objective of this empirical investigation is to bridge this gap and identify the perceived barriers preventing students of FE from progressing to HE in the Republic of Ireland. Like others who have investigated this topic this investigation adopted an interpretivist approach to enquiry and a case study methodological approach (e.g., Catterall et al., 2014; Hoelscher et al., 2008; Barber and Netherton, 2018). Primary data was generated from in depth focus groups and qualitative surveys (Braun and Clarke, 2021). Data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps to thematic analysis. The preliminary findings of the first phase of this investigation illustrate that student transition from FE to HE is multidimensional. Findings have supported the development of a draft Transitions Framework, which is currently being piloted with case study students.

**Keywords:** Access, Barriers, Transition, Equity, Framework