



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHÉ
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY

Widening Participation Strategy

2025 - 2028



University
of Galway.ie



Foreword



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Interim President, University of Galway



At University of Galway, we are committed to widening access and participation for students from underrepresented groups in society. This strategy, our first Widening Participation Strategy, formalises our commitment and lays out our strategic objectives in this area for the next three years, 2025-2028.

Many people continue to encounter barriers in progressing to and meaningfully participating in higher education. At University of Galway, we are committed to removing barriers to equality and diversity in our University, recognising that the diversity we find in our society ought to be reflected in our student body.

We have achieved so much in the area of widening participation in recent years. This includes increasing the number of underrepresented students at full-time undergraduate level from 19% to 24%, as well as the many successful projects being delivered through the HEA's Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) funds. In 2024, we also celebrated the significant milestone of 25 years of the delivery of our Access Programmes for students from underrepresented groups. All of these important initiatives and their impact are now captured on an annual basis in our Widening Participation Committee Report.

With the publication of our Widening Participation Strategy we are articulating the evolving and progressive widening participation agenda in University, and setting out our road map for the next 3 years. By continuing to improve access and participation for the most underrepresented in society, we are delivering on our core values, as outlined in our *University Strategic Plan 2025-30, Of Galway, For the World*, of ensuring we are an institution that is respectful and open to the diversity of talents in our community and supportive of an environment where students feel they can belong. The goals in our Widening Participation Strategy will support the achievement of wider strategic priorities in our University Strategic Plan and enable our university community to deliver positive change for all our students.

I would like to thank the members of the University's Widening Participation Committee and colleagues in the Access Centre who were key to the initial drafting of this strategy and ensuring widespread consultation in the strategy development process. I wish to also express my sincere thanks to all the schools, community groups, statutory bodies and other external stakeholders who contributed to this consultation process.

This strategy outlines how we will continue to ensure our University student body is reflective of the diversity we find more generally in society. I look forward to this next stage in the University's widening participation mission and ensuring the University of Galway is a place where all our students can reach their full potential.

University *Widening Participation* at a Glance

24%

of students at full-time undergraduate level from underrepresented groups

2,000

Over 2,000 students registered with the Access Centre's Disability Support Service

333

DEIS New Entrants in 2024/25

119

Further Education and Training full-time undergraduate New Entrants in 2024/25

153

1916 Bursary recipients currently registered at University of Galway (276 since its inception in 2016)

709

HEAR/Access fund recipients in 2024/25

248

Primary School Students participating in the Access Centre's UNI4U in 2024/25

€833,333

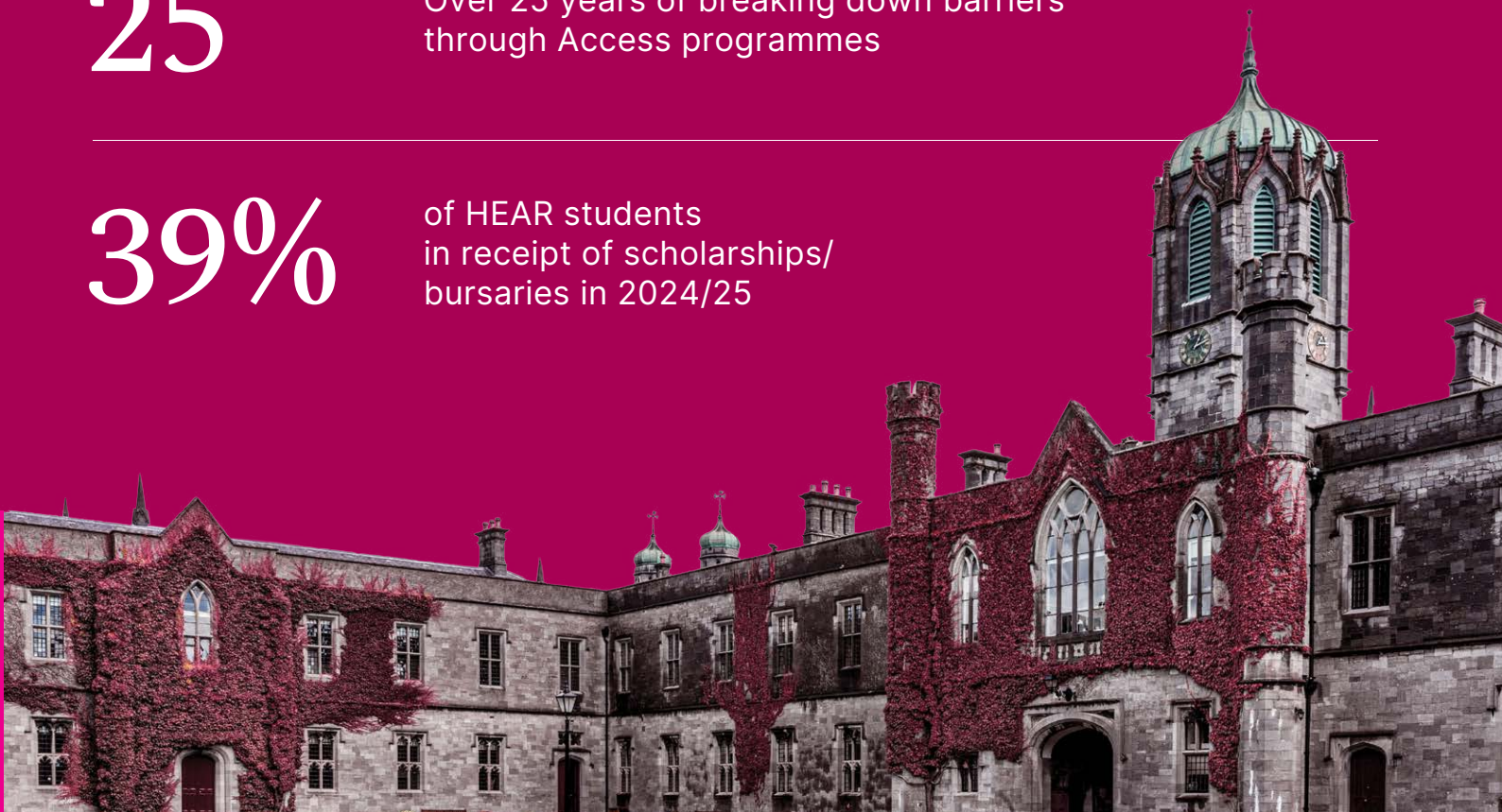
of performance Funding awarded in 2022 for improving educational opportunities for underrepresented students

25

Over 25 years of breaking down barriers through Access programmes

39%

of HEAR students in receipt of scholarships/ bursaries in 2024/25



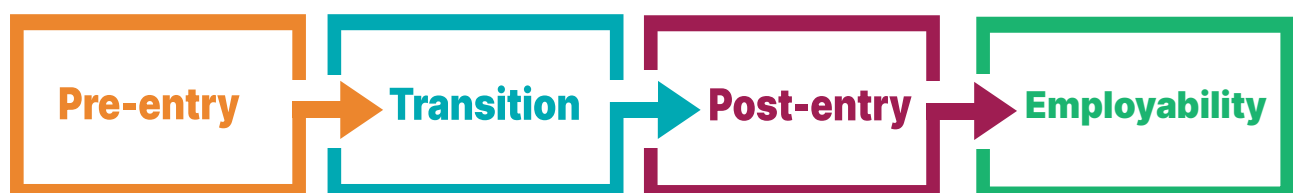


Strategic Context

University of Galway recognises that some sections of society are underrepresented in accessing and meaningfully participating in Higher Education and require additional supports to remove these barriers.

Widening participation refers to a set of policies and activities which aim to create a more inclusive environment for students who are underrepresented in higher education. These activities cover the full-duration of the student lifecycle: pre-entry, transition, post-entry and employability (see figure 1).

Figure 1: The Student Lifecycle



In recent years, a number of important organisational, strategic and legislative steps have been taken in advancing Widening Participation at University of Galway. In 2018, the University's Widening Participation Committee (WPC) was established. The WPC is a sub-committee of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Campus Committee (EDICC). It was established to support and monitor the University's strategic plans on widening access and participation

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Organogram

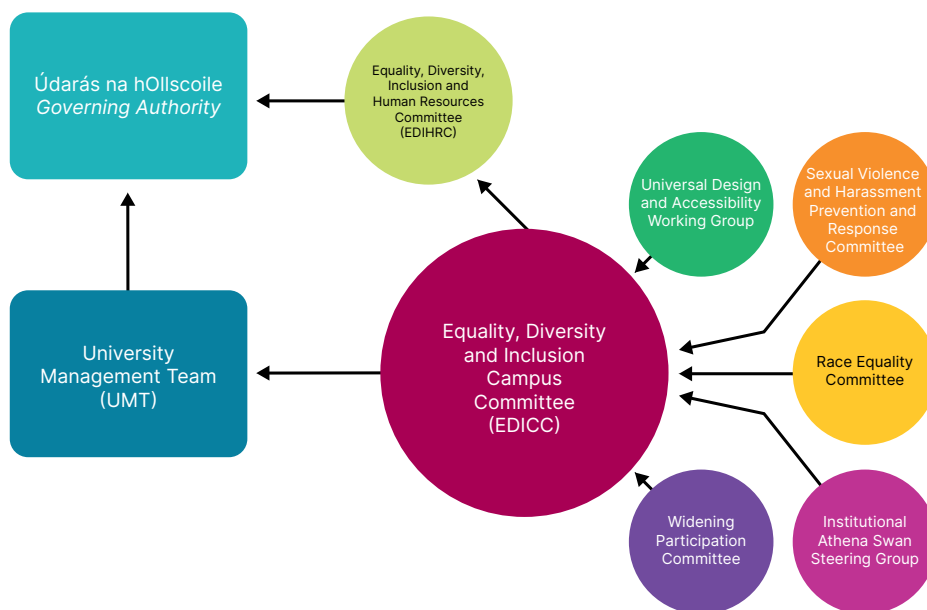


Figure 2: Widening Participation Committee Governance Structure

In 2022, the HEA launched the fourth iteration of its National Access Plan (NAP) for Higher Education. *The National Access Plan: A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-2028* sets the overarching objectives, priority groups, goals, actions and KPI's for the sector in relation to widening access and participation. New to this particular iteration of the plan is the requirement that HEI's must report on an annual basis with regards to the extent they are reaching the strategic targets outlined in NAP.

In November 2022, Minister for Further and Higher Education Simon Harris announced the commencement of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) Act 2022. Part 5 of the Act titled 'Access, participation and lifelong learning' contains the statutory requirement that Higher Education Institutes (HEI's) must develop 'draft strategic action plan[s] ... providing for equity of access to, and participation and the promotion of success in, higher education' (HEA, 2022b, p. 45). This, significant legislative change, ensures that individual HEI's must also provide their own roadmap in terms of how they plan to achieve equality of opportunity for underrepresented students in HE.

This strategy, our first Widening Participation Strategy, acknowledges that equality of educational opportunity is central to the pursuit of respect, openness, sustainability, excellence and belonging which are core values of our university. It will work alongside our Student Success Strategy (forthcoming) which will also provide the background conditions for students to succeed in higher education.

The goals in this strategy will ensure that University of Galway continues to be at forefront in responding to the underrepresentation of certain social groups in Higher Education. It will formalise the University's approach, at a strategic level, to achieve our mission of ensuring that the student body accessing and participating in higher education reflects the diversity we find more broadly throughout the population.



Alignment with *University Strategy*

The Widening Participation Strategy is closely aligned with the University's Strategic Plan 2025-30, *Of Galway, For the World*, which is built on a foundation of core values. These are:

Excellence:

The University is dedicated to supporting excellence in teaching, research, and innovation, empowering our people with the skills and knowledge to reach their potential and drive positive societal, cultural and economic change.

Respect:

The University is committed to ensuring a culture of respect, equality, trust and empathy, and supporting the wellbeing and equitable treatment of students and staff.

Openness:

The University is committed to fostering openness, diversity, and inclusion, while engaging with local and global communities to drive positive change and make education and research accessible.

Sustainability:

The University aims to lead the transition to a sustainable future by embedding sustainability into its teaching, research, operations, and partnerships, fostering the next generation of leaders and innovators to tackle global challenges.

Belonging:

The University strives to create an environment where students, staff and alumni feel welcomed, supported, connected and valued as an integral part of a community of learning that fosters academic engagement, professional development and personal growth, health and wellbeing.

A Key Enabler of the three Strategic Priorities (Distinctive research Impact; Education for the Future; Effective and Sustainable Organisation) in our new Strategic Plan 2025-30 makes specific reference to: enabl[ing] and support[ing] all students and staff to reach their full potential in an engaging, accessible and inclusive learning environment by continuing to improve access and participation for underrepresented priority groups, including students with disabilities, through our pioneering work on widening participation in higher education (2025, p. 28).



Widening *Participation Goals*

This strategy outlines how we will continue to ensure our university student body is reflective of the diversity we find more generally in society.

The following goals will help us achieve this objective:



Goal 1:

To increase access and participation in higher education for people from underrepresented socio-economic groups, and minority status groups.



Goal 2:

To engage with schools, Further Education and Training providers, community groups, employers and the wider community to foster sustained change in beliefs and attitudes about higher education.



Goal 3:

To develop collaborative strategic partnerships internally within the university to promote the widening participation agenda.



Goal 4:

To collect and disseminate research on widening participation activities delivered throughout the University.

GOAL ONE



To increase access and participation in higher education for people from underrepresented socio-economic groups, and minority status groups.



- 1.1** Expand the provision of the Diploma in Foundation Studies (Access) programmes in our region with underrepresented groups identified in NAP 2022-28

- 1.2** Develop and expand the Further Education and Training entry pathway across full-time Undergraduate programmes

- 1.3** Increase the number of Undergraduate places ring-fenced for underrepresented students

- 1.4** Continue to develop and embed activities under HEA PATH funding targeted at underrepresented students including students with intellectual disabilities

- 1.5** Expand the existing provision of financial supports for underrepresented new entrants through bursaries, scholarships and additional funding streams

- 1.6** Provide outreach support and Education Transition Programme to priority underrepresented groups identified in NAP 2022-28 in applying to Undergraduate degree programmes at University of Galway

- 1.7** Increase 1st year progression rates for student with disabilities, Irish traveller and Socio-economic disadvantaged students at full-time Undergraduate level

- 1.8** Enhance peer support for widening participation students through peer-to-peer mentoring projects

- 1.9** Engage with industry and organisations to identify workforce development needs and provide progression pathways for learners from underrepresented groups to continue in lifelong learning

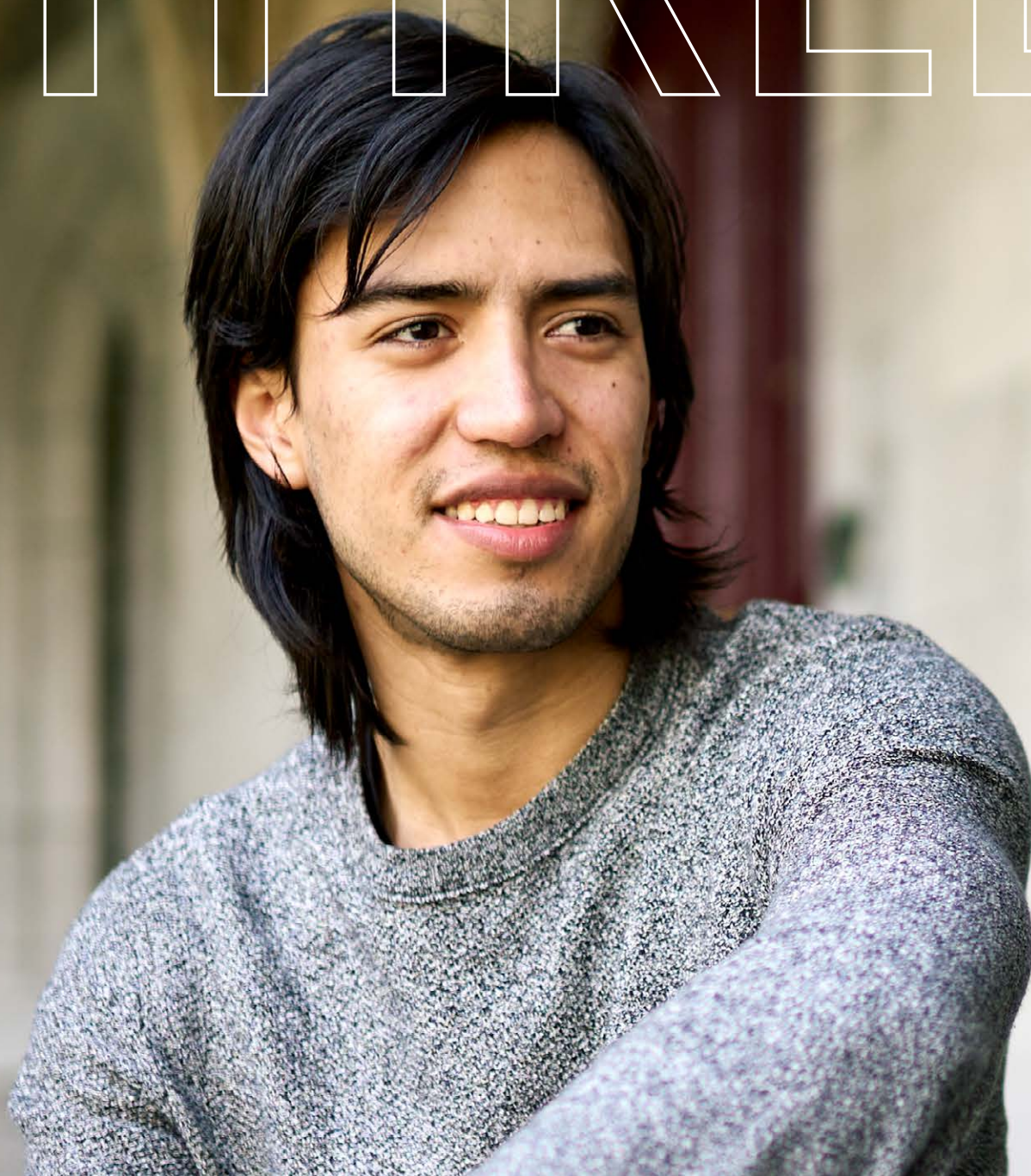
GOAL TWO



To engage with schools, Further Education and Training providers, community groups, employers and the wider community to foster sustained change in beliefs and attitudes about higher education.

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- 2.1** Expand the existing provision of primary and secondary schools outreach work targeted at underrepresented students through schools outreach activities
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- 2.2** Continue to develop strategic partnerships with the Further Education and Training Sector through the further education to higher education committee to increase the number of students progressing from Further Education and Training to HE
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- 2.3** Develop placement, mentoring opportunities and course information sessions with employers and employers groups for underrepresented students
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- 2.4** Further develop structured links with voluntary and community groups in the Border Midlands and Western (BMW) region responsible for supporting underrepresented groups identified in NAP 2022-28
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- 2.5** Further develop structured links with statutory bodies responsible for supporting underrepresented groups identified in NAP 2022-28
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- 2.6** Provide opportunities for Alumni from underrepresented groups to reconnect with the University through mentoring opportunities
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- 2.7** Continue to develop strategic initiatives with other HEI's to support underrepresented students
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- 2.8** Continue to develop strategic opportunities with Enterprise and Community Organisations to increase the number of employees engaging in lifelong learning at all levels of the NFQ

GOAL THREE



To develop collaborative strategic partnerships internally within the university to promote the widening participation agenda.



3.1 Establish School level widening participation representatives/champions in each College

3.2 Ensure that alternative entry pathways are a key part of outreach and recruitment activities

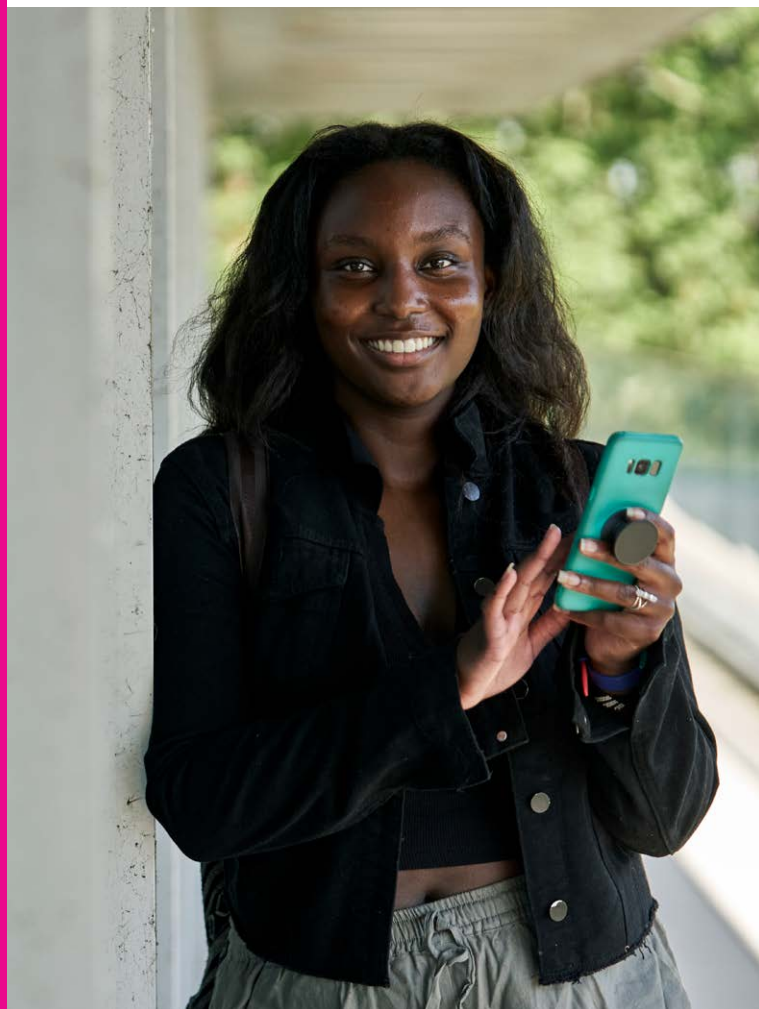
3.3 Ensure that supports for underrepresented students are a key part of main Orientation and on boarding activities for students

3.4 Continue to develop staff training opportunities on how to support underrepresented students

3.5 Promote and develop Erasmus+ optional opportunities for students from underrepresented groups

3.6 Develop strategic partnerships through the HEA's PATH funds to encourage progression to HE for students from underrepresented groups

GOAL FOUR



To collect and disseminate research on widening participation activities delivered throughout the University.



4.1 Produce an annual Widening Participation Report outlining widening participation activities in the University

4.2 Gather additional qualitative data on the lived experience of underrepresented students in University of Galway

4.3 Collect data on progression to employment and postgraduate studies by students from Underrepresented groups.

4.4 Collect data on underrepresented students across fields of study using ISCED codes

4.5 Digital resource for staff created outlining annual quantitative data



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Special thanks to Professor Chaosheng Zhang (Geography) for sharing his photography of the campus.

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