

## EQUITY OF ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION POLICY

<b>Date approved:</b>	11/04/2025	<b>Date policy will take effect:</b>	11/04/2025	<b>Date of Next Review:</b>	11/04/2028
<b>Approving Authority:</b>	Academic Council				
<b>Responsibility:</b>	Vice President for Academic Affairs & Registrar				
<b>Consultation undertaken:</b>	DkIT Regional Access Forum				
<b>Supporting documents, procedures &amp; forms of this policy:</b>					
<b>Reference(s)</b>					
<b>Audience:</b>	Public – accessible to anyone				

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## 1 Version Control and Change History

Version Control	Date Effective	Approved By	Amendment(s)
3	11/04/2025	Academic Council (Meeting No. 198) (AC:DOC:198:05:01)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This policy replaces the Equal Access and Participation Policy 2000 and the Statement of Access Policy 2015.</li></ul>

## 2 Purpose of Policy

DkIT is committed to the achievement of equity of access and participation. DkIT plays a pivotal role in the educational, economic, social and cultural evolution of the region and acknowledges that delivering on access objectives is a key means of fulfilling this role.

The Institute will work closely with its student body in fostering a sense of belonging and inclusivity by creating a campus culture that celebrates diversity, encourages collaboration and ensures every student feels valued, connected and a vital part of our community.

This policy is underpinned by the Institute's Strategic Plan 2024-2028, the National Access Plan 2022-2028 and the Government of Ireland Traveller and Roma Education Strategy 2024-2030. This policy aligns with other DkIT policies that encapsulate similar and complementary aims and objectives, *inter alia*, the Student Experience and Success Strategy and the DkIT Admissions Policy.

This policy will assist DkIT in its efforts to meet, and where possible, exceed the targets set in the National Access Plan 2022-2028.

The policy will also assist DkIT in meeting its commitments under Strategic Pillar 3 Widening Access and Participation of the Institute's Strategic Plan 2022-2028. DkIT will prioritise its strategic focus on increasing its access and participation rates. This requires a prioritised focus on increasing flexible and lifelong learning provision. This reflects the strategic intent of the Institute to provide programmes relevant to the needs and abilities of learners and to meet the needs of employers in the region. To support this strategic goal, the Institute will develop and further enhance access and progression routes for diverse learner cohorts.

Underpinning this Policy are the six student-centred goals identified in the National Access Plan 2022-2028:

- Inclusivity
- Flexibility
- Clarity
- Coherence
- Sustainability
- Using an evidence-driven approach

DkIT operates in accordance with the goals in order that the student body is enabled and empowered to reach their full potential. The Institute recognises that this is achieved through the development of systems and of a culture on campus that is supportive of these aims.

## 3 Application & Scope

DkIT recognises that equity of access and participation is a key value and goal of the Institute and as such, is within the remit of all DkIT departments and services. Equity of access and participation must be delivered at all stages of the student journey from pre-entry to graduation. This policy applies to prospective students, applicants, current students, staff, external partnerships, external contractors, the wider community, state agencies, other formal and non-formal educational partners and NGOs.

The access policy is particularly concerned with students from groups and communities that are under-represented at third level. DkIT will concentrate its equity of access and progression actions on the target groups identified and prioritised in the National Access Plan currently in operation. In line with the National Access Plan 2022-2028, these target groups are broadly understood to encompass: students who are socially-economically disadvantaged,

students who are members of the Traveller and Roma communities, and students with disabilities (including intellectual disabilities).

More specifically, the following groups will be the focus of equity of access and progression actions:

- Students from low-income families and/or who are long-term social welfare dependent
- Students from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas
- Students with a disability
- Students who are mature and have never previously accessed higher education,
- Students who are mature and who previously attended higher education but did not complete a course (that is, 'second-chance' mature students)
- Students who are lone parents or teen parents
- Students who are migrants or refugees or who have experience of the international protection process, or students from ethnic minorities
- Students who have experience of the care system
- Students who are survivors of domestic violence
- Students who are carers
- Students who have experienced homelessness
- Students who have experience of the criminal justice system

## **4 Policy**

### **4.1 Policy Statement**

DkIT is committed to advancing equity of access and participation across all its programmes of study, actions and initiatives. The Institute recognises its responsibility to foster social inclusion and to create a third level environment in which the student body is representative of the diversity in wider society. In line with this commitment, DkIT will be guided by national policy, in particular working with target groups identified by the HEA in its National Access Plan and also by the Institute's Strategic Plan of which Access is a key pillar.

Our Mission is to provide provides quality, accessible and inclusive student-centred practice-based higher education and apprenticeship provision to meet the educational, social, economic and cultural development of the North-East and cross-border region and beyond.

Our Vision is to be a sustainable, accessible and impactful University campus of choice for students, employers and the community in the region and beyond. We embrace equality, diversity and inclusivity as a core value. We are committed to accessible higher education for students in all their diversity through equal access opportunities and the delivery of education and support services to support and enable students to achieve their aspirations.

### **4.2 Policy Principles**

In furthering equity of access and participation goals, DkIT commits to:

1. Increasing access rates from groups, as identified in the National Access Plan, that are under-represented in third level education
2. Facilitating access to DkIT through delivery of a wide range of programmes, alternative pathways and flexible provision

3. Operating quotas across all programmes to reserve places for students from particular target groups
4. Working with community partners, HEI partners and other stakeholders on access initiatives that encourage applications to DkIT from prospective students underrepresented groups
5. Providing student supports to increase progression rates of students from underrepresented groups to facilitate student success
6. Promoting a culture of lifelong learning where person at any point in their lives have the opportunity to engage with higher education
7. Continue the development of seamless and transparent access routes to DkIT from FET programmes and via Recognition for Prior Learning (RPL)
8. Embedding universal design and inclusive practice in all functions and services across DkIT
9. A culture of transparency in the monitoring and evaluation of progress in the levels of admission and graduation of learners from under-represented groups.

#### **4.3 Dialogue and Partnership**

DkIT is committed to building and deepening relationships with our community and regional partners and the wider community in order to further the aims of equity of access and participation. Underpinned by principles of community engagement and good practice community development, DkIT will create meaningful channels of dialogue with communities, particularly those that traditionally would not access DkIT or HE, in order to ascertain the barriers mitigating against constructive engagement with DkIT and how best to support them in removing said barriers.

### **5 Monitoring of the Equity of Access & Participation Policy**

The DkIT Regional Access Forum (established as a sub-action of the Institute's Strategic Action Plan) has a key role to play in ensuring that this Policy remains relevant by reviewing the Policy on an annual basis, by reviewing and planning actions that are informed by the National Access Plan (currently 2022-2028) and the DkIT Systems performance Framework (currently 2023-2028) and Strategic Plan (2024-2028) and by bringing the value of their varied experiences to bear on this policy.

Further, the Regional Access Forum will, at regular intervals, review membership with a view to ensuring that to the greatest extent possible target groups are represented in and engaged on the Forum.

### **6 Roles and Responsibilities**

It is recognised that high-level commitment to access through mainstream strategic priorities, resource allocation and quality assurance processes is crucial for success in this area.

The successful implementation of this policy comes within the remit of all DkIT staff, functions and departments. This remit extends to providers extending services on behalf of DkIT, the Students' Union, all applicants to DkIT, DkIT students and alumni.