

Travellers in Higher Education

Maynooth University

Seminar Report

Maynooth
University



**Maynooth
University**
National University
of Ireland Maynooth

**About the Maynooth University
Department of Applied Social Studies**

The Department of Applied Social Studies (DAPPSS) is the longest established provider of professional education and training in youth work and community work in the country.

Our mission is “to contribute to human rights, social justice and equality nationally and internationally through excellence in education for, and development of, the applied social professions, through innovative academic education and research in the social sciences and associated public contributions.

**About the Maynooth University Access Programme
(MAP)**

The Maynooth University Access Programme (MAP) encourages under-represented groups to enter third level and provides these students with support through their time at Maynooth. MAP is founded on four pillars; outreach into the community, promoting pathways into university, easing the transition for incoming students to Maynooth University and supporting our current students.

A guiding principle of our work is to provide an equitable experience for all students. We work to achieve this by identifying the obstacles and barriers for students to successfully enter, transition to and complete university. We develop supports which equip students with the skills needed for success and where possible we mainstream these supports across campus.



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Foreword



Over the past 30 years, Maynooth University has been to the forefront in building Traveller participation in third level education. During this time, 25 Travellers have graduated from Maynooth University with academic and professional qualifications.

On 15 March 2016, Maynooth University was delighted to host a consultation with over 30 stakeholders including our Traveller graduates, our graduates from the settled community who work or have worked with Travellers, and Maynooth University staff. The consultation was also attended by representatives from the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and the Department of Education and Skills (DES). The purpose of the seminar was to seek the views of these stakeholders on how best we can improve access, participation and outcomes for Travellers in higher education, and address the associated barriers, in light of commitments outlined in the HEA National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education.

The learning from the consultation is outlined in this Seminar Report. The report provides a strong and informed picture of the opportunities and barriers that face Travellers in accessing higher education as well as providing a roadmap for how we might support better access. Maynooth University are now uniquely placed to consider this report and to maximise the opportunities for Travellers to progress to higher education and to fulfil their academic potential. Our ambition is to be a role model within the higher education sector in relation to developing good practice for Traveller inclusion.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the graduates who have given their time and considered viewpoints to this process. I would also like to acknowledge the work of the Maynooth University Access Programme and the Department of Applied Social Studies for this consultation, the Seminar Report, and for the instrumental roles they will play in developing our strategy to improve Traveller access to the University.



Rose Ryan
Director of Maynooth University Access Programme



List of Abbreviations



CERD	Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CESCR	Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
Dáil	Irish Parliament
DAPPSS	Department of Applied Social Studies at Maynooth University
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institution
LGDC	Local Community Development Committee
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual and Intersex
MAP	Maynooth University Access Programme
MU	Maynooth University
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
RTÉ	Radio Telefís Éireann – National Radio and Television Broadcaster, Ireland
STEP	Survey of Traveller Education Provision in Irish Schools
UN	United Nations

Introduction



This report on a Maynooth University (MU) Consultation with Travellers and other MU graduates regarding Travellers in Higher Education is made available as part of MU's work in progress on this issue. As participants pointed out, and as statistics and Higher Education Authority (HEA) targets illustrate, considerable progress is needed at every level if Travellers are to realise full rights to a university education. We believe that this progress can best be made with the full participation and engagement of Travellers and their organisations. It also requires, at all levels of the education system, recognition of Travellers' ethnic identity and culture. These principles of participation and recognition have formed the frame for MU's work for Traveller access to education.

Travellers' identity as an ethnic group within Irish society¹ is now recognised at Government level. We welcome the Taoiseach's statement to that effect, given in the Dáil on March 1, 2017. This not only accords to Travellers the distinct but equal status that is their right, it also underpins and validates initiatives to make equality and diversity a reality in education at all levels.

MU is grateful to our partners in Traveller organisations who are and will be key for the success of our initiatives in support of Travellers' right to higher education. We are grateful also for the engagement of HEA and Department of Education and Skills (DES) colleagues, and look to their support in this crucial and timely work.

Background

Over the past 30 years, MU has led efforts to build Traveller participation in university education, in particular through programmes offered by the Department of Applied Social Studies (DAPPSS).

Over this period, 25 Travellers have graduated from MU with academic and professional qualifications at degree and postgraduate levels. In many instances this participation has been supported by Traveller rights groups with the aim of progressing Travellers into employment and building Traveller leadership and engagement in community and youth work projects and initiatives.

In further developing this commitment to supporting Travellers' access to, participation in and outcomes from third level education, MAP and the Department of Applied Social Studies hosted a seminar on 15 March 2016 with over 30 stakeholders including Traveller graduates, graduates from the settled community who work or have worked with Travellers, and MU staff. The purpose of the seminar was to seek the views of these stakeholders on how best MU can improve access, participation and outcomes for Travellers in higher education, and address the associated barriers, in light of commitments outlined in the HEA National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education.

The seminar used a participative framework of interactive dialogue and provided a unique opportunity to:

- develop a better understanding of Traveller experience of participation at MU;
- discuss barriers to Travellers' Higher Education participation;
- suggest priorities and strategies for Traveller Higher Education participation,
 - as students completing post-primary level,
 - as mature students, and
 - as students completing further education programmes.

The next stage of developing a coherent institutional programme for MU and an associated regional strategy to promote improved Traveller progression and participation in higher education will involve discussions with university colleagues and faculty, key regional and national Traveller organisations, and colleagues from other institutions in the region.

¹ See Appendix 1 for background information on Travellers in Irish society



My name is Kathleen Lawrence, I am an Irish Traveller and I am in my third and final year of a Bachelor's degree in Maynooth University. I never considered going to university. It was not something I even thought about before I started my job in Pavee Point, I never considered University as an option. I was only working in Pavee Point a couple of months when I was encouraged by colleagues to do a degree. I talked myself out of applying many times before I finally built up the courage. It was not an easy decision to make because I knew I would be putting myself into a situation that was very much out of my comfort zone. By the time I had finally made the decision to apply, Maynooth was the only place accepting late applications for a Bachelor of Arts degree. It turns out it was the best thing that could have happened.

College was definitely an adjustment and not just for me; my family found it hard at first to get used to me going to college, as it is not something that is considered the norm within my community. It took me a while to fit in to college life. I was nervous and anxious at the beginning but the supports I received in college definitely helped me to get through my first year and to build my confidence so that I could fully participate in the college experience both socially and academically. Over my three years in Maynooth University I have made friends, joined societies and improved academically and I have even applied and been accepted to the Washington Ireland Program which I am due to participate in this summer. I will have the opportunity to travel to Washington, live with a family there and get work experience in a big company or maybe even human rights or project management. Going to college has been a life changing experience, it has been hard but it has definitely been worth it.



Kathleen Lawrence,
Final Year,
Arts Degree

Traveller Education Context

The glaring and persistent inequalities in access to, participation in, and outcomes from education between Travellers and the general population have long been documented.

- 55% of Travellers leave school by the age of 15
- 90% of Travellers have finished education by the age of 17
- In 2011 1% of the Traveller population (115 Travellers) had attained a third level qualification².

Lack of recognition of Traveller culture in education curricula; lack of understanding of Travellers lives and experiences within the school environment; experiences of discrimination and isolation of Traveller children in schools; and severe cuts in Traveller education supports, are all cited by Traveller organisations as some of the key barriers to the advancement of Travellers in the education system.

According to Pavee Point:

Racism and discrimination towards Travellers in wider society is reflected within the education system and continues to present a significant barrier for Traveller students. Identity based bullying by other students poses a significant problem. The 2012 State of the Nation's Children report found that Traveller children, immigrant children and children with a disability are more likely to report being bullied at school.³

This position has been reiterated by Council of Europe and United Nations (UN) Bodies examining Ireland's implementation of our human rights obligations.

In 2011 the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) stated in relation to Ireland:

While noting the efforts made so far by the State party to understand the issues affecting Travellers through the Survey of Traveller Education Provision in Irish Schools (STEP) and the All-Ireland Traveller Health Study, the Committee regrets that efforts made to improve the welfare of Travellers have not substantially improved their situation. The Committee notes with regret the poor outcomes in the fields of health, education, housing, employment for Travellers as compared to the general population" and recommended that "the Irish Government should "ensure that concrete measures are undertaken to improve the livelihoods of the Traveller community by focusing on improving students' enrolment and retention in schools, employment, access to healthcare, housing and transient sites."⁴



² Census 2011

³ Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre (2014). Submission regarding issues in relation to the third periodic report of Ireland to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR). 54 Pre-Sessional Working Group (01 Dec 2014 - 05 Dec 2014)

⁴ CERD (2011). Concluding observations of the CERD: Ireland (paragraph 13)



In 2015 the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) stated:

The Committee is concerned at the prevalence of Traveller children and children with disabilities in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools action plan and their disproportionately low level of entry to higher education. It is also concerned at the high rate of Traveller children who leave school before the age of 15. ⁵

This slow progress in realising full access, participation, and outcomes for Travellers at all levels of education, compromises their potential across the personal, social, political, economic, and professional domains of life—their capacity to participate and contribute as citizens.



⁵ CESCR (2015). Concluding observations on the third periodic report of Ireland (paragraph 32).

Education was important in my family and my brother had graduated from Maynooth University before me. I knew about the programme and knew that Travellers were welcome there, but when I got there it was still a big challenge. There were four other Travellers in my group and we supported each other.

In fact the whole class of mostly mature students, all challenged by being back in education which had not been a great experience for many, supported each other and the staff of the Department of Applied Social Studies gave their time generously. My experience in Maynooth University, and since, underlines for me the value of third level education and how important it can be for Traveller women in particular. Since graduation, I have worked for Travellers rights, especially the rights of Traveller women now as Coordinator of the National Traveller Women's Forum.



Maria Joyce,
Coordinator,
National Traveller
Women's Forum

Travellers and Third Level Education



The overall vision for the HEA National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education is to ensure that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population. The National Access Plan sets out the goals, objectives and actions that are directed at delivering this vision over the period 2015–2019.

Notwithstanding the success of MU initiatives to date, there is clearly considerable and urgent work to be done to achieve Traveller equality at third level. The HEA⁶ recognises the disparities that exist:

In the National Access Plan, the HEA notes that in December 2015, Travellers comprised an estimated 0.1% of that year's new entrants, and that there was a total of 35 Travellers enrolled in higher education. The HEA has set a target to increase this total to 80 over the period 2015–2019. This is the first time a national target has been set for increasing Traveller participation in higher education. The HEA notes that the need for such a target was identified in consultation with Traveller representative groups and with Travellers who have succeeded in accessing further and higher education in Ireland, and that given the very small number of Traveller students accessing higher education each year, a numerical rather than a percentage target was appropriate.

While progress is being made, there is still work that needs to be done to address the under-representation of certain groups. There remain pockets of educational disadvantage throughout our society and access to higher education is not distributed equitably across different groups in the Irish population... Participation in higher education among Irish Travellers remains comparatively low.⁷



⁶ The HEA has a statutory responsibility, at central government level, for the effective governance and regulation of higher education institutions and the higher education system.

⁷ HEA – National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2020

I decided to go to college because I had the desire to push myself educationally and also I knew it was really important to the Traveller Struggle in Ireland, it was also important in opening the way for other Travellers to go to third level. Maynooth had one of the first Community and Youth Work courses and this fitted with what I wanted to do but also the Department of Applied Social Studies and the people running the course shared similar values as me regarding equality, human rights and anti-racism so this made it much easier for me to attend Maynooth.

It was very difficult at times and could be a struggle for me but I felt there was a lot of support and encouragement from both staff and my classmates, and it was very important to me to do this and still is.

It's really important that more Travellers go to third level and get the support they need to do this, so as we as a community can begin to develop academics, writers and researchers from within the Traveller community as well as tutors and lecturers in third level.



Thomas McCann,
PhD Candidate

I had lots of experience before I came to Maynooth University in 1987, but needed to understand more about the reasons why Travellers were so despised in society and where we were going in the work for equality for my community.

I was encouraged by my local Traveller group and the new thinking about Travellers' rights then being discussed. It was a major challenge to be back in a classroom, but I enjoyed my time in MU and made lifelong friends there. Since graduating, I have been actively involved at local, national and international levels working for my community and am currently manager of Meath Travellers Workshops where we have a particular focus on Traveller history, culture and heritage.



Michael McDonagh
Manager, Meath
Travellers Workshops



Summary of Seminar Presentations

Seminar participants were welcomed to the event by Rose Ryan, Director of MAP. Rose thanked those present—including graduates, students and staff—for attending, and highlighted MU's long track record in the field of supporting Traveller access. She noted the contribution of the Department of Applied Social Studies and in particular that of Anastasia Crickley in spearheading and leading this work. She wished participants a fruitful day and looked forward to working with them into the future.

Professor Rowena Pecchenino - Dean of MU Faculty of Social Sciences

Professor Pecchenino, on behalf of the Faculty of Social Sciences and on behalf of MU, sincerely thanked participants for taking the time to attend the event and share their views on how MU can progress Traveller access to third level education. The views and insights of those present as MU graduates and students, regarding possible action areas, she said, were particularly important.

Professor Pecchenino acknowledged the reality that a number of participants work daily on the issues being discussed and on their consequences, and that much remains to be done for Travellers to have full equality in Ireland. She saluted all that has been achieved and especially the contributions made by all present.

As is clear from the statistics, she noted, Traveller participation in Higher Education remains very low even by comparison with other under-represented groups—as is underlined by the HEA setting a numerical target to be achieved for Traveller access. She further noted that this target, set at 80 over the period of the plan, is not high and that while the current figure of 35 Travellers in Higher Education is a very low starting point, ambition and plans to go far beyond the figure set are required.

Professor Pecchenino commended the contribution MU has been able to make to date through the Travellers who have studied and graduated from this college since 1985, and through the contribution of other graduates whose studies at MU motivated and equipped them for their work with Travellers.

This work, she said, has supported engagement with Travellers nationally by third level Access Officers and has contributed to the naming of Travellers in HEA Access Plans.

Finally, she commended the efforts of the Department of Applied Social Studies (DAPPSS) noting that almost all of the approximately 25 MU Traveller graduates are past students of that Department, the ongoing support of MAP and Student Services, and the active engagement of library colleagues as well as the goodwill of colleagues across the faculties.

Anastasia Crickley – Former Head of MU Department of Applied Social Studies, Chairperson Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, President UN Committee for the Elimination of Racism and Discrimination

Anastasia highlighted the fact that this is a time of change and challenge for Travellers, for Irish society for Europe and globally, as minority rights are claimed but persistently denied. She noted that this is a time when minority leadership for collective progress is complex and challenging. She pointed to a clear need to respond to diversity within minorities also—recognising women's rights, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual and Intersex (LGBTI) rights and disability rights. She stressed that a coherent MU and regional approach for improved progression and participation by Travellers in higher education is required in recognition of the principle that education at all levels is a human right.⁸



⁸ Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960) reasserts the right to education established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and states (Article 1.1): *the term 'discrimination' includes any distinction, exclusion, limitation or preference which, being based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, economic condition or birth, has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing equality of treatment in education and in particular: (a) Of depriving any person or group of persons of access to education of any type or at any level. [emphasis added]*



Anastasia listed developments in supporting Travellers in MU since 1985, including a focus on mature Traveller students in community and youth work programmes, the importance of identity as a starting point for staff and students, the development of university wide initiatives (e.g.) library exhibitions, departmental initiatives including teacher education and the provision of placements and support for Traveller students. She noted that a number of initiatives were undertaken, including visits for Traveller organisations to MU, the naming of Travellers in HEA Access plans and in Access Officers’ national initiatives.

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) monitoring work, she said, is particularly conscious of the absence of progress in achieving full access to, and outcomes from, education at all levels, for Travellers and Roma. This seriously curtails their rights to full participation in society, and it frustrates any ambitions they have for full development as persons and citizens. MU and Travellers have worked together well, and should be emboldened by their success to aim for full equality in the education domain.

Anastasia highlighted the need for special measures and positive action recommended to Ireland by CERD and other UN and Council of Europe human rights bodies to address the disturbing participation differentials between Travellers and all other cohorts in third level education: she stressed that without such measures, as experience elsewhere indicates, little progress will be possible. She highlighted issues regarding age groups which should be targeted for such special measures. Noting that a growing number of Travellers are now graduating from post-primary Senior Cycle with the Leaving Certificate, she advocated that MU and other universities need to strengthen links with post primary schools to jointly attract this cohort into direct progression to third level. Anastasia also identified the need to attract Travellers in the 18–22 year age bracket who have left the school system. Universities, in liaison with Traveller organisations and other education provision, need to promote access through other routes.

Finally, supporting mature Travellers must also remain a key focus, as must promoting Traveller women’s inclusion across all disciplines and subjects. For many Travellers, re-entering formal education is not an option in early adult life; many who have progressed through the DAPPSS programme were in the 26–40-year age group—as their children become independent, and their time

becomes their own again. This age group has a richness of experience to bring to student life, and can be powerful role models and potential leaders within their communities.

All this when realised will bring a change in the student profile, and will involve challenging university traditions and teaching methods—but equality is, and must be regarded as an asset in the pursuit of excellence towards a just and fair society.

Anastasia also noted other challenges—in creating expectations and identifying whose role this should be, in breaking the mould, and in addressing issues relating to cultural development and the perceived threat of loss of identity. She highlighted the important role of all stakeholders in the pursuit of equality for Travellers in education.

Orla Christle - Acting Head of Access Policy HEA

Orla’s presentation focussed on the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education and its relevance to Travellers, in the light of the Plan’s vision, “To ensure that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland’s population.”

Orla outlined Government and Department of Education and Skills (DES) key policies in relation to addressing educational disadvantage including the National Strategy for Higher Education (2011); the Higher Education System Performance Framework 2014–16; the DES social inclusion policy (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS); National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and other national strategies. She described the consultation process undertaken in the development of the plan. This involved round table meetings, consultation beyond the higher education sector, the receipt of 57 written submissions and the publication in August 2014 of the consultation paper, Towards the Development of a New National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education. Orla provided data on a county by county and national basis for higher-education participation rates in the 18–20-years age cohort (with the state total being 51%) and posed questions arising from it:



- Communities with low participation: what needs to change?
- Are existing access strategies targeting groups most in need?
- What is the role of key influencers on potential students?
- How are all post-school level options supporting access?

The key Principles of the National Plan were highlighted;

- A 'whole of education approach' to social inclusion is needed
- Partnerships between key stakeholders are critical
- Consultation with students should inform policy
- Pathways from further education must be improved
- Funding needs to target improved access and completion
- There is a need for better data to inform policy and practice
- Equity of access policies should be mainstreamed in HEIs.

Orla focussed in particular on Goal 5 of the Plan - To develop regional and community partnership strategies for increasing access to higher education in order to:

- Target low participating communities through support for local pilot initiatives (regional clusters and Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs))
- Strengthen collaboration with post primary level through examining scope to develop mentoring initiatives (HEIs, clusters) and identifying, disseminating and supporting best practice.

Orla noted that this is the first time that a national target has been set for Traveller participation in HEA: there is a clear need for joined-up monitoring of progression from post-primary to third level. 280 Travellers sat the Leaving Certificate in 2014 (DES data); there were 40 entrants to higher education (HEA data).

Dialogue with Rosaleen Mc Donagh Traveller activist and PhD candidate at Northumbria University

An interactive dialogue between Rosaleen Mc Donagh and Anastasia Crickley followed the presentations. Rosaleen has a long track record in work for Traveller rights. She is an author and playwright; her work including journalistic contributions, poetry and drama; she is also an adjunct lecturer at Trinity College Dublin and a PhD candidate at Northumbria University, researching the Affirmative Model in Relation to Traveller Identity. Rosaleen has worked in Pavee Point, managing the Violence against Women programme and other Traveller women's issues for ten years.

In discussing core issues for Travellers in relation to access to, participation in and outcomes from higher education, Rosaleen noted that a significant issue is lack of targeted implementation of policies and programmes to address educational disadvantage. This, she commented, has created an enormous gap in provision and in take up.

She added that the main difficulties lie not within the Traveller community itself, but in wider society, in attitudes, perceptions, racism and prejudice. She highlighted the fact that there is a significant and widespread appetite in the Traveller community for education, training and different types of learning, evidenced by Traveller engagement in various initiatives and education programmes including community development and Traveller health programmes.

There are, Rosaleen suggested, a number of challenges at internal and external levels. Internally there is work to be done to build support among and between Travellers for those who are seeking to progress in education. Externally the huge challenge is that of racism and prejudice which must be challenged and addressed as a matter of priority. Intersectional issues of gender/ethnicity and disability must also be taken into account. Traveller graduates, she said, have a key responsibility and role to play in projecting and promoting a Traveller lens in higher education.

Travellers she added are and should be treated as subjects, as opposed to objects, in the university narrative.

Summary of Seminar Discussion



Seminar participants welcomed the MU initiative for providing an opportunity for graduates to come together to share thoughts, experiences and ideas for supporting the advancement of Travellers in higher education and promoting better outcomes for Travellers. The following sets out the key themes discussed and main issues highlighted under each theme.

Challenges for Travellers in Accessing and Participating in Higher Education

Traveller participants discussed the sense in the community that participating in higher education can be perceived as a threat to Traveller culture, and the need to address this. This can be done by working through Traveller organisations but outreach work and constant and sincere engagement from MU and other higher education institutions is very much needed:

“It is no good waiting for the masses to come – they won’t, unless there is clear support along the way”.

There is no “one size fits all” solution, given the real diversity among Travellers and in their experiences of education to date.

“A lot of Travellers have had a lot of negative experiences with education.”

“This means there is even more need for positive visibility & positive identity”.

Direct targeted work is needed with Traveller parents to build an understanding that the cost of supporting education is less than the cost of a lack of education. This work it was suggested, needs to acknowledge the often enormous fears of Traveller parents of what might happen if their children, especially their daughters, attend university. Fears can often be associated with living in settled accommodation.

The invisibility of Traveller culture in the education system was cited as a core concern. The need for Traveller culture to be visible throughout the education system was stressed. Travellers must be able to access teacher training and teaching posts themselves. However, deficits in Traveller primary education, including the fact that many Traveller children did not learn Irish, present significant barriers to Travellers in accessing teacher training and teaching posts.

“There are real challenges around feeling like an outsider or feeling like you shouldn’t be here”.

“Many Travellers have come through the education system by keeping their head down”

Traveller participants argued that while there are others within the student body who have access issues, e.g. those with learning difficulties or those from disadvantaged backgrounds, they do not seem to feel that education is out of their reach. They questioned why this is the case among Travellers, and stated that clearly additional supports need to be put in place with potential Traveller students. Most mature students for example, have come through Traveller organisations where they have had on-going support and solidarity,

“It is really important to have another Traveller there to support you – someone who knows how it feels to be in the system and come out the other side”.

“There should be some sort of support network established at the start”.

Disability and student services often may not understand the particular issues facing Traveller students.

Giving visibility to the achievements of Travellers in education was felt to be extremely important. However, the challenges associated with doing this were also noted:



Traveller participants also noted that the particular responsibilities of Traveller women in the home, in rearing children and in the community need to be recognised and accommodated:

“Speaking as a Traveller mother, the issue of childcare is huge”.

The habit of study, it was stated, has not been part of Traveller culture or of the experience of Travellers growing up. The realities of accommodation can have an impact too.

There can also be other challenges from within the community, including mistrust of the education system and a concern that qualifications won't lead to employment. Sometimes, participants suggested, it is easier to keep it quiet but difficult to do so.

The above challenges inevitably lead to Travellers dropping out of university,

“There needs to be some support in the university – a student society would be great”

“There needs to be the same number of Travellers coming out of university as are going in”.

The Importance of a Whole of Education Approach

Seminar participants were clear that the issue of Traveller participation in higher education cannot be addressed in isolation from that of Traveller participation rates throughout the entire education system—from pre-school to third level. The barriers to Traveller education have been well documented but the supports available are simply not enough. A whole of education approach is required involving;

- Intensive teacher training at all levels (addressing for example, conscious and unconscious bias and expectations of teachers with regard to Traveller education and progression)
- The promotion of aspirations for third level (beginning at pre-school)
- Strategies for the prevention of early school leaving
- Family supports
- Funding being made available to Traveller groups to support Traveller participation in education at all levels
- Funding for and availability of part time programmes
- The development of a structured approach to linking further education and higher education including recognition of prior learning.

Ambitions and Targets

While welcoming the fact that a target has been set by the HEA to increase the number of Travellers in Higher Education to 80 over the period 2015–2019, some participants felt that the target is quite low. The target should also reflect a more immediate and determined approach to equality, towards an eventual goal of having the same percentage of Travellers participating in third-level education as the percentage of the settled population.



Traveller Employment

For the majority population attending higher education, there is, it was argued, an inherent expectation that a key outcome of achieving their qualification will be access to quality employment. For Travellers, this expectation is far more limited, given the high levels of discrimination and racism to which they are subjected. Given the high level of compromise and sacrifices that Travellers and in particular Traveller women make in attending higher education, this reality must be taken into account and outcomes and progression given considerable attention when promoting Traveller access, including for example, linking with potential employers.

Information and Data

The collection of data on Traveller participation rates in Higher Education remains a key issue for participants. The majority of third level institutions state that although they are aware of Travellers attending they cannot give accurate figures because many students do not self-identify. Both quantitative and qualitative data are necessary in order to clearly identify the experiences of, and challenges for, Travellers in higher education. Support for and recognition of diversity and of the experiences and rights of minorities including Travellers in higher education institutions is key to addressing the data deficit and supporting self-identification by Traveller students at that point.

Existing Initiatives

Participants stressed that many existing initiatives to tackle early-school leaving and educational disadvantage are not targeted at or having an impact on Travellers. 50% of Traveller children for example do not attend DEIS schools and therefore do not benefit from the additional supports available in those schools.

Local development initiatives and the role of local authorities in addressing educational disadvantage, it was felt, offer little to Travellers who are frequently outside of these processes. It was noted that the over-use of Youthreach as an alternative to mainstream education for Travellers is a form of segregation which must be addressed; and that the extreme cuts to Traveller education have a hugely negative impact.

The over-23-years age requirement for mature students does not reflect the reality of Travellers lives. Many will have started families at this age and therefore are very unlikely to return to education.



Proposed Action for Maynooth University

The following are the main recommendations for Maynooth University arising from the Seminar;

A. Strategy

1. Act as a role model within the higher education sector in developing good practice for Traveller inclusion.
2. Harness the resources of the University and the HEA to develop a whole of University, sustained strategic approach and plan for mainstreaming Traveller inclusion with targeted initiatives and resources including a focus on data collection, outcomes, progression and employment.
3. As part of the strategy, establish targets and quotas for students and staff.
4. Establish a poverty/equality and Traveller proofing process for MU policy, programmes and practice.
5. Review existing access strategies to assess their impact on Traveller access and depending on the outcome of the review consider a pilot Traveller specific access programme.
6. Submit a proposal to the HEA to appoint a National Lead for Traveller Education.
7. Undertake a study on Travellers in higher education.
8. Employ a dedicated support worker for Travellers to engage with and support existing students, potential students and their families.

B. Ethos & values

1. Based on work to date set out and clearly communicate the ethos and values of MU vis-a-vis minorities specifically naming Travellers, challenging stereotypes and discrimination in the wider student and staff body.
2. Take a public stand on issues affecting Travellers.



Proposed
Action

C. Partnerships

1. Maintain and build links and partnerships with Traveller organisations – if any strategy or plan is to be effective or sustainable it must be rooted in the community with strong communication and a commitment to dialogue and participation in decision-making.
2. Continue to work with MU graduates towards the implementation of the MU Traveller inclusion strategy (Travellers and settled).
3. Promote the establishment of University clusters at regional level on Traveller education to develop collaborative initiatives, promote good practice, and share learning
4. Promote the potential to link with the Further Education sector to create pathways and opportunities for progression.

Access
Strategy



D. Access

1. Establish clear links with schools with known populations of Travellers around the MU catchment area – in Dublin, Meath and Kildare.
2. Organise a series of targeted workshops and Traveller specific open days in association with Traveller organisations with a high profile communications strategy.
3. Call for reconsideration of the mature access route in the case of Travellers for under 23 year olds and older learners.
4. Examine the opportunity to develop further pathways and opportunities for progression.

Participation
Outcomes

E. Participation

1. Recognise that Travellers are not a homogenous group and that intersectional issues such as gender/disability need to be taken into account.
2. Support student services to understand the complex needs of Traveller students.
3. Support specific measures including for example Traveller student societies, and inclusion of Traveller identity, culture, history etc. on course curricula.
4. Establish a Traveller mentoring programme.
5. Respond to the HEA/ DES 2016 call for funding/ proposals.
6. Recognise and take account of the historical and embedded history of educational disadvantage amongst Travellers and in doing so consider issues such as timing of classes and of submission of work, the need for additional supports in relation to writing and assessment in non-written formats.
7. Ring-fence funding to provide essential intensive financial and academic support for Travellers coming through and review the part-time fee structures.



F. Outcomes

1. Take concrete steps to employ Traveller tutors, teachers and mentors.
2. Establish a system of student placements/work experience for Travellers making links with potential employers and providing specific supports for Travellers in placement settings.



Partnership
Ethos & values

Conclusion

The Seminar Chairperson, Anastasia Crickley, concluded proceedings with a final recommendation from participants. Participants thanked Maynooth University for organising the Seminar and for the ongoing commitment of Maynooth University to Traveller participation in third level education.



Participants noted however that this is work in progress. They stressed again the need for MU to both respond to Traveller education needs at MU, and to inform and influence national progress towards third level educational equality for Travellers.

Closing the Seminar, the Director of Access, Rose Ryan, reiterated Maynooth University's commitment to bringing this work forward.



Appendix 1: Travellers in Irish Society



Introduction

Irish Travellers have been a part of Irish society for centuries. Their shared vibrant and unique culture based on the tradition of nomadism,⁹ their distinct language, long shared history, traditions and customs all distinguishing them from the majority settled population, have long been recorded and documented. The All-Ireland Traveller Health Study, commissioned by the Department of Health and Children and published in 2010 establishes the Traveller population in the Republic of Ireland at a little over 36,000.¹⁰

Travellers share a long history of oppression, discrimination, racism and exclusion leading to high levels of poverty, poor living conditions, poor health status (including mental health), high levels of unemployment and extremely low levels of educational attainment.

Traveller women's life expectancy is 12 years less than that of the settled population while that of Traveller men is 15 years less. Traveller infant mortality is estimated at 14.1 per 1,000 live births as compared with 3.9 per 1,000 live births in the general population.¹¹ Traveller suicide rates are 6 times that of the general population. Eight hundred Travellers live on the side of the road.¹² Between 2008 and 2013 the Traveller accommodation budget was cut from €40 million to €4 million, yet Local Authorities still fail to spend budgets allocated to them for Traveller accommodation. The Traveller unemployment rate is 84.3%.¹³

Traveller Women

Traveller women as with women from minority groups throughout the world, experience multiple forms of discrimination, oppression, and inequality. This oppression comes in the form of sex discrimination on the basis of gender, racism on the basis of being Travellers and a combination of both on the basis of being Traveller women.

Traveller women have played and continue to play a key leadership role in the on-going development of Traveller rights organisations at local, national and international levels. Their role as carers in their community means that Traveller women are frequently those most likely to deal with frontline service providers in relation to for example health, education and accommodation. They can often be the ones most likely to experience racism and discrimination.¹⁴ Traveller women experience violence and the sexual stereotyping and sexism experienced by women broadly in many facets of their lives. Responses to meet the needs of Travellers must therefore be considered from a gender perspective to ensure that Traveller women can benefit equally from any advances made.

Racism and Discrimination

Travellers experience widespread racism, discrimination, prejudice, stereotyping and oppression;

- 62% of Travellers have experienced discrimination at school.
- 40% of Travellers have experienced discrimination in accessing health services.
- 55% of Travellers have experienced discrimination at work.
- 61% of Travellers have experienced discrimination in a shop/restaurant/public house.¹⁵

The widespread negative stereotypes of Travellers, combined with notions of innate inferiority, are used to legitimate discrimination. Examples would include resident's associations, which organise against the provision of Traveller accommodation; the denial of one's own Traveller identity to get a job and the fear if it's known you are a Traveller that you will lose the job. Also the design and delivery of a range of public services that ignore the specific needs of minority ethnic groups, including Travellers - because it is assumed there is only one culture.¹⁶

⁹ Nomadism is an historical tradition and part of Traveller culture. It is not an activity or simply a descriptor of lifestyle, nomadism is part of who and what Travellers are; it is part of their being as a people - http://itmtrav.ie/keyissues/myview_new/45

¹⁰ The total number of Irish Travellers enumerated in the 2011 census was 29,573

¹¹ Kelleher et al (2010) Our Geels, All Ireland Traveller Health Study, University College Dublin & Department of Health & Children.

¹² Census 2011

¹³ ibid

¹⁴ National Traveller Women's Forum – Gender Position Paper <http://www.ntwf.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/NTWF-Gender-Position-Paper.pdf>

¹⁵ Kelleher et al (2010) Our Geels, All Ireland Traveller Health Study, University College Dublin & Department of Health & Children.

¹⁶ Fact Sheet – Racism and Discrimination Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre <http://www.paveepoint.ie/document/racism-and-discrimination-factsheet/>

Travellers as a distinct ethnic group

Travellers share the characteristics of an ethnic group and are widely recognised as such by a range of national and international organisations and institutions including the United Nations. The Irish government now recognises Travellers' ethnic identity. However, it is useful to review the range of concerns that were registered during the years of struggle to achieve this outcome.

In 2011 the CERD committee stated:

*The Committee expresses concern at the State party's persistent refusal to recognise Travellers as an ethnic group notwithstanding that they satisfy the internationally recognised criteria. The Committee recommends that the State party should continue to engage with the Traveller community and work concretely towards recognising Travellers as an ethnic group.*¹⁷

In 2015 the UN Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights stated that:

*The Committee is concerned at the State party's long-standing non-recognition of Travellers as an ethnic minority. It is also concerned that Travellers are not included as an ethnic minority in anti-discrimination legislation (arts. 2 (2) and 15). The Committee recommends that the State party expedite its efforts to give legal recognition to Travellers as an ethnic minority and include them as an ethnic minority in anti-discrimination legislation.*¹⁸

Traveller organisations have consistently reiterated the point that:

*Recognition of Traveller ethnicity will secure a new status and standing for Travellers that will shape new terms on which resources are made available to Travellers, that will shape new relationships of mutual respect with the settled community and that will underpin a new influence for Travellers in their dealings with the state.*¹⁹

*Recognising Traveller ethnicity means recognising that Travellers experience racism and discrimination. ... The dominant view of Travellers in Ireland has been that Travellers are some sort of deviant settled people ... if Travellers are not a distinct community then they should be treated the same as the general population and assimilated into the general population. But in this way their specific needs will not be met. They become invisible to policy makers and service providers and the community suffers.*²⁰

In November 2016, Taoiseach Enda Kenny, stated that the Irish Government would begin taking steps towards the recognition of Traveller ethnicity in early 2017, referring the issue to the Cabinet joint Committee on Justice and Equality. Traveller groups welcomed the development as "a major step forward for Travellers, cultural diversity and equality in Ireland"²¹ The report of the Committee stated that:

- The Committee is of the view that Travellers are, de facto, a separate ethnic group. This is not a gift to be bestowed upon them, but a fact the State ought to formally acknowledge, preferably by way of a statement by the Taoiseach to Dáil Éireann.

¹⁷ CERD (2011). Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: Ireland. CERD/C/IRL/CO/3-4, paragraph 12.

¹⁸ Economic and Social Council - Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Concluding observations on the third periodic report of Ireland 8 July 2015 <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G15/150/67/PDF/G1515067.pdf?OpenElement>

¹⁹ Irish Traveller Movement - Ethnicity a Key to Equality http://itmtrav.ie/keyissues/myview_new/46

²⁰ <http://www.paveepoint.ie/about-us/traveller-ethnicity-why-is-it-so-important/>

²¹ <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/pavee-point-welcomes-recognition-of-traveller-ethnicity-1.2880451>

- The Committee strongly encourages that this step be taken and at the earliest date possible in 2017.
- The Government should then conduct a review, in consultation with Traveller representative groups, of any legislative or policy changes required on foot of the recognition of Traveller ethnicity ²²

On March 1st 2017, following decades of work by Travellers, Traveller organisations, human rights groups and other supporters the Taoiseach issued a statement in the Dáil formally recognising Travellers as a distinct ethnic group;

Since the eighties, Pavee Point together with the Irish Traveller Movement, the National Traveller Women's Forum and Minceirs Whidden have campaigned strongly on behalf of Travellers. They have worked hard with the community to improve living conditions, promote health and education and access to services.....They have sought to empower Travellers and have not been afraid to help them address some of their own internal challenges...

As the House is aware, the Traveller community has for many years campaigned to have their unique heritage, culture and identity formally recognised by the Irish State. And in this State, they make their contribution as Gardaí, doctors, members of the defence forces, prison officers. So there should be no surprise that a person can identify as Irish and as Traveller. This is a deep and personal issue for many Travellers.....

As Taoiseach, I wish to now formally recognise Travellers as a distinct ethnic group within the Irish nation. It is a historic day for our Travellers and a proud day for Ireland. ²³

The announcement was followed by statements of welcome from Traveller rights and human rights bodies:

This announcement shines a light on Travellers' rich distinct history and culture and sends out a message of respect and inclusion.... This announcement heralds a new positive starting point in relations between Travellers and the majority population – a relationship that can only flourish and develop when founded on the vital principle of equality.

(Martin Collins, Pavee Point) ²⁴

The State recognition of the ethnicity of our indigenous Traveller community puts Ireland back in step with Northern Ireland, the UK and other EU partners, as well as responding to calls from regional and international monitoring bodies for human rights and equality. ... Recognition of Traveller ethnicity will be the catalyst for a rethink of how we focus resources on policies affecting Travellers, for example, in accessing education, in accessing culturally-appropriate and safe accommodation and in accessing healthcare, amongst other priority areas.

(Emily Logan, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission) ²⁵

It is a hugely positive step forward that will bring hope to my community. Recognition is about showing respect and dignity for all people, especially respecting Traveller culture and acknowledging the valuable contribution Travellers have made to Irish society.

(Mary Ward, Galway Traveller Movement) ²⁶

²² Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice and Equality Report on the Recognition of Traveller Ethnicity January 2017 <https://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/committees/justice/Report-on-the-Recognition-of-Traveller-Ethnicity-20-01-17.pdf>

²³ Statement by An Taoiseach Enda Kenny TD On the recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group Dáil Éireann 1 March 2017 <http://www.paveepoint.ie/taoiseachs-statement-on-traveller-ethnicity/>

²⁴ <http://www.paveepoint.ie/a-historic-day-for-irish-travellers/>

²⁵ <https://www.ihrec.ie/historic-step-traveller-ethnicity-recognised-state/>

²⁶ <http://www.advertiser.ie/galway/article/>

Appendix 2: Seminar Programme



**Travellers in Higher
Education**

**Maynooth University
Graduates
Consultation Seminar**

Tuesday, 15 March 2016



**Maynooth
University**
National University
of Ireland Maynooth

**Maynooth University
Department of Applied
Social Studies
&
Maynooth University Access
Programme**

 @mu_map

Schedule

13.45 Welcome
Prof Rowena Pecchenino, Dean of the Faculty of
Social Sciences Maynooth University

Opening Plenary
Background to the seminar
Anastasia Crickley, Maynooth University
Orla Christle, Higher Education Authority

**Dialogue with Rosaleen McDonagh, Traveller Activist
and PhD Candidate Nortumbria University**
Interactive dialogue on Traveller participation in
Higher Education

15.00 Workshops
1. Traveller Graduates
2. Traveller Students
3. Solidarity Workers

16.00 Closing Plenary
Interactive Dialogue on
• Workshop concerns & Suggestions
• Remaining questions & proposed next steps

Closing Remarks
Maynooth University: Next Steps
Rose Ryan, Director of Access Maynooth University

Seminar Speakers



Prof Rowena Pecchenino
Dean of Social Sciences
Maynooth University



Anastasia Crickley
Seminar Chairperson
Maynooth University



Orla Christle
Acting Head of Access Policy
Higher Education Authority



Rosaleen McDonagh
Traveller Activist
& PhD Candidate
Northumbria University



Rose Ryan
Director of
Maynooth University
Access Programme

Workshop Facilitators & Seminar Organisers



Martha Brandes, Outreach Officer,
Maynooth University Access Programme

Rachel Doyle, National Coordinator,
Community Work Ireland

Oonagh McArdle, Lecturer,
Department of Applied Social Studies,
Maynooth University

Ashley O'Donoghue, Equality Officer,
Maynooth University

Marianne O'Shea, Lecturer,
Department of Applied Social Studies,
Maynooth University

Appendix 3:

Seminar Participants

Ciara Bradley		Lecturer MU DAPPSS
Martha Brandes		MU Access Programme Outreach Officer
John Paul Collins	MU Graduate	Pavee Point National Traveller Organisation
Dave Donovan	MU Graduate	Galway Traveller Movement
Rachel Doyle		National Coordinator Community Work Ireland
Ronnie Fay	MU Graduate	Pavee Point National Traveller Organisation
Eileen Flynn	MU Undergraduate	
Paul Ginnell	MU Graduate	European Anti-Poverty Network
Maria Joyce	MU Graduate	National Traveller Women's Forum
Lynsey Kavanagh	MU Graduate	Pavee Point National Traveller Organisation
Kathleen Lawrence	MU Undergraduate	Pavee Point National Traveller Organisation
Gemma Lynch		MU Access Programme Access Advisor
Aoife Maguire	MU Graduate	Longford Community Resources Limited
Oonagh McArdle		Lecturer MU DAPPSS
Thomas McCann	MU Graduate	Traveller Counselling Service
Geraldine McDonnell	MU Graduate	The Parish of the Travelling People
Berny McMahan		Advocate
Mick Mooney	MU Graduate	Pavee Point National Traveller Organisation
Dave Murphy		Voice of Traveller Magazine
Ashely O'Donoghue		MU Equality Officer
Marianne O'Shea		Lecturer MU DAPPSS
Catherine Reid		Department of Education and Skills
Sinéad Smith	MU Graduate	Meath Equality RA Network
Julie Smyth		Department of Education and Skills
Jane Sweetman		Higher Education Authority

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