

The logo for TUTOR features a stylized 'T' on the left, composed of a blue 'U' shape with horizontal lines, and the word 'TUTOR' in a bold, white, sans-serif font to its right.

TUTOR

Teachers' upskilling aiming at a holistic inclusivity in learning
Literature Review on Inclusive Education
Ireland



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Background

The TUTOR consortium partners have adopted an assessment methodology, setting out the common framework, criterion and parameters for the TUTOR project. This literature review is the first phase of the TUTOR assessment methodology. Five partners within the consortium undertake a review of the literature pertaining to inclusive education within each country. A European wide review also forms part of the assessment. The focus of the literature review is on inclusive education for teachers in second level schools/or in Vocation Education and Training (VET), Further Education and Training (FET), who are working with cohorts of migrant, LGBTI+, socio-economic disadvantaged students including those at risk of poverty, educational disadvantage, students facing geographical barriers, marginalised and ethnic groups including Traveller and Roma.

This action is a desk-based literature review, coordinated by Maynooth University, aiming to identify the emerging common trends, needs and challenges to ensure that the secondary education and vocational, further education and training environments are inclusive of all students in the consortium partner countries. Strategic documents that examine different perspectives of teachers upskilling needs in terms of inclusive education in modern secondary, vocational and further education and training are reviewed.

In line with the Call for Proposals for Teachers Academies, our consortium has already identified some core documents that we can further study, such as:

- The OECD's TALIS 2018 insights and interpretation survey
- The 2020 Commission's Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025
- The Council Conclusions on European Teacher and Trainers for the Future of May 2020
- CEDEFOP's Skills forecasts country reports summarizing the key future trends in jobs and skills for each EU Member State up to 2030

Additional relevant available research is explored at national, EU and international level including:

- Available statistics and data about the current situation of secondary education teachers and VET teachers' skillsets, with specific relevance to inclusive education.
- Reports and official communications about the inclusivity needs of disadvantaged students in secondary education and in vocational education.
- Accessible information about LGBTQI students, migrants/ Third Country Nationals (TCNs) and students facing socio-economic disadvantage.

At minimum 30 research and policy documents are reviewed and analysed by the consortium. Each partner has listed reference documents in an excel file uploaded to Basecamp. An overall list of reference documents for the consortium is compiled that ensures a broad review of current country, EU and international policy and research documents. Where there are several partner organisations within each country, bilateral meetings and consultation amongst country organisations ensures the identification of the documents for review and allocation. Specific reference documents are allocated to each partner by the manager in collaboration with the work package leader. This approach will minimise the potential for repetition, and ensure a broad review of the research and policy documents in the literature review.

TUTOR's target groups include:

Teachers in second level schools and vocational education who are working with disadvantaged students comprised of LGBTQI community, migrants and students facing socio-economic difficulties.

Parameters of the target groups:

- Second level education teachers and vocational/further education and training teachers who are interested in upskilling in the area of inclusive education.
- Second level and vocational/further education teachers who are working with the following student cohorts:
 1. Migrants
 2. LGBTI+
 3. Socio-economic disadvantaged students including those at risk of poverty, educational disadvantage, geographical barriers, marginalised and ethnic groups including Traveller and Roma.

Task 2.1.2 Literature review:

A literature review is an in-depth examination of the significant material in books, journals and other sources relating to the TUTOR topic, Inclusive education in secondary education and vocational education.

Aim: Analysis of current literature, research documents and scholarly articles, strategy and policy documents (within 10 years, 2012-2022) pertaining to inclusive education.

Scale: Minimum of 30 policy documents and research documents to be reviewed and analysed by the consortium. One country report per partner in Austria, Greece, Turkey and Ireland and one Transnational European report to be delivered by partners with a European wide remit, e.g. EVTA, IGLYO and EVBB.

Detail: Partners will write a country report that explores and describes the literature pertaining to inclusive education in each country. The country report will identify the current literature and trends on inclusive education. It will explore the current training offer and the future training needs of secondary and vocational teachers in each country in relation to inclusive education. It will outline the key concepts associated with inclusion and reference any findings on discrimination in secondary education and VET education.

Conceptual framework: Inclusive education, holistic, person centred, identity, intersectionality, diversity, universal design for learning, discrimination, exclusion, human rights, dignity, quality education and inclusion, inclusive education, inclusivity.

1.1 Introduction

In this introduction a working definition of inclusive education and how it manifests itself in the secondary and further education and training system in Ireland is explored. The policy and theoretical assumptions that currently exist regarding inclusivity in secondary and further education and training are outlined. The TUTOR Consortium use intersectionality as a means to deconstruct the target groups approach to inclusivity, adopting instead a holistic person centred approach. The concept of intersectionality is integrated into the literature and the methodology for the TUTOR assessment. This literature review explores the current situation with regards to inclusive education in Second Level and Vocational Education and Training (VET), commonly known as Further Education and Training (FET) in Ireland. Ireland does not separate IVET from CVET and incorporates VET along with adult education and training into what is defined in Ireland as Further Education and Training (FET), which is available for everyone, offering provision to learners as early as age 16 with no upper age limit.

1.1.2 Inclusive education

Historically in Ireland, inclusive education was practiced as education for children with disabilities and was carried out almost exclusively in segregated settings. The medical model of disability dominated the provision of Special Education Needs (SEN). Numerous researchers (Shevlin et al, 2008, Kinsella & Senior 2008; O'Donnell, 2003) critiqued the psycho medical model in Ireland and noted the need for a cultural shift. The social model of disability, adopted in the 80s and 90s adopts a different attitude, perceiving that the social barriers imposed on people with disabilities, is caused by the way society is organised, rather than the person's impairment or difference. This model emphasises the need for structural change to enable people with disabilities to take charge of their own lives in a society that is inclusive, accessible, promotes choice, values freedom and is supportive of personal rights.

The Department of Education guidelines (2007) constitutes an inclusive school as characterised by a continuous process of development and self-evaluation with a view to eliminating barriers. Mission statements, admission policies and procedures are pivotal in establishing a positive agenda for inclusion. Schools are advised to revise their culture and ethos, organisational arrangements, curriculum content and approaches to teaching and learning.

Inclusion has been named as 'the major challenge facing educational systems around the world' (Ainscow, 2005, p.109). Inclusive education has traditionally been thought of as being an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings (Suleymanov, 2015). The National Council for Special Education (NCSE, 2011) described inclusion as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of learners. It involves removing barriers so that each learner will be enabled to achieve the maximum benefit from his/her schooling.

In Ireland, the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 set out a strong commitment to 'active inclusion' (SOLAS, 2014: 91). This was influenced by the EU Commission's definition of active inclusion (2008). This focus on inclusion was continued in the FET Strategy *Future FET: Transforming Learning* plan 2020-2024, which identified 'Fostering inclusion' as one of its core strategic pillars (SOLAS, 2019: 5).

Internationally, however, inclusive education is increasingly seen more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity among all learners (Ainscow, 2005). Reflecting the

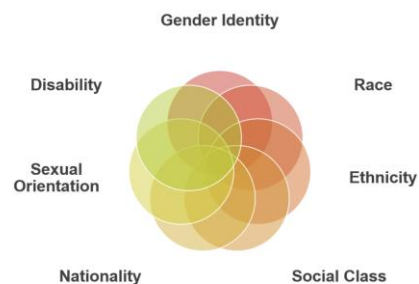
broader context of increased recognition and rights, international policies of inclusion are informed by a human rights approach. UNESCO contend that, in terms of education, inclusion is about

how to transform education systems and other learning environments in order to respond to the diversity of learners. It aims towards enabling teachers and learners both to feel comfortable with diversity and to see it as a challenge and enrichment of the learning environment, rather than as a problem (UNESCO, 2005: 15).

The term inclusion shifts the focus from the child to the school and society, and that inclusion aims to end discrimination and to work towards equal opportunities for all (Winter & O'Raw, 2010). Increasingly, the focus has moved to models of 'full inclusion' in an educational context, that advocates for a removal of all segregated and specialised instruction for learners with disabilities in favour of full participation in mainstream settings with the support of appropriate adaptations and accommodations (Zigmond, Kloo and Volonino, 2009). Kruse and Dederig (2018) broadly define an inclusive education system as one 'where all school pupils have unrestricted access to general education and are taught together in heterogeneous and inseparable learning groups' (p. 21). 'Inclusion is an attitude and approach that embraces diversity and differences and promotes equal opportunities for all' (Inclusion BC, 2019). Inclusion has favourable effects on social-emotional skills, academic achievement, school engagement, peer acceptance, and sustainable relationships among all students (Downes et al., 2017). Yet, extant literature points to a lag in the adoption of inclusive education by teachers and educational institutions (O'Rourke, 2015).

1.1.3 Intersectionality

Intersectionality recognises that individuals experience exclusion based on multiple intersecting identities (Crenshaw, 1989, Hill Collins, 1989, Lorde, 2007) referring to exclusion based upon interlocking webs of oppression.



Lamoureux & Katz (2020) describe intersectionality as the interconnected ways in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination combine, especially in the experiences of marginalised individuals or groups. They are the "categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power" (Davis 2008, 68). For students from ethnic minority backgrounds, this means that the prevalence of racism can also combine, for some, with issues of poverty, trauma, and or disability to create significant risks for learners. These students are likely to be significantly marginalised in schools operating in traditional ways, for example, with white, able-bodied, middle class and heteronormative values for behaviour, ways of learning, worldviews, and curricula (Neegan, 2005; Lynch and Baker 2005, Reay, 2022, MacRuairc 2021). Intersectionality and the definition of diversity as it is experienced in the educational system is interlinked. Diversity is often narrowed down to single issues. A broader definition of diversity refers to 'multiply-burdened' (Crenshaw,

1989:140) differences in, among others, gender, sexual orientation, age, ethnic and cultural background, physical and mental abilities, neurodiversity, socio-economic background, language, level of education, worldview, migration history, nationality and residence situation (Novak, 2016). By broadening the definition of diversity, educators and policy makers can intervene and reclaim a person-centred and holistic approach to inclusive education. Critically, an intersectional approach allows an analysis of how “socially constructed identities intersect with macro social structural systems (racism, classism, sexism, ableism etc.) at the micro level of the individual lived experience to reveal hierarchies and interlocking systems of power, privilege, and oppression” (Ryan, 2019: 92).

1.1.4 Second Level Education Sector in Ireland

The second-level education sector comprises secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools. Secondary schools are privately owned and managed. Second-level education consists of a three-year junior cycle followed by a two or three-year senior cycle. The Transition Year (TY) which is an optional year for students, is a one-year programme that forms the first year of a three-year senior cycle in many schools. It is designed to act as a bridge between the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes.

The [junior-cycle](#) caters for students in the 12 to 15 year age group. The [Framework for Junior Cycle 2015](#), provides the basis for post-primary schools to plan quality, inclusive and relevant education programmes with improved learning experiences for all students, including those with special educational needs. The Junior Cycle examination is held at the end of the junior cycle in post-primary schools. Students normally sit for the examinations after 3 years of post-primary education. The [State Examinations Commission](#) is responsible for the development, assessment, accreditation and certification of the junior cycle examinations.

The [senior-cycle](#) caters for students in the 15 to 18 year age group. It includes an optional [transition year \(TY\)](#) which follows immediately after the Junior Cycle. TY provides an opportunity for students to experience a wide range of educational inputs, including work experience, over the course of a year that is free from formal examinations.

During the final 2 years of senior cycle students take 1 of 3 programmes, each leading to a state examination.

Leaving Certificate

The Leaving Certificate Established is a 2-year programme that aims to provide learners with a broad, balanced education while also offering some specialisation towards a particular career option. Subjects are assessed by an examination paper and by additional assessment methods including oral and aural examinations, practical examinations and assessment of practical coursework at the end of the two-year programme of study. Performance in the examination can be used for purposes of selection into employment, and into further and higher education.

Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme

This 2-year programme combines the academic strengths of the Leaving Certificate with a dynamic focus on self-directed learning, enterprise, work and the community.

Leaving Certificate Applied Programme

The Leaving Certificate Applied is a 2-year Leaving Certificate, available to students who wish to follow a practical or vocationally orientated programme. The Leaving Certificate Applied is made up of a range of courses that are structured round 3 elements: Vocational Preparation, Vocational Education and General Education

The [State Examinations Commission](#) is responsible for the development, assessment, accreditation and certification of the leaving certificate examinations.

1.1.5 Further Education and Training sector in Ireland

In Ireland, the delivery of Further Education and Training (FET) is the responsibility of SOLAS, the further education and training authority designated with responsibility by the Department of Education. FET offers a wide variety of life-long education options to anyone over 16 years. FET provision includes apprenticeships, traineeships, Post Leaving Cert (PLC) courses, community and adult education as well as core literacy and numeracy services. FET courses and programmes are provided primarily through the 16 Education and Training Board (ETB) network throughout the country as well as through a range of other education providers. FET courses are provided at levels One to Six on the National Framework of Qualifications.

1.1.6 Teacher education and inclusive leadership

Coolahan (2001, p.337) notes that 'teacher education is a major enterprise in Europe, more than half a million student teachers receive initial teacher education in more than 1,000 institutions at which more than 50,000 teacher educators and trainers are working'. Coolahan reflects that 'while harmonisation efforts are important, teacher education in Europe is by no means a static condition. A great deal of ongoing critical analysis and review has been occurring'. The teaching profession is a key mediating agency for society as it endeavours to cope with societal change and upheaval, the school is being called upon more and more by social agencies to provide programmes and remedies for deficits in the social fabric external to the school, with emphasis more on the pastoral, socialising and counselling role (p.337). Walsh (2020) reiterates the situation in the contemporary Irish context 'nationally the role of approximately 15% of teachers in post primary schools is specifically to support inclusion (DES 2019).'

Historically in Ireland, education for children with disabilities was carried out almost exclusively in segregated settings. The medical model of disability dominated the provision of Special Education. Many researchers (Shevlin et al, 2008, Kinsella & Senior 2008; O'Donnell, 2003) critiqued the psychosocial model in Ireland and noted the need for a cultural shift. The social model of disability emphasises the need for structural change to enable people with disabilities to take charge of their own lives in a society that is inclusive accessible, promotes choice, values freedom and is supportive of personal rights.

Despite progress, current policies encourage stakeholders to try to adapt learners to the system, rather than adapting the education system to learners' needs (OECD, 2007). Capacity building of leaders and teachers is needed for developing effective, efficient and inclusive education systems and avoiding costly unnecessary labelling of students (UNESCO, 2017). The EU commission emphasises the need for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) within the teaching profession. The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) highlight that a significant number of teachers express the need to develop their competences for teaching students with special needs, use of digital technologies, and teaching in multilingual and multicultural classrooms.

To ensure adequate preparation to meet the learning needs of all students, various research reports identify the need for teacher education programmes to equip teachers with pedagogical content and skills, as well as with practical experiences that promote and support the development of inclusive beliefs, attitudes, and instructional practices that

encourage teachers to use evidence-based practices (Grima-Farrell, Bain, & McDonagh, 2011). For well-prepared teachers to apply what they have learned, as well as continue to develop within their instructional practice, they must be supported within the institutions in which they work (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). School leadership must provide this support by creating a favourable school climate for inclusion in which all stakeholders collaborate in decision making guided by a commitment to inclusion (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019).

The Council Conclusions on European Teacher and Trainers for the Future (2020) identify challenges for novice (newly qualified) teachers and trainers, since from the first years of teaching or training they are facing the same responsibilities as their more experienced colleagues. In addition, they may often find themselves working in challenging environments, such as education and training institutions with higher rates of learners with socioeconomically disadvantaged or migrant backgrounds (p.7).

Senior teachers and trainers might experience other difficulties, for example facing a generation gap at a workplace (p.12). Moreover, there may be additional challenges for teachers and trainers working in rural, remote or disadvantaged areas, such as those related to professional isolation, limited infrastructure including digital infrastructure, accessing support and opportunities for professional development or teaching multi-age and multi-grade classrooms.

However teachers and trainers working in densely populated urban areas may face more prominent challenges related to teaching learners from different multilingual, multicultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. In school education, there are difficulties related to attracting and retaining high potential students in initial teacher education. 'all of this is reflected in shortages of teachers many Member States are facing, whether in general, in specific geographical areas, in certain subject areas, such as STEM, or shortages of teachers with competences for teaching students with special needs, teaching in a multicultural or multilingual setting or teaching students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds (p. 9).

2.1 Policy overview

This section reviews the literature and policy directives regarding inclusive education at international, European, national and governmental level. Key international policy documents under review include the OECD's Teaching And Learning International Survey (TALIS), the 2020 EU Commissions Achieving the European Education Area by 2025 and the Council Conclusions on European Teacher and Trainers for the Future. The right to an inclusive education for people with disabilities first emerged in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and then in more detail in the International Covenant on Economic and Cultural Rights (1966). Principles of inclusive education were adopted in the 'Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education' at the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Equality (UNESCO, 1994) and restated at the World Education Forum, Dakar 2000. A broader definition of inclusion is referenced in the UN Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015), where the overall emphasis is placed upon 'leaving no one behind'. Many International organisations (UNICEF, WHO, UN Human Rights Committee on the Rights of the Child) and non-governmental organisations (Human Rights Watch, etc) monitor, advocate and provide for greater inclusion. Article 33 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action recognises the importance of rights focused organisations that are led, directed and governed by people

with disabilities (SHO). NGOs and civil society organisations ensure that all international development programmes are inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.

An analysis of the concept of inclusion shows it to be used, at times, interchangeably with concepts of integration, mainstreaming, and inclusive education (Suleymanov 2015). A sense of belonging, feeling respected, being valued, and feeling a level of supportive energy are important indicators of inclusion (Miller & Katz, 2002). Inclusion involves providing encouragement and opportunities to actively participate (Agyei, 2016, p. 10). Inclusive educators focus on the learning community and how it can be designed to celebrate and teach diversity (Katz, 2012). Inclusion “is about learning how to live with difference and learning how to learn from difference” (Winter and O’ Raw, 2010: 132). The *raison d’être* for the global charge for inclusion is the exclusion or marginalisation of some populations. Recognition theories increasingly highlight the silent (or silenced) voices of these populations, and how this has perpetuated through social structures including education and society more broadly (Boyle, Hanafin & Flynn, 2018, Honneth & Fraser 2003).

The OECD’s TALIS 2018 insights and interpretation survey, on teacher training notes,...

If high quality learning opportunities are to be equitably available, the education community needs more refined and detailed measures of quality teaching and a more comprehensive understanding of what can best support students from diverse backgrounds in the classroom.

OECD (2021), “Ireland”, in *Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/7d62f281-en>

The 2020 Commission’s Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025 suggests that:

Education is failing to reduce inequalities linked to socio-economic status, despite the fact that the highest performing education systems are those that put a premium on equity. Across Europe, the educational experiences of individuals follow social patterns. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are overrepresented among underachievers. Underperformance in reading and early school leaving is on average higher among boys than girls.

Rural areas are falling behind and students with a migrant background fare worse at school. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted even more starkly the importance of inclusion and fairness in education and has shown the relevance of geographical location of students and families.

To turn the tide, in the European Education Area recommend decoupling educational achievement from social, economic and cultural status, in order to ensure that education and training systems boost the abilities of every individual and enable upward social mobility. Further recommendations include ‘challenging and dissolving gender stereotypes, especially those that constrain the choices of boys and girls for their field of study, but also all those that can be conveyed in education and training practices and learning materials. Active inclusion has been a policy focus on European and national education policies.

In terms of teacher training the commission notes the need for Continuous Professional Development (CPD). The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) showed

that a significant number of teachers express the need to develop their competences for teaching students with special needs, use of digital technologies, and teaching in multilingual and multicultural classrooms.

In addition, to build democratic education environments free from bullying, harmful speech and disinformation, the commission plans to continue through the Erasmus programme to support Member States and stakeholders in implementing the *Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching*.

- CEDEFOP's Skills forecasts country reports summarizing the key future trends in jobs and skills for each EU Member State up to 2030.

The UNCRPD Committee identify political will as a key ingredient to inclusive education. In 2018, Ireland ratified the UNCRPD which contains the most comprehensive provision on inclusive education in any treaty. The Irish Government is now obliged to implement Article 24 and ensure inclusive education at all levels.

This commitment requires the provision of teacher training and supports. The quality of teacher training on inclusion, both pre-service and in-service is a recurring area of concern raised by the UNCRPD Committee in examinations of State reports internationally. Walsh (2020) recognises the concerns 'provision for teacher professional development in Ireland is largely funded by the DES, and has in the past focused more on 'disseminating national policies rather than developing teachers' wider professional capacity (Sugrue 2002, O'Sullivan et al. 2012, McMillan et al. 2016).' The Teaching Council Act (Government of Ireland 2001) places statutory responsibility for the 'continuing education and training and professional development of teachers' (Walsh, 2020). The Framework for Teachers' Learning in 2016, Cosán4 (Teaching Council 2016) recognises teachers as autonomous learners and highlights the need for a flexible framework to respond to the diverse needs of teachers who work in different contexts and have varied learning needs. Cosán refers to teacher professional development as 'something that is experiential, collaborative, sustained, enquiry-based and relevant to classroom practice' (Walsh, 2020).

2.1.3 National policy

The Education Act 1998 defines educational disadvantage as 'the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevents students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools'. Educational disadvantage is demonstrated most often in poor participation and levels of achievement. In 2005, the department of education published DEIS-Delivering Equality of opportunity in Schools: an action plan for educational inclusion. The objectives of the plan, to improve the learning experience and outcomes of pupils in DEIS schools..

The Irish government identifies clear education objectives in the national Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 - 2025 Ambition, Goals, Commitments, which commits the government to 'continue to improve retention rates from 85% at second level in DEIS schools in order to reach the national norm (currently 91.6 %) (p. 18)

According to the Department of Education, inclusive education is recognised as a fundamental principle of the education and training system in Ireland. Government policy on inclusive education is acknowledged in a whole of government inclusive approach in a comprehensive range of crosscutting policy and strategy documents, including a Department of Education policy statement on Inclusive Education, the Intercultural Education Strategy

(2010-2015), Migration Integration Strategy, National Action Plan on Racism, Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy, LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy (2017-2019), The National Action Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education, along with a range of educational targets in national policies on disability, literacy, health and other areas. Equality legislation allows for positive measures towards the attainment of full equality across the equality grounds. Currently there are national inclusion strategies on four of the grounds: The Migrant Integration Strategy (2017-2020) The National Disability Inclusion Strategy (2017-2021) The National Strategy for Women and Girls (2017-2020) and The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (2017-2021). These strategies are reviewed in the following sections.

Key stakeholders in education include The Teaching Council, and the Teaching Unions, as well as statutory and educational agencies, SOLAS, Education and Training Board Ireland, ETBs, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), National Council for Special Education, National Centre for Guidance in Education, as well as advocacy and representative groups including, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), the Irish Traveller Movement, Pavee Point, National Traveller Women's Forum Ireland, LGBT Pavee, National Disability Authority, AHEAD, Irish Refugee Council, AKIDWA, Migrant and Refugee Rights (Nasc) One Parent, Gay, lesbian and transgender support organisations including LGBT Ireland, BeLonGTo, Transnational Equality Network Ireland (TENI) and many other actors in the field advocating for inclusive education.

2.1.4 National Access Plan

This national policy context highlights inclusion as an objective of education and increasingly set targets for great student diversity and developing initiatives for diversity in the teaching profession. This is evident in the Irish context where the targeted under-represented groups specified in the National Access Plan include entrants from lower socio-economic groups (non-manual and semi-skilled manual worker groups); first-time, mature entrants, students with disabilities, part-time/ flexible learners, further education award holders, and Irish Travellers (HEA 2015: 34). More recently the current National Access Plan (2022) aims to support inclusion and diversity, recognising the needs of vulnerable learners, the most marginalised and those with special and additional needs.

This plan targets and seeks to support students from three groups; those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged (including mature students), students with disabilities (including those with intellectual disabilities) and students from the Irish Traveller and Roma communities, as well those who have experience of the care system, homelessness, and the criminal justice system, survivors of domestic violence and students who are carers. Migrants and refugees are also named for the first time in a National Access Plan in Ireland responding to the key needs in all of these areas (Gol, 2022).

2.1.5 Further Education and Training Strategic Plans

In Ireland, the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 set out a strong commitment to 'active inclusion' to enable "every citizen, notably the most disadvantaged, to fully participate in society and this includes having a job" (SOLAS, 2014: 91). This has been influenced by the EU Commission's definition of active inclusion (2008). This focus on inclusion was continued in the current FET Strategy *Future FET: Transforming Learning* plan 2020-2024, which identified 'Fostering inclusion' as one of its core strategic pillars (SOLAS, 2019: 5). It defines a 'strong inclusive ethos' as ensuring "that supports are available to allow any individual, regardless of background or formal education level, an opportunity to learn and develop" (SOLAS, 2019:45). It pledges to do so by providing "consistent levels of support and good practice for all learners; rooting FET in its communities; targeting and

facilitating participation by the most marginalised groups in society; and tailoring literacy and numeracy resources to meet complex learner needs” (SOLAS, 2019:45).

2.1.6 Intercultural Education Strategy (IES) (2010-2015)

The Intercultural Education Strategy (IES) (2010-2015) was developed in recognition of the recent significant demographic changes in Irish society to ensure that they were reflected in the education system. The strategy builds on existing work in this area and seeks to be of relevance for all sectors of education, in line with the high level goal of the Department of Education to ‘support and improve the quality, relevance and inclusiveness of education for every learner in our schools’ (add ref). The Intercultural Education Strategy (IES) aims to ensure that:

- all students experience an education that ‘respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society and is conducted in a spirit of partnership’ (Education Act, 1998).
- all education providers are assisted with ensuring that inclusion and integration within an intercultural learning environment become the norm. [Intercultural Education Strategy](#)

Intercultural education, according to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has the following defining characteristics: It is education which respects, celebrates and recognises the normality of diversity in all areas of human life (2006: i).

2.1.7 The National Disability Inclusion Strategy (2017-2021)

[The National Disability Inclusion Strategy \(2017-2021\)](#) is a whole of government approach which aims to promote greater inclusion by people with disabilities in Irish society. This is based on national equality legislation including the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 and the [Disability Act 2005](#). The EPSEN act provided a legal responsibility for the provision of inclusive education, echoing the [Disability Act 2005](#), which gives “legal effect to the principle that mainstream public services should serve people with disabilities alongside other citizens through what is described as ‘mainstreaming’ or inclusive provision” (2017).

Irish disability policy is influenced by transnational bodies, such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU), which have been central to policy development regarding disability issues including the requirements impelled by Ireland’s ratification in 2016 of the ‘UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities’ (UNCRPD, 2006). Article 24 requires states to recognise the right of persons with disabilities to an inclusive education system at all levels and in lifelong learning. This inclusive approach, based in fundamental human rights, is supported by international policy and legislation from bodies including the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, European Convention on Human Rights, and European Disability Strategy 2010-2020. It has been crucial in the move towards greater inclusion in education in recent years. The implementation of this equality legislation in Irish education has been complex and requires all public bodies to provide ‘Reasonable Accommodation’ for people with disabilities and allows for a broad range of positive action measures to facilitate people to participate in programmes and services. Increasingly, attention has shifted to a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach which shifts from a focus on adaptations and supports for individual learners to how the system and environments of learning should be more inclusive (as is explored below).

2.1.8 The National Strategy for Women and Girls (2017-2020)

The National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 (NSWG) issued by the Department of Justice and Equality outline a vision of 'an Ireland where all women enjoy equality with men and can achieve their full potential, while enjoying a safe and fulfilling life' (2017b, p. 7). Gender equality policies and initiatives in Ireland are developed and co-funded by the Irish Government as part of the European Social Fund Programme for Employability Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020, through the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. It is a whole-of-government policy framework provided by the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 (NSWG), which reflects the priorities of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the European Pact for Gender Equality (2011-2020). It developed from previous National Plan for Women 2002 and the National Women's Strategy 2007-2016. NSWG notes that educational attainment rates for women have risen.

In 2016, 82.9% of women aged 25-64 had completed at least upper secondary education compared to 71.2% in 2007 (the comparable rates for men are 76.9% in 2016, up from 64.6% in 2007)... In addition, early school leaving rates for females have decreased to 4.8% in 2016 from 8.6% in 2007. (2017b, p. 16)

Females remain underrepresented in STEM courses and careers in all levels of education. This has been evident in the persistently low levels of female students taking STEM subjects in school level, as well as the lower levels of female teachers in STEM and vocational subjects (OECD, 2015). The numbers of women in apprenticeships remains low in FET, as is evidenced through the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020 (SOLAS, 2017b, p. 19)

International studies such as PISA (2012) and OECD (2015) highlight the low levels of females in STEM subjects and continuing into employment in these areas as well as the 'double disadvantage of having too many boys who drop out of school or leave school with low skills and/or skills that are not well matched with labour market requirements (OECD 2015: 21). Diverse, gendered representation in different disciplines result in females 'under-represented in the fields of mathematics, physical science and computing, but dominate the fields of biology, medicine, agriculture and humanities.' (OECD, 2015:19). Expectations also different as PISA (2012) 'reveals that boys and girls hold different expectations for their futures and that they tend to prepare themselves for life after compulsory education in very different ways.' (OECD 2015:4). Girls are more likely to focus on subject interests and a combination of personal, social and family reasons, while boys cite financial and employment reasons (Archer et al., 2003: 123). These patterns reflect the wider 'social expectations women and men are subject to, institutional practices and culture which often reinforce persistent gendered inequalities and the commitment of institutional and national bodies towards the pursuit of gender equality' (Loots and Walker 2013:372). How gender intersects with other areas of inequalities, such as class, ethnicity, age and disability, is key to consider in education.

2.1.9 LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy

The LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy (2017-2019) , The LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy builds on existing equality policy and is situated within the framework of safeguards provided by Ireland's equality legislation. The national strategy offers a framework in which to address intersectionality (where people may be subject to discrimination on more than one of the nine equality grounds, e.g. LGBTI+ Travellers, migrants, older people or people with

disabilities). It is intended in this regard that the structures overseeing this LGBTI+ Strategy will link with those relating to the National Strategy for Women and Girls, the LGBTI+ Youth Strategy, the Migrant Integration Strategy, the National Disability Inclusion Strategy and the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy to enable crosscutting issues affecting LGBTI+ people who are Travellers, Roma, people with disabilities, migrants, young people, or women to be addressed in a more systematic way.

The National Youth Strategy (2015-2020) identified LGBTI+ young people as a specific group to be considered in the context of focused provision for marginalised young people. While their situation has improved considerably in Ireland over recent years, significant challenges still remain for LGBTI+ young people today. This categorisation suggests that this group would benefit from greater support to ensure that they can achieve the same positive outcomes as all other young people. However, the provision of this support is challenging when the population cannot be easily mapped or quantified with empirical data. Ireland has however, robust equality legislation in place to counter discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and the ongoing work of a number of organisations focused on supporting LGBTI+ young people and advocating for their rights, such as BeLonG To, Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI), LGBT Ireland and ShoutOut, ensures implementation of legislation and policy. These organisations have developed a range of action plans, guidelines and initiatives with schools to support LGBTI+ young people in schools as well as the wider school community.

2.2. Migration Integration Strategy

The Department of Justice and Equality (2017). [Migrant Integration Strategy: A Blueprint for the Future \(2017-2020\)](#) defines integration in current Irish policy as the 'ability to participate to the extent that a person needs and wishes in all of the major components of society without having to relinquish his or her own cultural identity' (p. 11). The Strategy identifies actions including those designed to encourage those from migrant and minority ethnic backgrounds into the teaching profession. 'Proactive efforts will be made to attract migrants into teaching positions (p. 25). Action 31 states 'The effectiveness of training for teachers on managing diversity and tackling racism will be reviewed.' Action 36 states 'The fostering and development of positive attitudes towards diversity and celebrating difference will continue to form part of the school curriculum.' (p. 26).

Two additional key policies include the National Action Plan against Racism and the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education which have significant implications for education are discussed in other sections of this review.

2.2.1 Traveller and Roma Policy

According to the Central Statistics Office (CSO) the number of Irish Travellers in the Census of population (2016) is 30,987. [Irish Traveller Infographic \(2016\)](#). The Roma community in Ireland consists of persons from a range of European countries including Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and the Czech Republic (Czechia). There are no official statistics on the number of Roma in Ireland but it is estimated to be in the region of 3,000 – 5,000. The European Commission and the Council of Europe tend to use "Roma" as an umbrella term to refer to a number of different groups (such as Roma, Sinti, Kale, Gypsies, Romanichels, Boyash, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom and Lom) and also include Travellers, without denying the specificities and varieties of lifestyles and situations of these groups (p. 15).

The National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS), published in 2017 and led by the Minister for Children, Disability, Equality, Integration and Youth, provides the framework

and strategic direction for interventions to improve the lives of Travellers and Roma in Ireland in practical and tangible ways. 'recognition of the distinct heritage, culture and identity of Travellers and their special place in Irish society would be hugely important to Traveller pride, to Traveller self-esteem and to overcoming the legacy of marginalisation and discrimination that the community has experienced.' (NTRIS, 2017, pp.6) The National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) (2017-2019) identifies the principle of inclusion as the core of the Strategy and, accordingly, the focus of current education provision is on the development of a more inclusive school environment through the whole school planning process, teaching practice, admissions policies, codes of behaviour and whole school evaluation.

Education-related actions include the aims of achieving equality of education outcomes, supporting an inclusive school community, and promoting a positive culture of respect and protection for the cultural identity of Travellers and Roma in education. The programme for Access to Higher Education, PATH names Travellers as a priority group for support and the recently launched PATH 5 strand has a specific focus on supporting Traveller and Roma students to access, participate and succeed in higher education. The objectives of PATH strand 1 are to increase the number of students from underrepresented groups entering initial teacher education, and to provide more role models for students from these groups. The 'Supporting Traveller and Roma (STAR)' pilot project in education was established in 2019 under the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) with the aim of improving attendance, participation and school completion in primary and secondary education in specific Traveller and Roma communities regionally.

3.1 Implications for Inclusive Education

In this section the state of play in relation to the ambitions of policy directives and their alignment with initial teacher education and teacher CPD in reality is explored.

Despite the whole of government approach and cross cutting policies on inclusion, the Irish government's policy on equality and social inclusion poses significant challenges for many schools. The pupil populations of many schools now contain large proportions of disadvantaged pupils and of ethnic minorities often in classes with high student teacher ratios. Within diverse contexts second language competencies and cultural competencies become very important.

Lack of representation of ethnic, migrant and socio disadvantaged people in the teaching profession continues to play a limiting factor. Despite interventions, it is rare for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to become teachers. Where advances have been made, role modelling can become problematic, particularly for those teachers who are expected to represent large cohorts of learners, and for the few representatives who are continuously drawn upon to 'give back' to society.

Alongside that the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' (UNCRPD, 2006) it is obvious that what is required is a more robust approach to inclusivity, including an element on special education in Initial teacher training if all children are to attend mainstream schools, encouragement of uptake of a post graduate qualification specialising in inclusive education and the provision of continuing professional development for all teachers on special education, on inclusive education and on Universal Design for Learning. Teachers will need to be afforded time and resources to attend such training, and be facilitated to engage in practitioner networks where methodologies, methods,

experiences and feedback from students can be discussed. ETB Dublin, hosts such a practitioner network.

3.1.1 ITE and CPD for teachers

Numerous studies into inclusion indicate that many teachers still do not have sufficient professional competence in inclusive education, and that currently ITE and CPD neither provides them with the necessary knowledge nor covers practices and appropriate models of sustained school development (European Commission, 2013; Nairz-Wirth et al., 2012a; Nouwen et al., 2015; Nouwen et al., 2016).

A number of factors have been identified that influence the embedding of inclusive education within teaching practice. The professional competence of teachers, their expectations, attitudes and relationships, plays a key role in the prevention of exclusion. Language and cultural competencies as well as representation of diversity within the teaching profession remain key contemporary issues. Banks (2004 p. 47) highlights the need for developing teachers cultural and language diversity competencies for working with ethnic minorities and migrants.

Downes et al, (2017) referring to the Public Policy and Management Institute (PPMI) report (2013, p. 94) highlights a lack of focus on second language acquisition as a distinct competence, and language support courses are often reported by teachers to be of low quality. 'It is important that not only language teachers receive training for working with immigrant children, but subject teachers as well. It is advisable for subject and specialised language teachers to work together so that teaching of academic subjects and language happen in a coordinated way (p. 25). The PPMI's report notes that some countries, to increase the number of qualified specialist teachers in second language development, have introduced language courses as a subject of pre-service and in-service training' (p. 47).

However, according to McDaid and Nowlan (2021) despite an increase in ethnic diversity within the state, the Irish teaching workforce remains starkly mono-ethnic. The need for representation within the teaching profession has been highlighted. 'From a nine city study, it is evident that many municipalities in Europe have no or very few ethnic minority teachers in their schools' (Downes et al, 2017).

The need for representation within the teaching profession has been frequently highlighted. 'From a nine city study, it is evident that many municipalities in Europe have no or very few ethnic minority teachers in their schools' (Downes et al, 2017). In 2013, the Diversity in Initial Teacher education (DITE) longitudinal research study was funded by the Irish Research Council. In 2017, Maynooth University launched the Turn to Teaching Initiative (TTT), the aims of TTT are to support students from marginalised backgrounds to move into Initial Teacher Education. Think about Teaching foundation certificate, and the two year school outreach and CPD programme Rising Teachers Rising Leaders Programme, both TTT initiatives, aims to promote diversity in the teaching profession through a series of social-justice orientated widening participation initiatives'

<https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/turntoteaching>

A NCSE study of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) experiences highlights the practice of collaborating and collective effort for meeting diverse needs, through acquiring specific skills, alongside providing consistency and continuity of support for pupils who are withdrawn from the classroom. All NQTs identified collaboration between resource and classroom teachers as crucial. The major factors cited in relation to enabling inclusive

practice are for example; support from resource/learning support staff, participation in team teaching, ways of communication, and shared time for planning opportunities (2019, p. 73). Walsh (2020) notes 'Teacher collaboration is seen as central to all elements of the continuum of teacher education. At ITE, collaboration is a central principle and the ability to collaborate is an expected outcome of ITE programmes (Teaching Council 2017a)'.

Leadership practices in the context of schools charged with including minority groups may be recognitive - fostering recognition and positive visibility of 'others' or distributive - implementation of policies, through the investment of time and resources, to support teaching and learning for diversity (Devine, 2012, p. 396). Bennett (2020) notes that real inclusion considers and creates possibilities, however 'peoples thinking first needs to change before they can become inclusive. The task is to change the status quo of the exclusionary practices' (p.)

Sider and Ling (2021) note that there is an abundance of research on the critical role of school principals in effecting positive student achievements, but not a lot in the area of principals and their role in inclusive education. They identify a gap between the literature on inclusive education and the literature on school leadership, 'what is largely missing in the literature is where these two areas intersect' (p. 1). Ryan (2006) refers to some key distinct practices to argue that inclusive school leadership involves 'advocating for inclusion, educating participants, developing critical consciousness, nurturing dialogue, emphasising student learning and classroom practice, adopting inclusive decision- and policy-making strategies, and incorporating whole school approaches' (p.9). McGhie-Richmond and Haider (pp. 32-50) consider the concept of knowledge mobilisation (KM) as key to moving forward the agenda of inclusion.

Despite the prevalence of opportunities for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for secondary school teachers, there is currently no national mandatory requirement for engagement by FET teachers in CPD. Even those FET teaching staff who are registered with the Teaching Council are not required to complete a minimum number of hours of CPD to maintain their registration. (Dunlop, 2022, p. 14). Individual education bodies, centres and associations provide numerous CPD opportunities for teachers in school and FET, but these are not necessarily communicated or offered systemically to teachers. From the perspective of teacher competence, a need has been identified in many countries for extended and new teacher competence to meet the challenges of inclusive education. (O'Gorman and Duddy, 2011, p. 17). 'A survey across 15 European countries showed that professional development is compulsory for VET leaders in only about half of the countries surveyed' (Cedefop, 2011). This resonates with the findings from TALIS that show that many VET leaders did not participate in professional development opportunities.

The PPMI report (2013, p. 47) highlights the need for the development of language competencies. The report highlights a lack of focus on second language acquisition as a distinct competence, and language support courses are often reported by teachers to be of low quality (p.94). 'It is important that not only language teachers receive training for working with immigrant children, but subject teachers as well. It is advisable for subject and specialised language teachers to work together so that teaching of academic subjects and language happen in a coordinated way (p. 47).

Challenges for teachers in implementing inclusive education include, but are not limited to, identifying the support needs of students, some of whom may be difficult to identify, and the upskilling of practitioners' competencies and skills in order to provide greater support to

those students who are at risk of exclusion. In addition developing teachers language competencies, within ITE and CPD would support inclusive education, and greater alignment between language teachers and curriculum subject specialists in adapting to the challenges. Providing CPD and communities of learning, and support networks for others in the school community is also vital, including for school leaders, those in guidance and other support roles, managers and posts of responsibility, and developing student-led and -centred communities of practice, representation and peer networks.

3.1.2 Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

One of the ways in which teachers and the school community can be supported in implementing inclusive education is through the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Framework.

According to Padden (2017), Novak (2016) and others, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework for educators to intentionally reflect on, design or redesign learning interactions. It is a set of principles for curriculum development that give all individuals equal opportunities to learn (SOLAS, 2020b). It aims to improve the educational experience of all students by introducing more flexible methods of teaching, assessment and service provision to cater for different styles of learners. This approach is underpinned by research in the field of neuroscience and the learning sciences and is designed to improve the learning experience and outcomes for all students. There are 3 core principles underpinning UDL when designing learning experiences, educators build into their planning and delivery, multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation and multiple means of action/expression. The first step in embracing universal design is to embrace learner diversity (Padden, 2017). Professional Learning Community (PLC), or community of practice approaches offer the potential for collective teacher efficacy in the field of inclusive education. UDL is a principal and approach adopted within Irish education and currently being implemented, as evidenced by work of AHEAD and the UDL in FET guidance (SOLAS, 2021c).

3.1.3 LGBTI+ students

Key recommendations offered by young people consulted for the LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy include 'the introduction of mandatory LGBTI+-inclusive education in primary and post-primary schools' and 'LGBTI+ and diversity training for all professionals'

In a country where a significant number of primary and post-primary schools remain under religious patronage, the impact of unsupportive attitudes towards homosexuality and transgender issues cannot be ignored. There is a reliance on a 'school-to-school' approach, where an inclusive, open and celebratory attitude towards the diversity of gender and sexual identities is driven by individuals rather than policy (LGBTI+ Strategy, 2017-2021, p. 16).

Objective 1 of the strategy notes 'Create a more supportive and inclusive environment for LGBTI+ young people in formal education settings' (p. 18) Actions include 'review and update professional development supports for teachers to take account of the LGBTI+ Youth Strategy.' Further actions include the publication of the Action Plan on Bullying and Anti-Bullying Procedures, and the introduction of a national anti-bullying website – www.tacklebullying.ie – by the Department of Education and Skills, with a particular focus on promoting inclusion and tackling identity-based bullying provides guidance.

3.1.3 Migrant students

With the contemporary waves of migration into Europe, both economic and refugee, the policy interventions firstly focused upon the integration of migrants into the educational system, by providing host country language supports. The concept of integration is now shifting towards greater reflection upon how best to include migrants from many countries in a real and meaningful way. To this effect, the movement has trended beyond intercultural education, which was experienced as limited in its capacity to have meaningful impact, towards a more inclusive and holistic, person centred approach to inclusivity that has emerged in the policy and strategy documents, and within European Commission policy directives. Overwhelmingly in relation to policy direction 'consultation with stakeholders has resulted in a shift of emphasis from integration to inclusion' (p. 16) and an understanding of the complex and diverse nature of migration and ethnicity, as well as the impact of experiences of othering and racialisation for students from minority backgrounds.

A major challenge that emerged within consultation with teachers is the difficulty experienced with differentiating planning and teaching to take account of the diversity of students. Challenges include, differentiation of curriculum content, instructional strategies and pace, material and resources and student output.

3.1.4 Travellers and Roma students

Ireland has undergone a transformative shift in how it approaches the inclusion of Travellers in education systems, not least as a result of the negatively adopted and experienced approach of assimilation in previous decades. The Irish Traveller community, a distinct cultural group and traditionally nomadic, was first formally recognised as an ethnic minority in Ireland in 2017 (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2017). Historically and contemporaneously, Travellers have experienced social exclusion and disadvantage in many domains, including education, health, housing, employment, leisure, and media reporting (Boyle, 2014; Devine, Kenny, & Macneela, 2008; Equality Authority, 2006; Harmon, 2015; Lodge & Lynch, 2004; Watson, Kenny, & McGinnity, 2017).

MacGréil (1996, 2011) findings highlighted persistent discriminatory attitudes to Travellers in Ireland (p. 3). A qualitative study of Irish Traveller parents and Traveller preschools in Ireland by (Boyle, Flynn and Hanafin (2018) explores inclusion, defined here as 'a response to diversity intended to reduce and eliminate exclusion within and from education.' Exclusion (and specifically educational exclusion) has been notable in the discourse about Irish Travellers (p. 2) Traveller parents, more than most other parents, have not been included in education. (p. 2) The relationship between Travellers and the education system has been fraught with difficulties (p. 4). Issues such as nomadic culture and the school system's lack of adaptation to the needs of travellers were prevalent.

The Irish Census 2016 (CSO, 2016) shows that just 13.3% of Traveller females were educated to upper secondary level or above, 8% of Travellers have completed secondary education. Nearly 6 in 10 male travellers undertook education to primary level at most. Of the 30,000 Traveller population, CSO (2016) shows that 167 Travellers possessed a third-level qualification, although this was almost double the figure of 2011. For many Travellers, their experience of education at school remains a negative one, including bullying, low expectations from school staff and peers, discrimination, isolation and marginalization (Pavee Point Education Factsheet). Ryder (2017) argues that the challenge for schools in the 21st century is to offer learning environments that allow Travellers (and other minorities) to maintain their identity, but also to acquire new and adapt old skills (p28).

3.1.5 Socio-economically disadvantaged students

The notion of equality of opportunity in Irish education was espoused periodically over several decades, but no significant steps were ever really taken to achieve it (Harford, 2018). Internationally and nationally educational policy is focused upon widening of participation of socio economic disadvantaged students. In Ireland, the main policy initiative in school for socio-economic disadvantage is the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS). DEIS is a targeted intervention to support schools which have high levels of educationally disadvantaged students. [The DEIS Plan 2017](#) sets out the Department of Education and Skills policy and supports for schools. Currently, there are 198 second-level schools in [DEIS](#) in Ireland. A review of the DEIS programme undertaken in 2015 identified three areas of the DEIS programme as being excellent supports: Home School Community Liaison Coordinator, professional development opportunities for teachers and the position of a resource teacher for travellers (RTT). However these supports continue to operate in isolation. The benefits of professional development (e.g. schemes such as First Steps, Reading Recovery) for DEIS teachers are sometimes outweighed by the challenge in sustaining these programmes and embedding them in schools when trained individual staff members leave the school.

Fleming and Harford (2022) in reviewing DEIS note 'the education system as it currently stands is unfair and unequal and that the consequences of this are stark', adding that 'Travellers, lone parents, people who have disabilities, who are homeless, or who are in the care of the state, asylum seekers and those who are from less affluent backgrounds are destined to struggle'. According to Downes (2020) the current system of inequality is being legitimised through the ideologies of meritocracy, equalising opportunity is inadequate and has not worked. Many researchers have pointed to the need to provide a tapered form of the DEIS programme to take account of those schools which fall just outside of the qualification criteria for full inclusion (Smyth, McCoy, and Kingston [2015](#); Fleming [2020](#), [2021](#)).

Criteria to evaluate the well-being of children is acknowledged as crucial. If schools managed to maintain attendance and engagement in learning they were deemed to be successful. There is general agreement that there should be an increased focus on student's physical and emotional wellbeing particularly in relation to diversity, students who live in direct provision and students from the travelling community.

The findings of the Addressing Education Disadvantage Review (2017) highlighted that teacher expectations tend to be lower than warranted by independent outcome data for students from poor backgrounds. The detail of the mechanisms by which students are impacted by the expectations of their teachers, and the precise effects of such expectations, are still not well understood. There is an absence of reliable data, valid methods of measuring expectations, and of effective strategies to raise teachers' expectations. Assisting teachers to become aware of their own prejudices, and educating them about the power of their expectations for their students, might well serve to reduce the achievement gap between students from disadvantaged backgrounds and their better-off counterparts. The intersectional nature of disadvantage is also key to consider, as is the impact of locating policy attention to initiatives like DEIS rather than addressing the systemic inequalities at a societal level that leads to community experiences of socio-economic disadvantage in this way. (Lynch and Baker, 2005). Burns (2016) highlights the conflicting and competing ideologies inherent in the dominance of the 'pedagogies of same', noting the balancing act required of early career teachers who are working in DEIS schools. He raises awareness of the need for debate around what is sometimes considered the 'deficit' understandings of working class communities.

Professional development for those in leadership positions should cover issues relating to leading, supporting and implementing change for inclusion. Differentiated levels of expertise should be embedded across the system. Pedagogy for active learning, collaborative planning, use of resources, assessment and use of digital and eLearning technologies, specialist courses in teaching minority ethnic and minority language students and specific modules on teaching and learning in multi ethnic and multilingual classrooms in teacher education programmes at all levels

4.1.2 Key themes emerging in the literature review

The tentative conclusions emerging in this literature review are that despite the concept of inclusive education being on the policy agenda for many years in Ireland, the process of implementation, and the development of meaningful initiatives to support inclusive education policy within the second level school sector and within further education and training sector has been rather ad hoc, fragmented, lacks critical analysis and as a result has been limited in its scope to address inclusion through a policy level of action. This context persists, despite the goodwill and inclusive practices extended by dedicated teachers and practitioners to support the learning of all students within the classroom. Primarily, when consideration is given to the term inclusive education in Ireland and elsewhere, the dominant discourse relates to how best to include children with special educational needs in mainstream educational provision. A broader definition and understanding of inclusive education is needed.

To date, the narrow policy focus of inclusive education, focusing as it has on the inclusion of students with special needs, through the lens of a medical deficit model, as well as the deficit model of disadvantage remains the greatest challenge for transforming inclusive education into a holistic inclusive model that is embraced and mainstreamed across all levels in the educational systems in Ireland.

Despite various policy initiatives and robust legislation acknowledging the importance of a shift towards a social justice model of inclusion, policy has tended to be hampered through fragmentation in approach, resulting in a failure to gain the wider benefits of meaningful yet isolated initiatives. The lack of critical review by policy makers and government seriously undermines what can be achieved. A whole of government approach has yet to show the anticipated benefits. Overall there has been limited progress in tackling educational inequality in Ireland. A willingness to engage with the fundamental principles of inclusive education by all actors and allies within the education sector has been proven. The actions underpinning this willingness however are lacking in a formulated theory of change that embraces inclusion as a holistic concept, that is driven by leadership, implemented at systemic level, within a whole of government, whole of school approach.

The reasons for this are many, there exists a number of tensions identified in this literature review to be resolved, including and not limited to the dominance of competing and conflicting ideologies, not least of which is the predominance of a meritocratic approach to achievement. The targeting and labelling of learners within the current model of financially resourcing the system to tackle inequality is highly problematic and unhelpful. This approach contributes to the tensions that exist within inclusive practice, between segregation and integration, assimilation and inculturation and between multicultural and intercultural education. Further tensions that exist within the realm of teaching practice that are yet to be resolved include those between differentiation and universality.

Further challenges that exist in the system include precarious and restricted contracts of employment for practitioners, cumbersome management processes and the administrative demands of the curriculum and standardised assessment methodology. The need for continuous professional development to articulate a broader definition of what constitutes inclusive education, and how it can be applied is necessary.

The goodwill extended by teachers in second level schools and FET practitioners to include and support all students, competes with restricted personnel time, management processes and the administrative demands of the curriculum. The findings in this literature review reveal that the practice of inclusive education is very much dependent upon individual teachers attitudes and experiences concerning inclusionary methods of teaching and learning, and their attitudes towards the target groups; LGBTI+, migrant and socio economically disadvantaged students. The literature concerning minority, traditionally excluded and ethnic communities in second level and VET/FET education systems in this literature review has identified the potential for tackling exclusion, by linking the inclusive practices adopted by individual teachers and practitioners, to the policy and leadership level, so that such intervention practices become recognised, resourced, integrated and mainstreamed.

This needs to be understood through an intersectional approach to allow for an analysis of how individual experiences intersect with macro social structural systems of racism, classism, sexism and ableism. Targeting high-quality professional development activities at teachers serving students from disadvantaged backgrounds may have success in the promotion of educational equity and inclusion.

The unique knowledge honed by leaders and managers within the second level and Further Education and Training sector can be a significant contribution to knowledge mobilisation. Practitioners at times handle a particular responsibility for social inclusion, with VET/FET often having a large number of disadvantaged students struggling with learning and social difficulties, a high rate of students dropping out and a greater diversity of students and training programmes (Cedefop, 2011[6]). One determinant factor impacting upon the implementation of inclusive education, is a systemic approach, implemented by leadership. By providing leadership and commitment to whole of school inclusion, educational systems create a favourable climate in which to implement policy, where all stakeholders collaborate in decision making guided by a commitment to inclusion (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019).

The literature strongly identifies the need for inclusive education to become mainstreamed into Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) within both second level and further education and training in Ireland. It suggests that leadership, policy and practice needs to coalesce and make the most of this juncture within the current policy framework of inclusion, and a systemic move towards adopting universal design for learning, which offers a window of opportunity and a methodology for the upskilling of teachers in inclusive education competencies, models, methods and practices.

In conclusion this literature review has addressed the nature and the scale of the challenge of embedding inclusive education in Ireland. It has outlined how inclusive education is evolving from a policy and strategic direction and from a research perspective. It describes the views of the stakeholders, and the main social impacts of inequality and the tensions that exist within competing and conflicting ideologies. It offers insights into the way forward, and the potential focus for teacher education.

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