ACCESS TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION – THE ROLE OF A QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY

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Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann
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FROM COUNTING TO CULTIVATING SUCCESSFUL PARTICIPATION

A REVIEW OF THE LANDSCAPE OF PRACTICE SUPPORTING ACCESS TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION IN IRISH EDUCATION AND TRAINING

INTRODUCTION

- 20th anniversary of the introduction of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and the national access, transfer and progression policy (ATP)

  - ATP has been fundamental to enabling learners to engage with the NFQ

- Review is timely and coincides with progress toward a unified tertiary education and training system

  - Discussion and findings are pertinent to the vision set out in the Government's Funding the Future strategy

- ATP practice is inherently complex and involves multiple stakeholders

  - Must account for and respond to diverse and dynamic socio-cultural realities

- Review report presented in four parts, each with a distinct lens to highlight challenges and opportunities for enhanced ATP practice

Education Attainment Thematic Report 2022

Highest level of education attained by persons aged 25 - 64 years

3%
Primary only or no formal education

29%
Secondary education only

53%
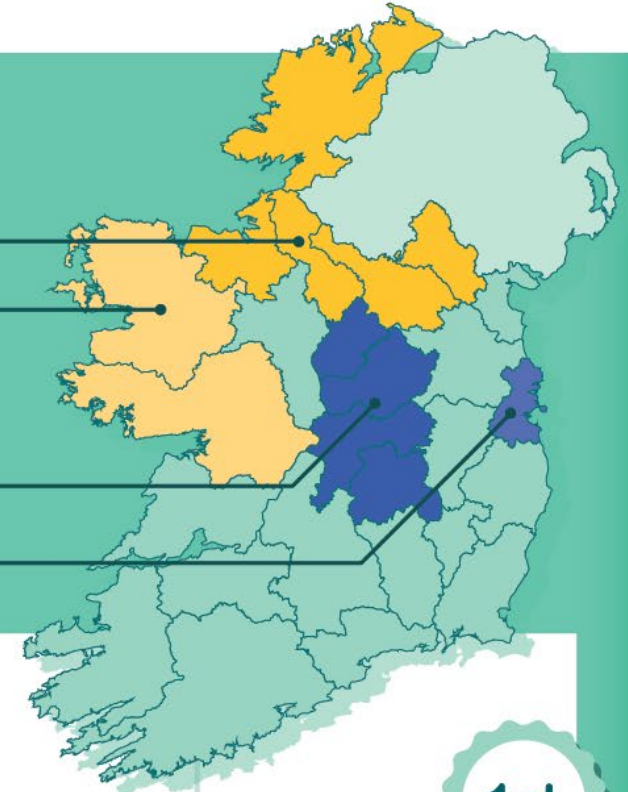Third level education

Primary only or no formal education

6% Border

3% West

Secondary education only

35% Midland

23% Dublin

2021

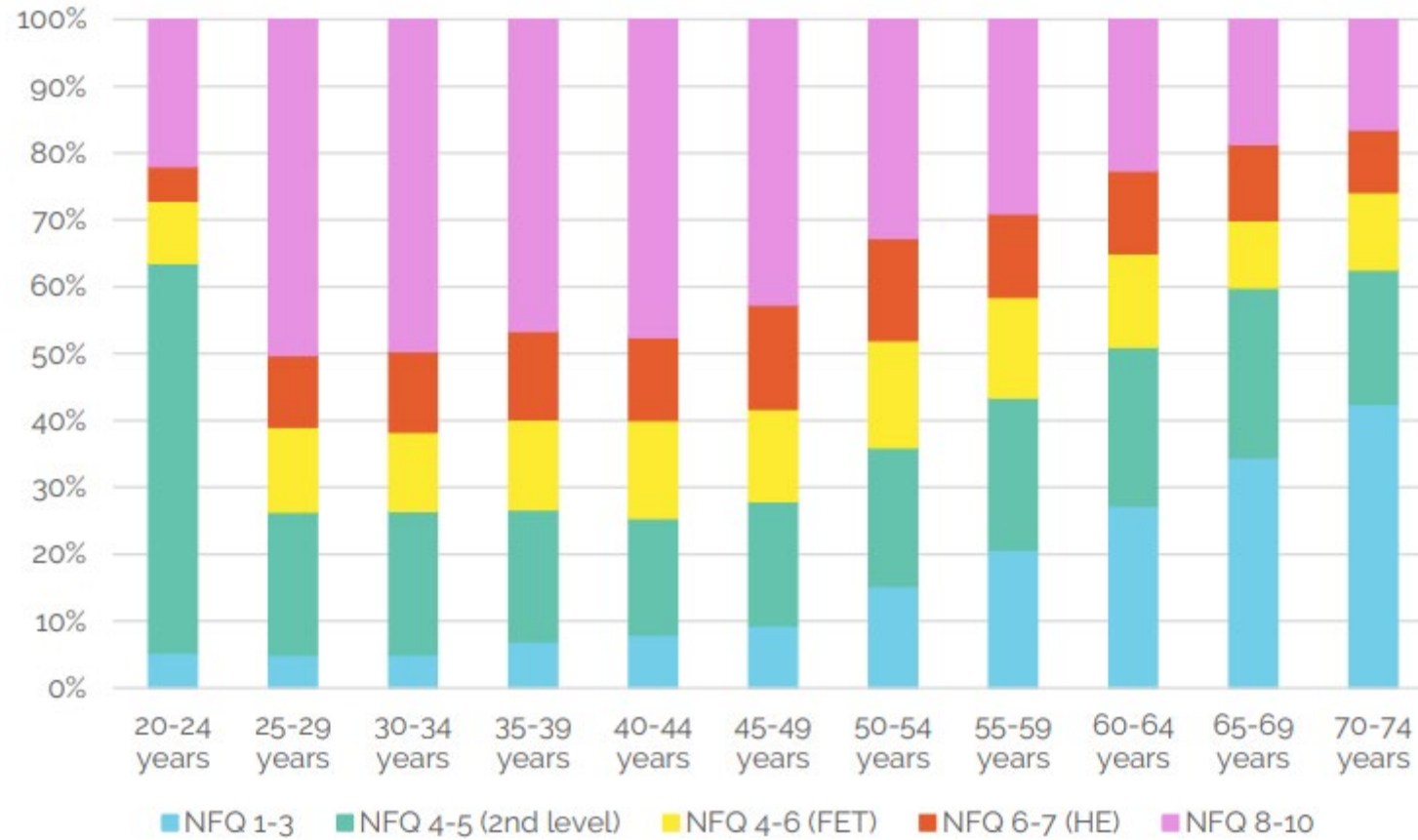### Percentage of persons with third level education

33% EU-27 average

53% Ireland

1st

Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (LFS) data

DISCUSSION: VISION FOR ATP

- Original vision and objectives published by NQAI in 2003
  - Education and training landscape has changed since then
- QQI to articulate new, ambitious vision and objectives for ATP
  - Inclusive of measures to ensure successful participation by learners
- Vision and actions to address challenges, vulnerabilities and barriers
  - Hindering learner engagement with qualifications system
 - Necessary permeability of the system

ARCHITECTURE OF ATP
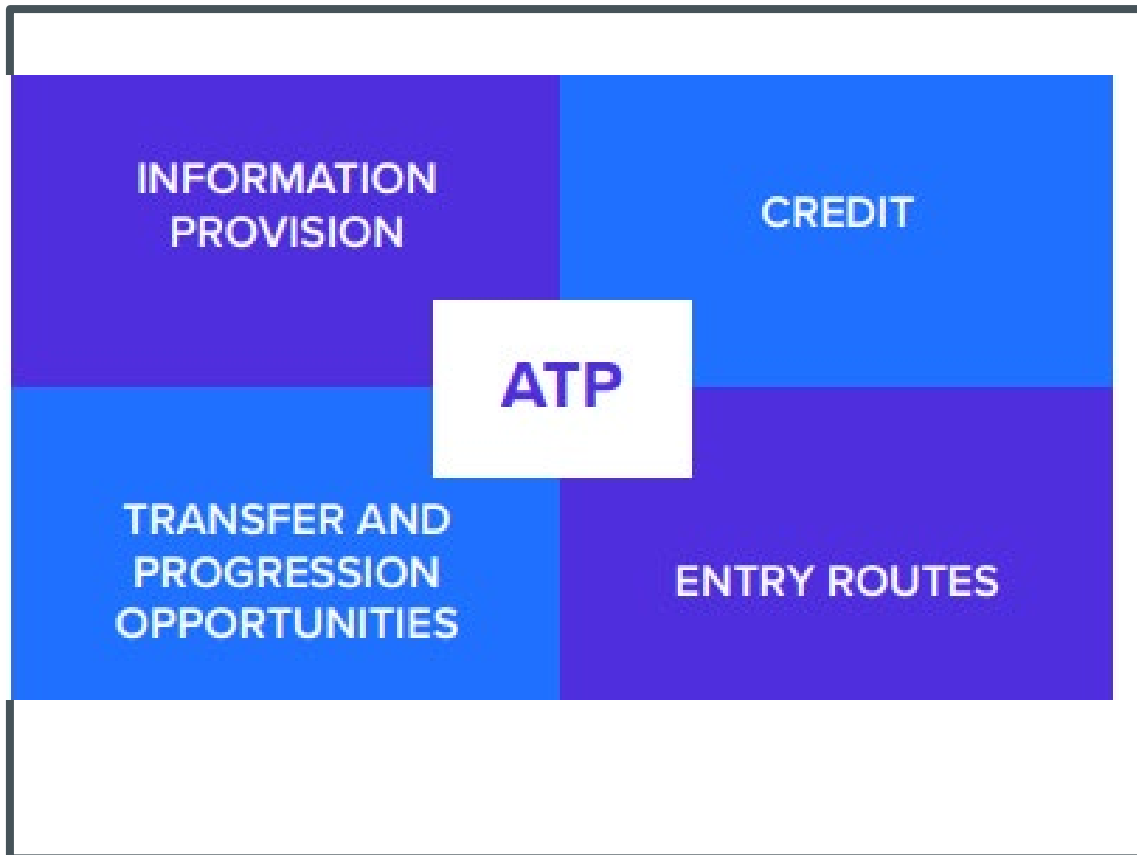
- Access: the process by which learners may commence a programme of education and training having received recognition for knowledge, skill or competence acquired

- Progression: the process by which learners may transfer from one programme of education and training to another programme where each programme is of a higher level than the preceding programme

- Transfer: the process by which learners may transfer from one programme of education and training to another programme having received recognition for knowledge, skill or competence acquired

- NQAI published Policies, actions and procedures for the promotion of access, transfer and progression in 2003

- The 2003 policy articulates a vision for learner mobility

Vision

Operational Principles

Objectives → Framework Development

Objectives → Facilitation of Change

Develop an integrated framework of qualifications → Credit

Ensure that learners can avail of a network of transfer and progression routes → Transfer and Progression Routes

Ensure that learners can avail of fair consistent entry arrangements → Entry Arrangements

Ensure that accurate and reliable information is available to learners → Information Provision

1.3 MOVING TOWARDS A TERTIARY EDUCATION SYSTEM – THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

- 2003
  - ATP policy implementation begins in highly fragmented and differentiated sectors.
- 2012
  - Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012, established QQI to replace four predecessor agencies.
- 2013
  - Education and Training Boards (ETBs) were created.
- 2014
  - Integration of training into the ETBs saw the dissolution of FAS and the creation of SOLAS.
- 2016-2017
  - Adoption by QQI of a single set of Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines and common policy and criteria for programme validation.
- 2015
  - QQI published a restatement of the original 2003 policy: Access, Transfer and Progression in relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training.
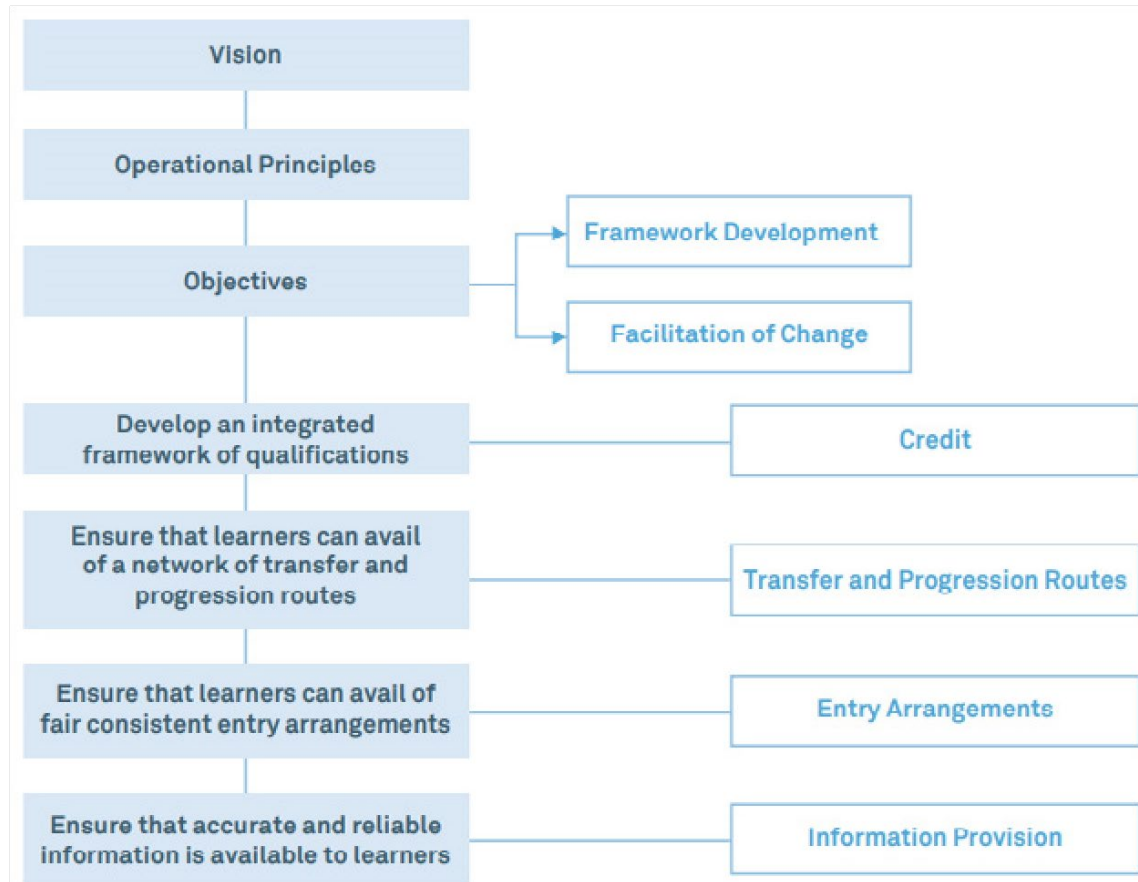
DISCUSSION: PATHWAYS

- Discrete progression pathways with own entry criteria and information
  - Adds complexity to the system for learners and practitioners
- Current policies and initiatives are piecemeal
  - Arise in response to localised demand or learner needs
- Access operates like a lottery system
  - Determined by local arrangements in place
- Need for a more sustainable long-term approach
  - Expand routes for programme access for all learners
- Collating information on programmes and access is a significant first step
  - Reduces complexity and confusion

DISCUSSION: RPL

- Significant progress in RPL in Ireland, but room for improvement
  - Public consultation calls for enhancement, expansion, and streamlining of RPL
  - OECD recommends establishment of national guidelines for RPL procedures
  - QQI has commenced work in this area
- Strengthening linkages and cohesive approach to professional guidance services could benefit RPL practice
  - European RPL guidelines emphasize importance of connecting guidance services with RPL practice
  - Optimizes resource utilization, reduces procedural costs, and reaches disadvantaged groups
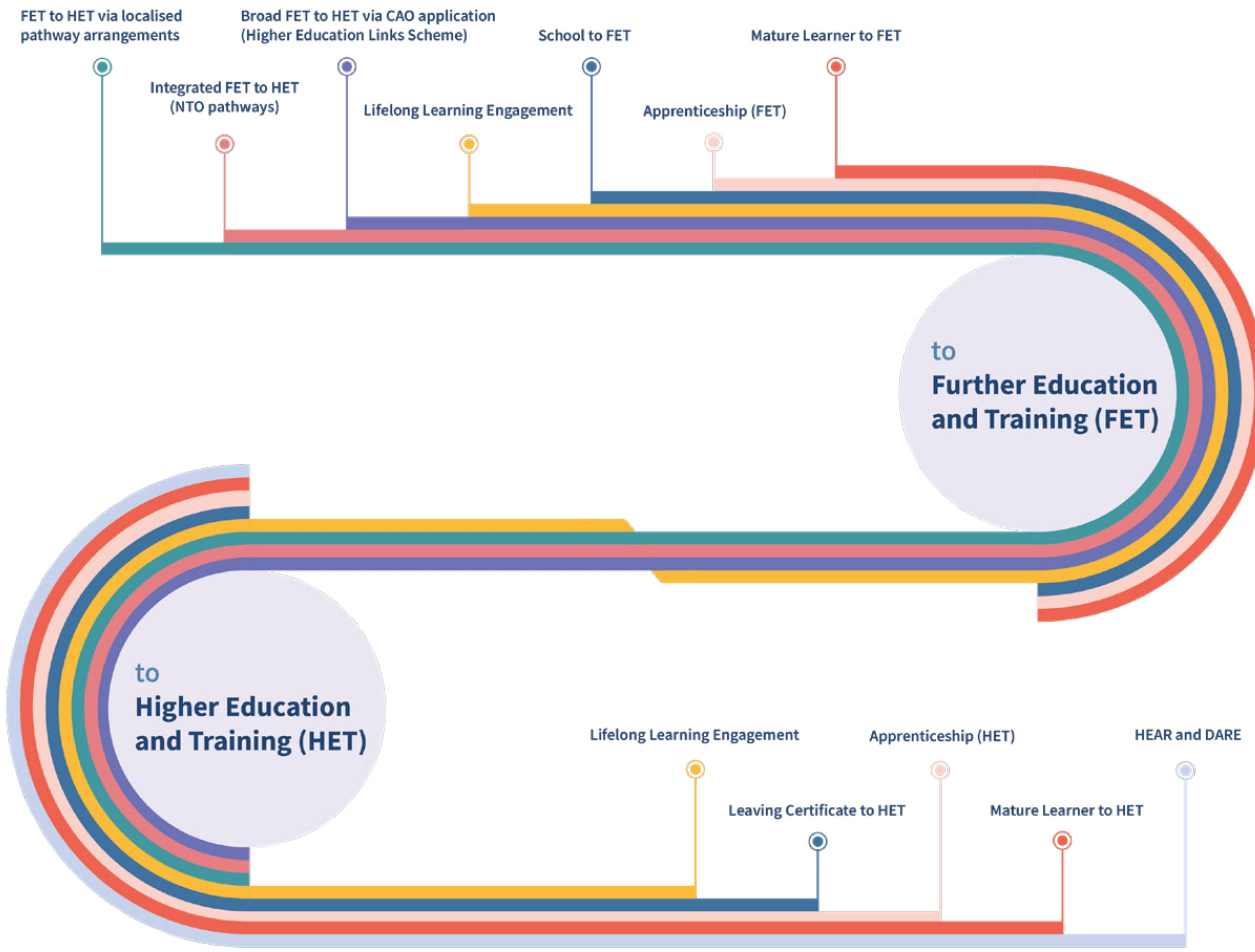
DISCUSSION: EXPANDING UNDERSTANDINGS OF ATP

- ATP is understood and defined narrowly, in relation to expanding entry to the system for particular groups of disadvantaged or nontraditional learners.

    - There are merits to this approach but it comes with limitations.

    - Not all learners can be easily categorised.

- Current emphasis placed on entry to programmes has the effect of narrowing the focus to the patchwork system of pathways and solutions.

- QQI Core QA Guidelines artificially separates ATP from the necessary elements for its success.

- The project team takes the view that a focus on entry has somewhat overshadowed the need to embed accessibility and inclusion across our institutions.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR QQI

- Restate or update vision and objectives for ATP
  - Emphasize successful participation as core principle
- Integrate ATP into relevant QQI QA Guidelines, policies, procedures and criteria
  - Ensure inclusive practice and universal design are emphasized
- Ensure parity of treatment of NFQ Levels 5 and 6 major awards for progression
- Evaluate benefits of maintaining two national credit systems
- Continue progress towards development of national policy approach to RPL
- Initiate discussion to clarify definitions of part-time and full-time study
- Facilitate and enhance routine monitoring of ATP
- Collate and make available appropriate ATP data
- Ensure evidence-informed ATP considerations are presented at national-level discussions

CHAPTER 2: LEARNER PATHWAYS

- 11 broad categories of ATP pathways identified
  - Individual pathways or networks may exist within each category
- Categories may mask complexity within the system
  - Learner identities are frequently intersectional
  - Challenges in ascertaining FET to HET transitions
- Challenges in identifying and navigating pathways
  - Information not centrally collated and changes annually
  - ATP objective of transparency and simplicity not achieved

Figure 5: Pathways through tertiary education and training. Diagram showing pathways to Further Education and Training (FET) and to Higher Education and Training (HET). Pathways to FET include: FET to HET via localised pathway arrangements, Integrated FET to HET (NTO pathways), Broad FET to HET via CAO application (Higher Education Links Scheme), Lifelong Learning Engagement, School to FET, Apprenticeship (FET), Mature Learner to FET. Pathways to HET include: Lifelong Learning Engagement, Leaving Certificate to HET, Apprenticeship (HET), Mature Learner to HET, HEAR and DARE.

Pathways to Further and Higher Education and Training in Ireland, 2023

2.1 ALL PATHWAYS

FIGURE 5: PATHWAYS THROUGH TERTIARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

CHAPTER 3: ATP IN PRACTICE

- ATP toolkit includes credit, RPL, and information and guidance for learners
  - Implemented by institutions and practitioners
- Significant achievements across tertiary landscape
  - Initiatives reflect holistic and cross-institutional approach
- Ongoing challenges to be addressed
  - Challenges and opportunities for successful ATP implementation
  - Some challenges specific to FET or HET
  - Others apply across tertiary sector

3.1 ATP IN FET

- Irish FET Sector
  - Facilitates diverse learners to enter or return to the qualifications system
  - Offers a range of programmes from literacy development to specialized technical learning
  - Operates an 'open door' policy with limited barriers to entry
  - Positive impact from dedicated educators and guidance practitioners
- Challenges and Opportunities
  - Identified for ATP practice in FET

3.1.2 FET PROGRAMME PROCESSES AND SUPPORTS

- ETBs lack common system for assessing learner suitability for programs

    - No consistent procedures for assessing ability to engage and achieve award

- Individual services conduct own entry assessments, but no common processes across all FET programs

    - Some FET courses may need to define prerequisite knowledge and assess prior to enrolment

- Inconsistency in support services available to learners following enrolment

    - Impact on retention and award achievement unclear

- Post-award progression opportunities data limited and unclear

    - Does not differentiate between formal articulation agreements and progression pathways

- QQI may need to monitor ATP practice and support ETBs toward consistency of opportunity and experience

3.1.4 FET AND HET AWARDS - PARITY OF TREATMENT FOR PROGRESSION PURPOSES

- Perception of FET as a challenge
  - Image problem and struggle to reconcile economic and educational values
  - Lower esteem compared to HE
- Raising the status of FET as a priority
  - Government rolling out huge capital investment
- Lack of parity of treatment for progression purposes
  - Leaving Cert remains a more advantageous route
  - Structural inequities in the current system
- QQI pathway less valued and advantageous
  - Not all courses on the CAO have a QQI pathway
  - FET graduates only allowed to compete with a maximum of 390 points

3.2 ATP IN HET

- Irish HET sector is diverse and has seen significant change
  - Comprises of IOTs, universities, independent/private providers, and TUs
- ATP reflected differently across provider types
  - Informed by status, institutional mission, and strategy
- Public HEIs have legal mandate to support national access agenda
  - Universities must ensure access by disadvantaged or under-represented learners
- New technological universities also obligated to promote access to specified groups of disadvantaged learners
  - Higher Education Strategic Performance Framework established

3.2.1 ATP MONITORING IN HET

- Review of Annual Quality Reports
  - Increased detail on ATP related activities in recent AQRs
  - ATP policies and procedures in place
  - Participation in HEAR and DARE funding schemes
  - Variable level of detail provided
  - Observable variance in focus regionally and by institutional profile
- Inconsistent reporting on ATP across providers and years
  - Recommendation for routine monitoring of ATP
- Private and independent providers have no legal obligations to promote wider national access agenda
  - Extent to which ATP forms part of institutional mission is highly variable
  - ATP initiatives to support entry reported by some providers
- CINNTE QA review cycle

TIRANA MINISTERIAL MEETING OF EHEA - COMMUNIQUÉ

- The need for Lifelong learning in society is increasing, especially for all those requiring or desiring new competences to enhance their professional, personal or civic potential. Learning paths need to be flexible, properly delivered, quality assured, and recognised. They should promote inclusion, upskilling and reskilling, and be aligned with the requirements of learners, changing societies and labour markets. This also includes the recognition of prior learning, and new forms of education provision, such as micro-credentials. We commit to fostering such flexible learning paths in all higher education programmes.

TIRANA MINISTERIAL MEETING OF EHEA - COMMUNIQUÉ

- We commit to measuring progress in the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA and ask the BFUG to report back on this in 2027. Furthermore, we endorse the document [Indicators and Descriptors for the Principles of the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA](#) as the first comprehensive and consolidated framework for the social dimension in the EHEA. Simultaneously, we promote the improvement of data collection, through participation in related initiatives, such as Eurostudent.

TASK 1

- Each of the three tables is assigned a tertiary education institutional profile, either

    - a classic research university

    - a new technological university or

    - an education and training board providing further education and training

- Outline what are your institution's priorities for access, transfer and progression in accordance with the QQI guidelines and what has been presented from the 2023 review of ATP

- Negotiate with your peer institutions; find where your objectives and actions converge and where they clash

TASK 2

- Each table/institution sends two of its members to work for the quality assurance agency QAA

- The QAA devises access transfer and progression guidance for the system and proposes techniques for monitoring and review while the institutions observe

- The institutions react to these proposals