



# Transformative Pathways for Underserved Communities

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# Transformative Pathways for Underserved Communities Project

- A **community-led** Higher Education and Community Education partnership
- **Flexible** educational pathways that **widen participation**,
- Recognise diverse starting points, and remove structural barriers.
- Bespoke access routes and supports with learner needs and system realities,
- Translating opportunity into sustained engagement, progression, and success in higher education.

# Transformative Pathways for Underserved Communities Project



- Students meet broad Lifelong Learning & Socioeconomically Disadvantage
- A university–NGO partnership delivering higher education to learners furthest from HE
- A model ready to scale with European partners



- **South East Technological University (SETU)** (merger of Waterford IT and IT Carlow in 2022).
- **18,000 learners** across multi-campus locations. **2,000+ staff**
- **Pre-Bachelor to Doctoral level across six fields:** Arts & Humanities, Business & Social Sciences, Languages & Culture, Health, Engineering, and Science & Technology
- **Strategic Plan “Connecting for Impact 2023–2028”:** widen participation, flexible provision, deep regional & European partnerships
- **Lifelong Learning Strategy 2025–2028** to expand access and flexible routes

# Transformative Pathways Partnership

- **An Cosán** is Ireland's largest community education organisation, founded in 1986 in Dublin, **providing adult, community, further and higher education pathways** (21,000 learners since establishment)
- **Empower marginalised communities** through holistic, learner-centred services including early years care, parenting supports, mentoring, counselling and digital inclusion
- Programmes from access and community education to accredited higher-education degrees (via SETU)
- Working together since 2008.
- In 2023, awarded €1m by the Irish Government for the project (via the Higher Education Authority – statutory body)

## Access pathways

Community-based Higher Education Programmes at Level 6 7 and 8

## Awards

Accredited major & minor awards; SETU-accredited HE certificates /BA routes (stackable)

## Research

Doctoral (PhD) projects aligned to access/ community education: Participatory Action Research embedded with learners & partners

# Flexibility & co-design

## Co-design cycle diagram



- **Flexible curriculum:** modular, blended, place-based delivery
- **Student voice in co-design:** co-created assessments; feedback loops
- **Project Steering Group:** SETU-An Cosán–community partners; iterative improvement

# Removing barriers so adults can succeed



Timetable flexibility:  
evenings/weekends;  
stacking



Wrap-around supports:  
IT/laptop loans,  
academic tutoring,  
pastoral support, early  
years/childcare



Outcome: increased  
persistence &  
completion among  
target groups

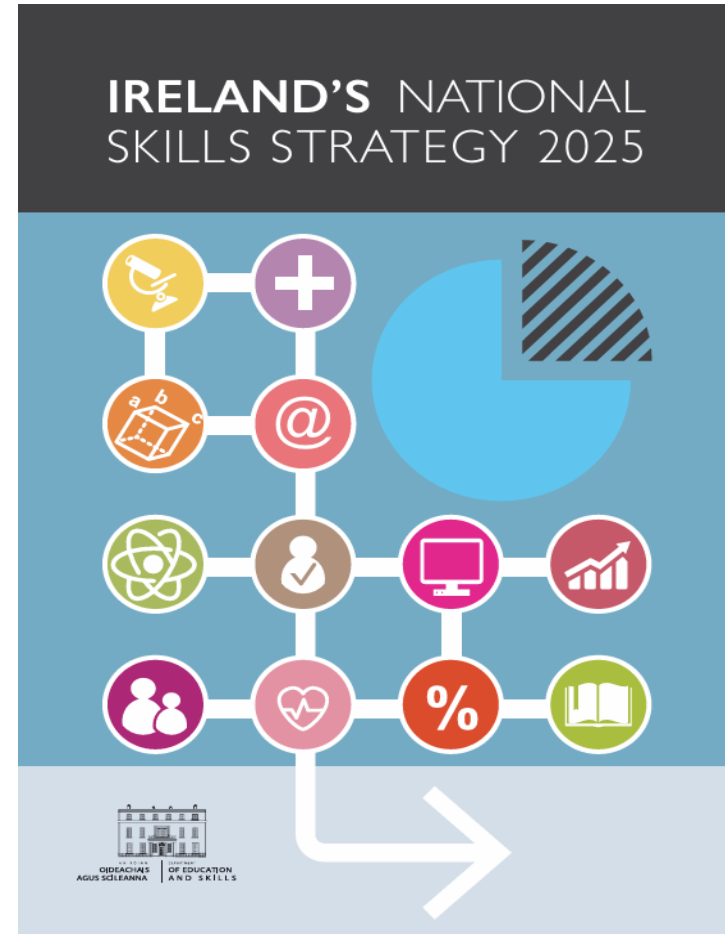


# When Students are Supported, they Thrive

- 94% progression (year 1 to year 2)
- 91% graduation
- Engagement & retention rise when flexibility + supports are in place
- Graduates moving into community leadership & professional roles
- Community-level impact and role-model effects

# Meeting Irish National Goals for Access & Lifelong Learning

**NATIONAL ACCESS PLAN**  
A STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN  
FOR EQUITY OF ACCESS,  
PARTICIPATION AND  
SUCCESS IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION 2022-2028



# What's next?

1. Sustainable funding for wrap-around supports & flexible delivery
2. European project partners: HEIs + NGOs + municipalities to adapt/scale the model

**Interested in  
cooperating  
to widen  
participation**

If you already partner with an NGO:  
lets meet and compare models of  
delivery

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