

# Leaving School?

Information on some  
Post-School Options for  
School Leavers and other  
Adults with Disabilities

HIGHER EDUCATION



## **Going to Third-Level? Support is available!**

Increasing numbers of students with disabilities are graduating with a higher education qualification. This is because more supports and services are now provided in line with your needs. This pamphlet will give you some information about higher education options, these supports and about how to avail of them.

### **One in every ten students attending higher education has a disability!**

Support is available to enable students with disabilities participate in higher education on an equal basis, as part of the national priority to improve equity in access to higher education for under-represented groups.

Supports are now provided to over 10,000 students with disabilities attending college.

## **Supports are tailored to your needs**

Supports are provided across a wide range of needs. Students being supported currently include those with:

- ▶ Attention Deficit Disorder and ADHD
- ▶ Autistic Spectrum Disorder
- ▶ Blind/Visual Impairment
- ▶ Deaf/Hard of Hearing
- ▶ Mental Health Condition
- ▶ Physical Disability/Mobility Impairment
- ▶ Significant ongoing illness
- ▶ Specific Learning Difficulties.

## **What is Higher Education?**

Higher or third-level education is provided by universities, institutes of technology and colleges of education as well as other State-aided and private bodies throughout Ireland. These are referred to as "higher education institutions".

Students may study for a degree, a diploma, a certificate or a post-graduate qualification. There are lots of different courses including arts and social sciences, business, computers, engineering, science, law and health care.

Most are full-time programmes but many are available by studying on a part-time basis or through distance learning.

## **Transition Planning – from school to higher education**

Preparation for transition should start in post-primary school to help you make informed applications for suitable post-school options.

### **2nd or 3rd year in post-primary:**

- ▶ Talk with your parents, career guidance counsellor or other teachers in your school about the subject choices you are making as this can make a difference to which courses you can apply for after you leave school.
- ▶ Get advice from your career guidance counsellor or other teachers about post-school options that may be available to you.
- ▶ Be sure to take into account your own strengths and interests – you can discuss with teachers and parents what they think are your abilities, strengths and needs.
- ▶ Look up useful websites for information about courses that interest you.

### **Two years before leaving school:**

- ▶ Talk with parents and teachers about the application process including any disability access supports available to you.
- ▶ Continue to look up useful and relevant websites.
- ▶ Look at what courses are offered in the different higher education institutions and what interests you by checking out their prospectus.

## How do I apply for a place?

Students apply for the vast majority of third level courses through an annual process run by the Central Admissions Office (CAO). Each course has a limited number of places which are allocated based on points achieved at Leaving Certificate level by students who meet the course admission criteria. Different arrangements can be made for mature students and students applying on the basis of Further Education and Training (FET) results. You will get further information on these routes from the Central Applications Office (CAO) [www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie) and from higher education institution websites.

## DARE to achieve – the Disability Access Route to Education

If you have a disability and have experienced additional educational challenges in post-primary school, you may be able to attend college with a reduced number of points.

A specific support scheme – the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) – is available to provide a different route into education. Many higher education institutions operate this scheme. It offers reduced-points places to certain school leavers with a disability. Full information on DARE is available on [www.accesscollege.ie/dare](http://www.accesscollege.ie/dare). Some higher education institutions do not operate DARE but have other supplementary admission schemes for students with disabilities.

### Postgraduate Education

Applications for admission to many post-graduate courses are made to the Postgraduate Applications Centre [www.pac.ie](http://www.pac.ie) or in the case of others, application is directly to the higher education institution.

## What supports can be provided?

Help available can be information and advice, help with finding accommodation, assistive technology, assistance with course materials (e.g. in Braille or audio), sign language interpretation, and assistance with exams (e.g. a reader or a scribe), personal or academic support or transport.

## How is individual support arranged?

Higher education institutions have Disability or Access Offices, and they publish their contact details on their websites. Supports for students with disabilities are arranged through these offices in each college.

### Disability or Access Office

The disability/access services role is to:

- ▶ Conduct a needs assessment to determine the type and level of support you might need.
- ▶ On behalf of the student, apply to the Fund for Students with Disabilities to acquire additional supports or accommodations.
- ▶ Liaise with academic, administrative, library and examination staff to co-ordinate various supports as required, including examination, teaching and learning, accommodation and library supports.
- ▶ Organise assistive technology and related training and support.
- ▶ Ensure that accessibility requirements are met.

## Disclosing a disability?

You do not have to disclose a disability unless you are seeking support. Information about any disability is sought in your application to the CAO and will enable your needs to be assessed and appropriate supports provided.

**AHEAD**, the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability [www.ahead.ie](http://www.ahead.ie) has published online a Guide to Disclosure for people with disabilities who are starting further or higher education studies.

## Special courses for students with intellectual disabilities

Some higher education institutions<sup>1</sup> run special on-campus programmes for students with intellectual disabilities. A limited number of places is provided on these courses. Applications are usually made directly to the institution concerned which determines eligibility and appropriate accreditation.

## What are the standards of awards in higher education?

Higher education leads to Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees, Master's Degrees and Doctorates. These correspond to awards at levels 6-10 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).



---

<sup>1</sup> Examples of these special programmes are in Trinity College Dublin (National Institute for Intellectual Disabilities), University College Cork, Maynooth University, Mary Immaculate College Limerick, Athlone Institute of Technology, Carlow Institute of Technology, Dundalk Institute of Technology, Sligo Institute of Technology, Tralee Institute of Technology, Waterford Institute of Technology. In some cases the courses are delivered in collaboration with disability service providers. Information about how to apply and other details may be obtained from the individual institutions.

## Can I proceed to Higher Education from Further Education?

Yes, students who achieve certain awards in further education and training (FET) may also progress to higher NFQ level awards in FET and in higher education. Holders of certain level 5 or 6 NFQ awards may apply through the Central Applications Office (CAO) [www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie) for admission to higher education programmes, subject to admission criteria<sup>2</sup>.

Where you plan to progress from FET to a particular field of studies in higher education, you should first check with the FET provider that the course leads to an award which will meet the higher education admission criteria.

The **Higher Education Links Scheme** (HELS) sets out how learners can progress from FET to higher education. Further information on this scheme is published by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) [www.qqi.ie](http://www.qqi.ie) and is also available through the Central Applications Office [www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie)

## Are there grants and financial supports available for students on higher education courses?

Yes, grants and supports are available. Details are available on the Student Finance Website [www.studentfinance.ie](http://www.studentfinance.ie)

**1916 Bursary Fund:** this is a new initiative to encourage participation and success by students from sections of society that are significantly under-represented in higher education including students with disabilities. For further information see [www.studentfinance.ie](http://www.studentfinance.ie). Application for a 1916 bursary is made directly to the higher education institution you are studying in or intend applying to.

---

<sup>2</sup> FET award holders may also be eligible to apply for advanced entry to second year of some higher education programmes. Further details on advanced entry are available through the CAO [www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie)



## Where can I get more information about higher education courses and supports?

- ▶ If you are at school, talk to your school's **Guidance Counsellor**, or your Year Head.
- ▶ Check the **website** of the individual higher education institution you are interested in, look up their Disability Office or Access Office.
- ▶ **AHEAD**: (the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability) is an independent non-profit organisation working to promote full access to and participation in further and higher education for students with disabilities and to enhance their employment prospects on graduation. It provides information for students with disabilities through its website [www.ahead.ie](http://www.ahead.ie), interactive map and help line and its annual Better Options – College Fair for Students with Disabilities.
- ▶ Details of **DARE**, the Disability Access Route to Education are at [www.accesscollege.ie/dare](http://www.accesscollege.ie/dare).
- ▶ **Qualifax** (the National Learners Database) [www.qualifax.ie](http://www.qualifax.ie) gives details of all courses available in Ireland.
- ▶ [www.careersportal.ie](http://www.careersportal.ie) has information on courses and careers, including a course finder feature.
- ▶ [www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie) is the website of the Central Applications Office.

These last three websites also have useful links to individual colleges and other sources of information.



## How do I select an option which meets my needs?

Think about your own interests, ambitions, goals and needs. There are a wide range of courses and everyone's needs and interests are different. If you are at school, talk to your Guidance Counsellor. Check out the broad range of courses available, and look up details of specific courses on the particular college's website.

Check eligibility requirements, course content, fees, other costs, location, transport and accommodation. Access and supports may be important factors for some people with disabilities. Check with the Disability Office or Access Office in the colleges you are considering about the supports they can offer.

## National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Publications [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie)

- ▶ Information Pamphlet on Further Education and Training (NCSE 2018)
- ▶ Information Pamphlet on Rehabilitative Training and Adult Day Services (NCSE 2018)
- ▶ Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs to make Successful Transitions: Guidelines for Schools (NCSE 2016)
- ▶ Planning for Life after School: Guidelines for Students with Special Educational Needs and their Parents/ Guardians (NCSE 2016)
- ▶ Post-School Education and Training: Information on Options for Adults and School Leavers with Disabilities (NCSE/NDA 2014)

## HEA Publications [www.heai.ie](http://www.heai.ie)

- ▶ National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019 (HEA 2015)

## Useful contacts and information sources<sup>3</sup>

| Agency/Service Name   | Full Web address   |
|---|--|
| <b>AHEAD</b><br>The Association for Higher Education Access and Disability                | <a href="http://www.ahead.ie">www.ahead.ie</a>                             |
| <b>Careers Portal</b><br>Career guidance website  | <a href="http://www.careersportal.ie">www.careersportal.ie</a>             |
| <b>Central Applications Office</b>  | <a href="http://www.cao.ie">www.cao.ie</a>                                 |
| <b>Citizens Information Board</b>   | <a href="http://www.citizensinformation.ie">www.citizensinformation.ie</a> |
| <b>DARE</b> Disability Access Route to Education  | <a href="http://www.accesscollege.ie">www.accesscollege.ie</a>             |
| <b>Higher Education Links Scheme</b>  | <a href="http://www.qqi.ie">www.qqi.ie</a>                                 |
| <b>National Council for Special Education</b>   | <a href="http://www.ncse.ie">www.ncse.ie</a>                               |
| <b>NFQ</b> National Framework of Qualifications   | <a href="http://www.qqi.ie">www.qqi.ie</a>                                 |
| <b>Postgraduate Applications Centre</b>   | <a href="http://www.pac.ie">www.pac.ie</a>                                 |
| <b>Qualifax</b><br>The National Learners' Database  | <a href="http://www.qualifax.ie">www.qualifax.ie</a>                       |
| <b>Student Finance</b><br>Fund for Students with Disabilities<br>Bursary Grants           | <a href="http://www.studentfinance.ie">www.studentfinance.ie</a>           |
| <b>Student Universal Support Ireland – SUSI</b><br>Student Tuition and Maintenance Grants | <a href="http://www.susi.ie">www.susi.ie</a>                               |

<sup>3</sup> This is a list of some helpful sources of additional information. The NCSE may have had no involvement with these organisations and cannot vouch for them or their staff. Due caution should always be exercised in providing information to third parties, particularly where children or vulnerable adults are concerned.