

# Students with Disabilities Engaged with Support Services in Higher Education in Ireland 2020/21



creating inclusive environments in education  
and employment for people with disabilities

**ISBN No: 978-1-8380513-6-5**

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**Published by:**

**AHEAD Educational Press  
East Hall  
UCD  
Carysfort Avenue  
Blackrock  
Co. Dublin**

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**July 2022**

**AHEAD's core work in the higher education sector is supported by the Higher Education Authority (HEA)**

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Disabilities Engaged  
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2020/21**

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# Foreword

By Dara Ryder, CEO, AHEAD



It is my pleasure to introduce the results of the AHEAD Survey on the number of students with disabilities engaging with support services in higher education in Ireland for the academic period 2020/21. I would like to take the opportunity to thank both the HEA for their continued support of AHEAD, and the wonderful professionals in higher education disability support services up and down the country who work with us to capture and present this important data.

This research, part of a now-annual series stemming back more than 25 years, provides a vital evidence base for the higher education sector, as we seek to collectively improve access to education, and student success within it.

Once again, the continued growth of the disabled student population is noted and welcome, but the report also throws up findings that pose challenging questions the sector must answer to facilitate this increase and an ever-diversifying student body.

As the caseload of over-stretched disability support services continues to rise, what can we do to alleviate the pressure, and accelerate the move towards a universally designed system which reduces the need for accommodations and spreads responsibility for inclusion across the campus?

How can we build on the huge progress made in providing greater access to higher education for people with disabilities, shifting our focus to ensuring students can equally engage in all areas and levels of study, and all facets of college life? Where can we shift our focus from equity of access for students with disabilities on entry, to equity of graduate outcomes on exit?

With a new and seemingly ambitious National Access Plan due to be launched shortly, now is the perfect time to begin addressing these questions as a community - students, staff, institutions and national bodies all have a part to play.

And we in AHEAD hope that this report can help to provide the evidence base needed to move forward with confidence.

the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are employed in the public sector has increased from 10.5 million to 13.5 million, and the number of people in the public sector who are employed in the health sector has increased from 2.5 million to 3.5 million (Department of Health 2000).

There are a number of reasons for this increase. One of the main reasons is the increasing demand for health services. The population of the UK is increasing, and the number of people who are aged 65 and over is increasing rapidly. This has led to an increase in the number of people who are in need of health services, and this has led to an increase in the number of people who are employed in the health sector.

Another reason for the increase is the increasing demand for health services in the private sector. The private sector has been growing rapidly in the UK, and this has led to an increase in the number of people who are employed in the private sector. This has led to an increase in the number of people who are employed in the health sector in the private sector.

A third reason for the increase is the increasing demand for health services in the voluntary sector. The voluntary sector has been growing rapidly in the UK, and this has led to an increase in the number of people who are employed in the voluntary sector. This has led to an increase in the number of people who are employed in the health sector in the voluntary sector.

There are a number of challenges that the health sector faces in the future. One of the main challenges is the increasing demand for health services. The population of the UK is increasing, and the number of people who are aged 65 and over is increasing rapidly. This has led to an increase in the number of people who are in need of health services, and this has led to an increase in the number of people who are employed in the health sector.

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A third challenge is the increasing demand for health services in the voluntary sector. The voluntary sector has been growing rapidly in the UK, and this has led to an increase in the number of people who are employed in the voluntary sector. This has led to an increase in the number of people who are employed in the health sector in the voluntary sector.

There are a number of ways in which the health sector can meet these challenges. One of the main ways is to increase the number of people who are employed in the health sector. This can be done by increasing the number of people who are employed in the public sector, the private sector, and the voluntary sector.

Another way is to increase the efficiency of the health sector. This can be done by increasing the number of people who are employed in the health sector, and by increasing the number of people who are employed in the health sector in the private sector.

A third way is to increase the efficiency of the health sector in the voluntary sector. This can be done by increasing the number of people who are employed in the voluntary sector, and by increasing the number of people who are employed in the health sector in the voluntary sector.

# Introduction

AHEAD is an independent, non-profit organisation working to create inclusive environments in education and employment for people with disabilities. As such, one of our primary aims within the further and higher education sectors is to foster inclusivity, equity of access, and an environment in which students with disabilities can succeed. Our work seeks to assist students by working with institutions to remove barriers that inhibit academic progression for this cohort. We also advocate for the full participation of people with disabilities in the workplace.

This research is made possible by the consistent support provided by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) as part of their commitment to further the promotion of equal opportunity in higher education (HEA, 2015). We also recognise the substantial work of the Disability Support Staff and Access Staff of each of the 25 institutions who participated and thank them for their effort and collaboration. It was these staff members who undertook the task of returning the completed surveys, which enabled us to analyse this data to inform the development of a highly relevant and complete report regarding the participation rates of students with disabilities, and other relevant information about their engagement with higher education support services in the academic year 2020/21.

This research, entitled “Students with Disabilities Engaged with Support Services in Higher Education in Ireland 2020/21”, is part of a series of now-annual research reports conducted by AHEAD, tracking participation rates over time through the lenses of disability category and area of study. AHEAD first conducted research on the participation rates of students with disabilities in 1993/94 (non-annual), (AHEAD, 1994), before moving to producing annual reports in 2008/09. From this data we explore patterns and trends, many of which help in unpacking the experience of students with disabilities, enabling us to make informed recommendations regarding the national policy landscape of higher education in Ireland. Through prolonged and continual engagement with these annual data sets, we can identify trends and patterns, enabling us to take an informed human rights-based approach in the national effort to advance equity of educational opportunity for students with disabilities.

A recent publication by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science states that higher education is “central to producing a pipeline of skills for our economy, driving innovation in enterprise, producing research which helps to meet grand challenges ranging from health to the environment, driving social mobility for individuals and fostering our shared civic values as a society” (2022:2). This research report supports the national effort to foster an inclusive environment for students with disabilities in higher education and therefore provide equal access to the social mobility that is synonymous with the completion of higher levels of education.

AHEAD would like to also draw the reader’s attention to the interactive data dashboard associated with this research that is currently available for use on our website. This dashboard now enables the user to view and interrogate all AHEAD participation rate data, from 1993/94, the inaugural year of our participation research, up to the latest research data published.<sup>1</sup>

Using this dashboard, the reader has the ability to create customised visual representations of participation data, disaggregated by disability category, fields of study etc. [The AHEAD data centre page](#) is updated every year to allow researchers or casual readers to quickly access detailed data regarding the participation rates of students with disabilities, drawing from our recent and historical (1993/94) data-sets.

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1 Please note that this dashboard is created in Tableau Public and may prove difficult to interact with using certain types of assistive technologies. If you find it more efficient to interact with the historical data reports which underpin this dashboard, they can be found [in written report format \(with accessibility features applied\) in the data section of our publications page](#). If you [have any queries around accessibility, please contact us](#) and we will endeavour to assist you.

## **AHEAD's Strategy**

The primary objective of AHEAD is to create inclusive environments for people with disabilities in education and employment. To this end, AHEAD seeks to embed flexibility and equality into the culture, capabilities and practices of higher and further education to better advance success for students with disabilities. AHEAD seeks to achieve its mission by pursuing objectives under three core strategic themes, (AHEAD, 2019a):

- To influence national policy to impact positively on the inclusion of students with disabilities in all learning environments.
- To sustain the organisation of AHEAD to promote inclusion in education and employment through the building of networks and collaboration with key strategic partners in all learning environments.
- To promote the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) by creating an understanding of UDL in all learning environments.

As part of the work undertaken to achieve this strategy, AHEAD publishes this annual participation rate data to inform our work and the work of national stakeholders, and undertakes further research, national projects, and policy submissions. As such, this participation data and our other research activities ensure that the work we produce to achieve the goals in our strategy, is evidence-informed and authentically underpinned by the voice and experiences of students and graduates with disabilities.

# Research Methodology

AHEAD distributed a detailed survey by email to the disability/access offices of 25 higher education institutions in the Republic of Ireland in May 2021, seeking participation rate statistics for the academic year 2020/21. For the purpose of this research, the term higher education institution is defined as those with whom the Higher Education Authority (HEA) works under statute or who are in receipt of core public funding (one exception outlined below). All 25 invited institutions responded and this report is informed by the data provided by each. Responding institutions are listed below and are further disaggregated by University/Technological University and IT/Other status.

To this end, the selection of participating institutions was largely determined by the fact that they are funded by the HEA, who also publish annual statistics regarding the general student population in Irish higher education, enabling us to compare these statistics to enrich our findings. The National College of Ireland, although funded by the Department of Education and Skills, was also included in the AHEAD survey because it facilitates a large student population and was therefore deemed too significant to omit. Moreover, considering the students attending The National College of Ireland are also studying NFQ levels that are commensurate with the other participating institutions. As such, the decision to include this institution is warranted, as it could be argued that it shares the same status as other responding institutions, despite the institution being in receipt of funding from a different source.

These surveys enable us to examine among other things, the number of students with disabilities engaging with supports provided by their institution, the percentage of the total student population they represent, the fields of study that students with disabilities are more likely to study in, and emerging trends in the data. This information is then disaggregated by disability category for further inquiry.

The following institutions participated in the research (every institution that was sent a survey responded and participated in the research). Responding institutions have been demarcated by their status as a University/Technological University or Institute of Technology/Other at the time of data collection:

**Universities/Technological University:**

-  **Dublin City University (DCU)**
-  **Marino Institute of Education (MIE)**
-  **Mary Immaculate College (MIC)**
-  **Maynooth University (MU)**
-  **National College of Art and Design (NCAD)**
-  **National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG)**
-  **Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI)**
-  **St. Angela's College, Sligo (St. Ang.)**
-  **Technical University Dublin (TuD)**
-  **Trinity College Dublin (TCD)**
-  **University College Cork (UCC)**
-  **University College Dublin (UCD)**
-  **University of Limerick (UL)**

**IT/Other:**

-  **Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT)**
-  **Cork Institute of Technology (CIT)**
-  **Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT)**
-  **Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkKIT)**
-  **Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT)**
-  **Institute of Technology Carlow (ITC)**
-  **Institute of Technology Sligo (ITS)**
-  **Institute of Technology, Tralee (ITTRA)**
-  **Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT)**
-  **Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT)**
-  **National College of Ireland (NCI)**
-  **Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT)**

## Technological Universities – Changing Landscape

The contemporary higher-level educational sector in Ireland is currently in the midst of a significant transition. Many of the previously titled Institutes of Technologies are merging under the banner of Technological Universities (TU). A number of these changes were initially mooted in the colloquially named 'Hunt Report', the 'National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030', (Higher Education Strategy Group, 2011). This document made a number of recommendations that precipitated the development of Technological Universities and set out the criteria for their establishment. The enactment of resulting legislation (Technological Universities Act, 2018) informs a process whereby a consortium of Institutes of Technology can submit an application to be recognised as a Technological University (TU).

There are currently five established Technological Universities. These include:

- Technological University Dublin, established January 2019.
- Munster Technological University, established January 2021.
- Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest, established October 2021.
- Atlantic Technological University, established April 2022.
- South East Technological University, established in May 2022.

However, at the time of data collection, only one Technological University had officially fully completed this transitional merging process, namely, the Technological University Dublin. Munster Technological University, an outcome of the Cork Institute of Technology and Tralee Institute of Technology merger, had undergone the process just prior to data collection. Notwithstanding this, DSS respondents from both institutions made the decision to respond separately to the survey and submitted their survey data independently for the academic year 2020/21. Therefore, much of the survey data from all responding institution is presented and delineated identically to the previous year, with these changes becoming more important in the examination of future survey data. However, for reasons of clarity, the pivot to Technological Universities, as a major transition in the Irish tertiary education system, is therefore briefly mentioned here.

# Findings

As discussed, the data used by AHEAD to inform this report was drawn from a survey that was distributed to Disability Support Service (DSS) staff from participating Higher Education institutions, in May 2021. As such, the term “Students with Disabilities”, when alluded to throughout this report, represents students with disabilities who have registered for support with the DSS in their institution.

AHEAD acknowledges that there is invariably a sizeable cohort of students who may have not have disclosed their disability to their institution, nor have they registered with their DSS in any capacity. This uncaptured cohort is a notable caveat and, therefore, should be considered in the interpretation of results. It should also be noted that two institutions that did not participate in the previous year’s report did so in 2020/21<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, although this may contribute to the rise in numerical data across all datasets, it is the representation percentage data that is considered most indicative of trends and patterns, as opposed to the predictable numerical increase. This should also be considered in the examination and discussion of the research data across all datasets in this year’s research.

## **Participation Rates of Students with Disabilities:**

This year's report is drawn from surveys returned by the DSS of 25 higher education institutions, with the data demonstrating that for the academic year 2020/21, 17,866 students with disabilities registered with DSS in responding institutions. This figure represents 6.6% of the total student population reported by the responding institutions (269,488). Both figures are indicative of a significant rise in the total student population and disability cohort relative to 2019/20. The 2019/20 survey demonstrated that 6.3% (15,846) of the student body (252,614) were registered with disability support services in their institution, with the preceding years reflecting 6.2% (2018/19, 2017/18) and 5.7% (2016/17) increases. Therefore, the most recent data continues the trend of an increasing percentage of the student population registering with the DSS in their institution year on year.

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2 DLIADT and GMIT did not respond to the previous year’s survey, but did so for this report.

These figures reflect a 13% increase in the actual number of students with disabilities engaging with higher education supports relative to 2019/20. It is interesting to note that while the total student population in the responding institutions rose 7% in the period, (AHEAD, 2021b), the increase in the percentage of students with disabilities almost doubled this at the afore-mentioned 13%.

The consistent increasing trend in the number of students with disabilities registered with the DSS is therefore sustained when our datasets are examined. AHEAD's annual participation rates data-sets indicate that there has been a 268% increase in the number of students with disabilities engaging with DSS since AHEAD began collecting data annually in 2008/09 (which recorded a student with disability populace of 4,853), (AHEAD, 2021b).<sup>3</sup> Figure 1 illustrates the substantial progress that has been made at point of entry regarding access to higher education for students with disabilities since AHEAD commenced collecting this data.

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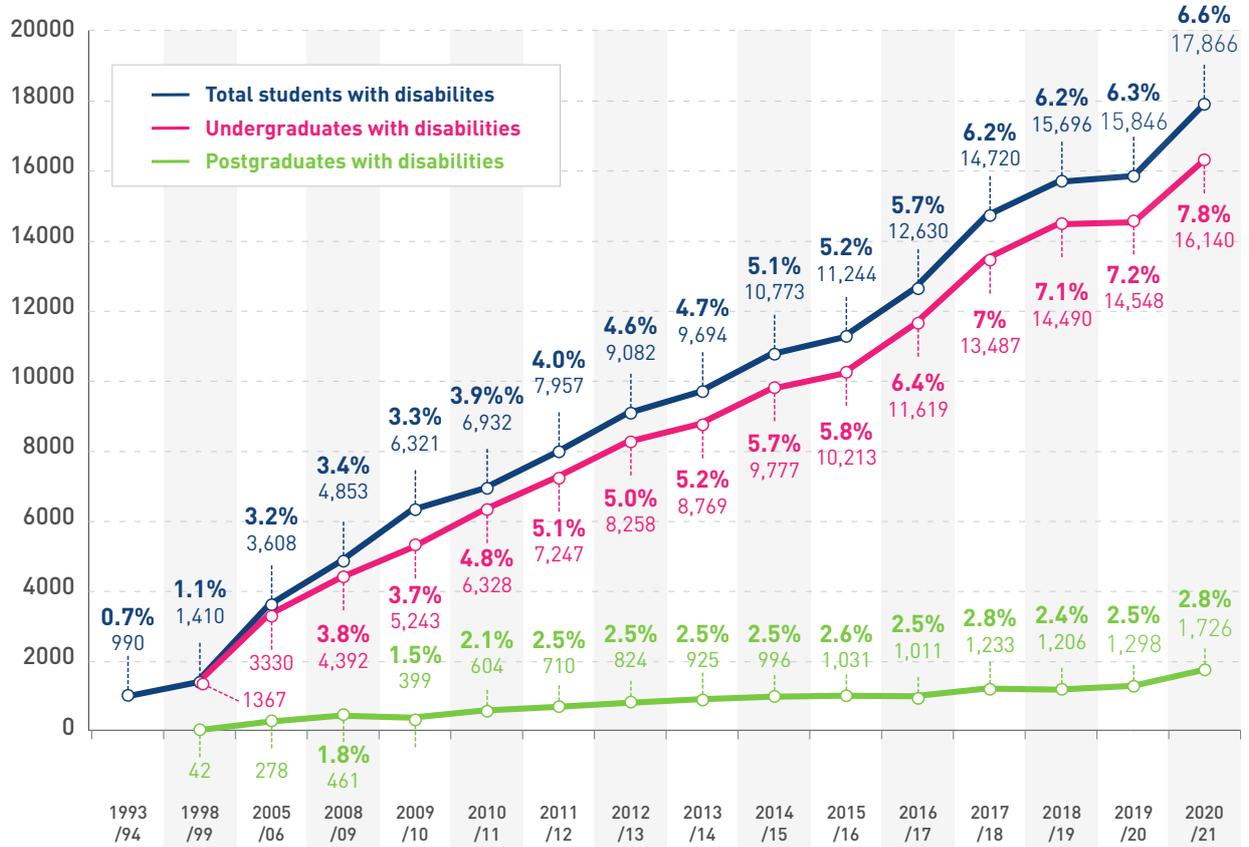
<sup>3</sup> Research prior to 2008/09 was not conducted on an annual basis. Instead, research was conducted, incrementally every three/four years.

# 17,866

students with disabilities  
registered with support services  
for the academic year 2020/21

# 268%

rise in the last 12 years



**Figure 1. Number of students with disabilities engaged with support services in higher education (and the percentage of the total student population they represent) from 1993/94 to 2020/21.**

In the academic year 2020/21, the number of students with disabilities engaging and registering with DSS in the IoT/Other sector was 5,326 or 6.3% of the total disability cohort. This figure is representative of an increase of 1,157 students or 28% relative to the previous year's dataset. The number of students with disabilities from the university sector was 12,540 or 6.8% of the total university population. Again, this is demonstrative of an increase relative to the preceding academic year's 11,677 (6.5%) university students registered with their relevant disability supports, a 7.4% rise.

A more nuanced analysis of the data from the perspective of individual institutions illustrates the variance that exists across responding institutions. The percentage of the total student population registered with the DSS across different institutions ranges from 2.9% to 11.5%. The National College of Art and Design recorded the highest rate of participation for students with disabilities at 11.5%, with Dun Laoghaire College of Art, Design and Technology (10.3%) and Trinity College Dublin (10%) recording high participation rates for this cohort. A full breakdown of the participation rates for students with disabilities by institution is listed in Appendix 1.

# Undergraduate and Postgraduate Participation

This section of the report analyses the data by exploring the participation rates of those engaging with undergraduate and postgraduate study in the 25 responding institutions as separate cohorts. Previous AHEAD research has identified a continuous and steady increase in the rate of students with disabilities represented at undergraduate level. This closer analysis and primary disaggregation of the data indicates the continuous rising trajectory for this cohort. However, while the percentage of students with disabilities studying at postgraduate level is also in ascent, the participation rate remains persistently low in comparison to that at undergraduate level.

Data collected illustrates that 16,140 undergraduate students with disabilities were registered for supports in 2020/21, representing 7.8% of the total undergraduate student body. This reflects an 11% increase in the actual number of undergraduate students with disabilities registered in relation to the total disability cohort (a rise of 1,592 students) from 2019/20 of 14,548 (7.2%).

Postgraduate students with disabilities continued to have a significantly lower participation rate across all participating institutions - just 2.8% (n=1,726 students) of the total postgraduate student population were registered with the DSS. However, the data highlights an encouraging increase of 33% in the actual numbers of postgraduate students registered for supports in relation to 2019/20 data (n=1,298), and a welcome increase in the postgraduate participation rate (up from 2.5% in 2019/20). Although an incremental increase is evident in the postgraduate with disability cohort, the comparatively low participation rate of 2.8% is a consistent trend across previous participation rates surveys (AHEAD, 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017, and 2016). This report is limited to a quantitative exploration of participation rates and, as such, we do not seek to explore the many potential variables that may inform the persistent low representation of students with disabilities at postgraduate level. However, from continuous engagement with students with disabilities, AHEAD acknowledges that a myriad of choices and barriers, from personal to systemic, often combine to advance this under-representation.

Further research is certainly warranted to fully capture the narratives, experiences, and student viewpoints that may determine the persistent under-representation of this cohort at postgraduate level and any potential impact on graduate outcomes.

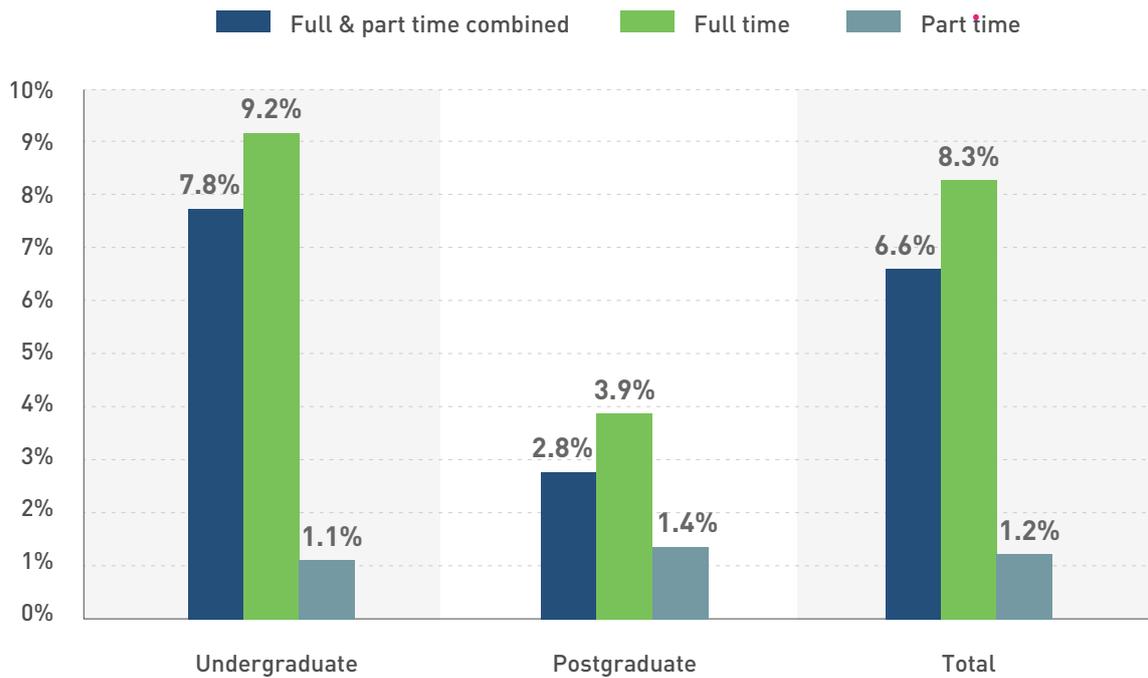
### **Full-Time and Part-Time Participation Rates:**

Responding institutions provided a detailed breakdown of the number of students with disabilities who were enrolled in full- and part-time study. This data enables a more nuanced exploration of undergraduate and postgraduate study for the academic year 2020/21. The data accumulated from responding institutions indicated that there were 17,080 full-time students from this cohort, representing 8.3% of the total number of students engaging with full-time programmes. Responding institutions reported that 786 students with disabilities were enrolled in part-time study, representing just 1.2% of all students studying part-time.

In comparison with the data from the previous year, both figures represent an increase in the actual numbers of students with disabilities participating in full- and part-time study. In 2019/20, 15,071 students with disabilities were recorded to be studying full-time, representing an increase of 2,009 students (13% increase) in 2020/21. In the same academic year, 775 students were reported to be registered with disability support services and participating in part-time study, reflective of an increase of 11 students (1% increase) to 2020/21. However, a more in-depth analysis highlights that while the participation rate of full-time students with disabilities rose markedly from 7.8% to 8.3% of the total full-time population year-on-year, the participation rate of part-time students with disabilities actually fell from 1.3% in 2019/20 to 1.2% in 2020/21.

Generally, students with disabilities have been significantly under-represented in part-time study, as evident in a number of previous AHEAD participation rate reports (AHEAD, 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017), and this low participation rate is again recorded from survey data, highlighting a lack of progress in tackling this issue nationally. As per postgraduate study, there are potentially a number of systemic and personal variables that advance this persistently low participation rate. As a descriptive research report informed primarily by quantitative data, the causes of this finding are not explored here, but certainly merit further research.

Figure 2 illustrates the breakdown of students with disabilities (as a percentage of the total student population) studying full- and part-time courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in 2020/21.



**Figure 2. Percentage of students with disabilities in full-time and part-time education as a percentage of the total student population studying each mode in 2020/21.**

## **New Entrant Undergraduates with Disabilities**

For the purpose of this research, new entrants are defined as students enrolled in the first year of an undergraduate course for the first time. The survey data for the academic year 2020/21 demonstrates that 4,324 (7.5%) of new entrant students across all responding institutions (57,397) disclosed disabilities through the registration process with the disability support service. This reflects a 6.1% (n=248) increase in the actual number from 2019/20 of 4,076, (AHEAD, 2021b). The previous year's research also reflected that 7.5% of the total number of new entrant undergraduate students (54,119) registered with the disability support service so the new entrant participation rate remained unchanged (Ibid.).

## **New Entrant Disclosure Rates—HEA Data Comparison**

As noted previously, this research only captures data on students with disabilities who are registered with the disability support services of participating institutions, and the data to inform the report is collected by AHEAD directly from these services. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) use a different methodology to gather indicative data about the percentage of new entrant students who self-identify as having a disability. To capture the data, the HEA employ a non-mandatory Equal Access Survey that is made available to all new entrants in each institution, with a high proportion of the new entrant student body completing it. In this survey, students are offered the opportunity to self-identify as having a disability. Thus, using this methodology, the HEA record a higher number and percentage of new-entrant students with disabilities engaging with higher education, and capture additional students who have not registered with disability support services by self-identify as having a disability. Importantly, the difference in the methodology between AHEAD and the HEA enables AHEAD to explore rates of disclosure (or non-disclosure) of disability for each academic year.

According to data provided to AHEAD by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) on the student population in higher education in Ireland for the academic year 2020/2021, the proportion of first year, full time, new entrants with a disability stands at 12.4%. That is nationally, 12.4% of all first year, full time, new entrant undergraduates disclose a disability through the Equal Access Survey. An interesting comparison can be made with AHEAD Survey findings for the same academic period (2020/2021) to highlight the sizable cohort of non-disclosed students with disabilities in higher education in Ireland. It should be noted when interpreting this comparison that, as referenced previously, the underlying datasets are not the same and some discrepancies exist between them.

As referenced above, the responding institutions in the AHEAD Survey reported that 7.5% of all new entrants in participating institutions in this survey period disclosed a disability and registered for support.

Despite the differences in the underlying datasets, the significant variation between the HEA figure of 12.4% (first year, full time new entrant undergraduate students who report a disability in the Equal Access Survey) and the AHEAD figure of 7.5% (first year new entrants registered for disability support in participating institutions), suggests that there is a sizeable cohort of new entrant undergraduate students with a disability who did not disclose and register for support in the academic year 2020/2021.

AHEAD recognises that disclosure of disability is a complex issue and there are likely many reasons for non-disclosure which require further investigation, such as no perceived requirements for support, a desire for independence, a lack of awareness of the availability of or benefits of support services, a lack of an often-costly formal diagnosis of disability required to register for support, or reasons related to the perceived stigma which may be felt by some individuals engaging with support services.

Indeed, Meeks and her colleagues have reported on how students with disabilities often avoid disclosing their disability and requesting accommodations for fear of bias, stigma, and misperceptions about performance, (Meeks, Case, Stergiopoulos, Evans & Petersen, 2021). Furthermore, Cole and Cawthon (2015) allude that many students with disabilities were in the process of endeavouring to attain independence and chose not to disclose as they felt secure in knowing facilities and supports were available if needed.

Additionally, registration with disability support services can often have financial implications for the student, as there is a requirement to verify disability with medical evidence. Specific types of medical diagnosis documentation are required to verify certain disabilities, and these reports are frequently costly to procure. The intersection of poverty and disability is accepted by the state (Government of Ireland 2015), with some research indicating that people with disabilities are twice as likely to be living in poverty (Watson et al., 2015). Thus, the possibility of socio-economic factors restricting students from engaging with disability support services is also a possible factor in non-disclosure and non-registration with support services.

While every student reserves the right to choose not to disclose and register for support, and many will make that choice, institutions should seek to remove any barriers that may inhibit any students with disabilities from doing so should they wish.

## **New Registrations**

New registrations are defined in this research students who register with the disability support services in their institution for the first time during the academic year. It is inclusive of students who are not new entrants, thus enabling AHEAD to calculate the number of students who did not register with support services in their first year of study, but subsequently did so. AHEAD recognises that there are likely many reasons for late registration with support services, many of which are considered above.

In 2020/21, there were 5,372 new registrations with disability support services recorded across all responding institutions. From this cohort, 1,048, of all new registrations were not new entrant students. From this data, it can be deduced that 24.2% of the total population of students with disabilities who register for supports, do not do so in their first year of study. Interestingly, the percentage of new registrations not in their first year of study was up significantly from 20% in 2019/20.

This data often epitomises the difficulties inherent in the disclosure process for students with disabilities within their respective institutions. With almost one in four students with a disability choosing to not disclose, the barriers to disclosure necessitate further inquiry. While a student reserves the right to choose not to disclose, there should be a national commitment to remove any barriers that may inhibit any students with disabilities from doing so.

## **Mature Students**

In the academic year 2020/21, there were 1,633 mature students with disabilities in the responding institutions registered with support services, representing 5% of the total number of mature students. In comparison with the preceding year's dataset (n=1,547, 9.8%), this represents a 5.6% (n=86) increase in the actual number of mature students registered.

When compared to the overall participation rate of students with disabilities registered with services in the general student population (6.6%), the comparatively lower participation rate in the mature student cohort is notable (5%).

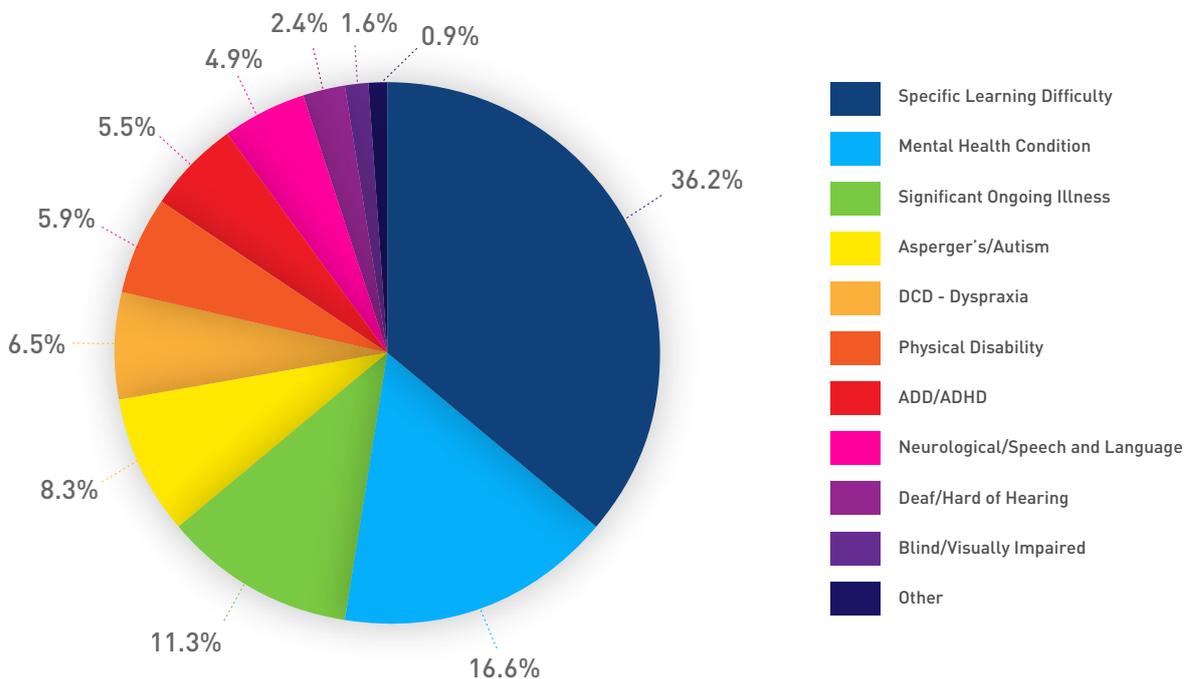
## **International Students**

Responding institutions reported that there were 665 international students registered with the disability support services in 2020/21, representing just 2.4% of the total number of reported international students. This data highlights a 5.5% decrease in the actual number of international students registered with disability support services across the responding institutions relative to 2019/20 data (704), (AHEAD, 2021b).

When compared to the overall participation rate of students with disabilities registered with services in the general student population (6.6%), the comparatively low participation rate in the international student cohort is notable (2.4%).

# Nature of Disability

AHEAD's research projects use similar disability categories to those employed by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in the Fund for Students with Disabilities guidelines for higher education. This enables consistency, standardisation, and comparison with AHEAD and HEA data. However, AHEAD's datasets also include a category entitled "Other" to cater for additional registrations with disability support services for categories, which are not, captured using the precise definitions provided by the HEA categories. One example of this is the grouping for students with intellectual disabilities. Although primary disability categories are employed as the primary identifier of students in this research, we are cognisant of a significant number of students who are registered with their institution's DSS have multiple (more than one) disabilities. Respondents reported that 20.6% of students with disabilities are registered in more than one disability category in their institution. This should be noted as the data on nature of disability is examined and interpreted.

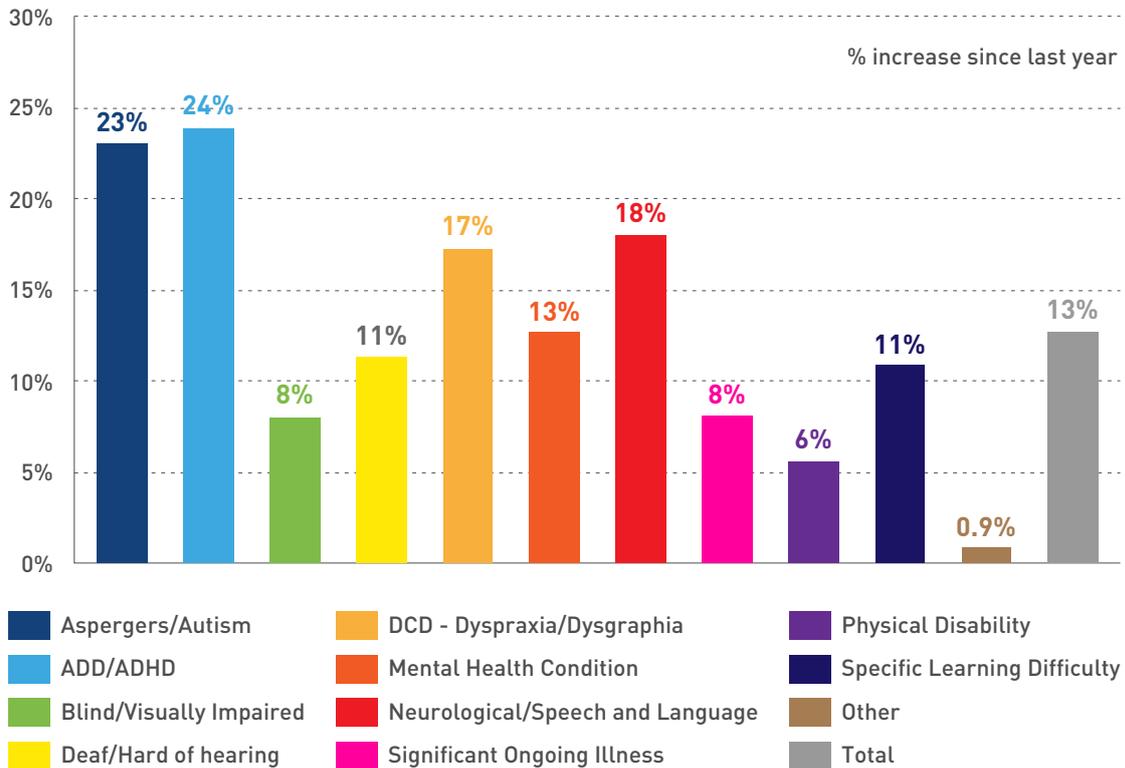


**Figure 3. Breakdown of students registered with disability support services/ Access Services by category of primary disability for 2020/21. (Postgraduate and undergraduate combined)**

Figure 3 exhibits the primary disability category breakdown of the total number of students registered with disability support services across all responding institutions as a percentage of the total, which for 2020/21 was 17,866. The most common disability category recorded across institutions was Specific Learning Difficulty at 36.2%, (n=6,484) of total students with disabilities. The second and third most common categories of disability were the Mental Health Condition category at 16.6% (n=2,974) and the Significant Ongoing Illness category at 11.3% (n=2,019) respectively. Among the lowest reported disability categories represented across the responding institutes were Other at 0.9% (n=156), Blind/Visually Impaired at 1.6% (n=282), and Deaf/Hard of Hearing at 2.4% (n=422) of total students with students. The other categories of disabilities were recorded as follows: Asperger's/Autism at 8.3% (n=1,484), DCD-Dyspraxia/Dysgraphia at 6.5% (n=1,172), ADD/ADHD at 5.5% (n=988), Physical Disability at 5.9% (n=1,050), and Neurological/Speech and Language at 4.9% (n=877) of total students with disabilities.

Due to the continual under-representation of students from the Blind/Visually Impaired and Deaf/Hard of Hearing cohorts, AHEAD recommends that the year-on-year data regarding the participation rates of students who register due to these sensory disability categories require further research and national commitments through policy, guidelines, or frameworks to reduce the barriers that preclude these cohorts from engaging with higher education. The latest Central Statistics Office (CSO) data postulates that people who report "deafness or a serious hearing impairment" represent 16.1% of the total disability population in Ireland, with 8.5% reporting "blindness or vision impairment" as their primary disability. Whilst sensory disabilities often emerge in later life, and therefore may not represent those who desire to enrol for higher education, the disparity in the statistics are noteworthy and should be further examined, (CSO, 2016).

Percentage difference between 2019/20 and 2020/21 populations by disability category



**Figure 4. Percentage difference in numbers between 2019/20 and 2020/21 by disability category**

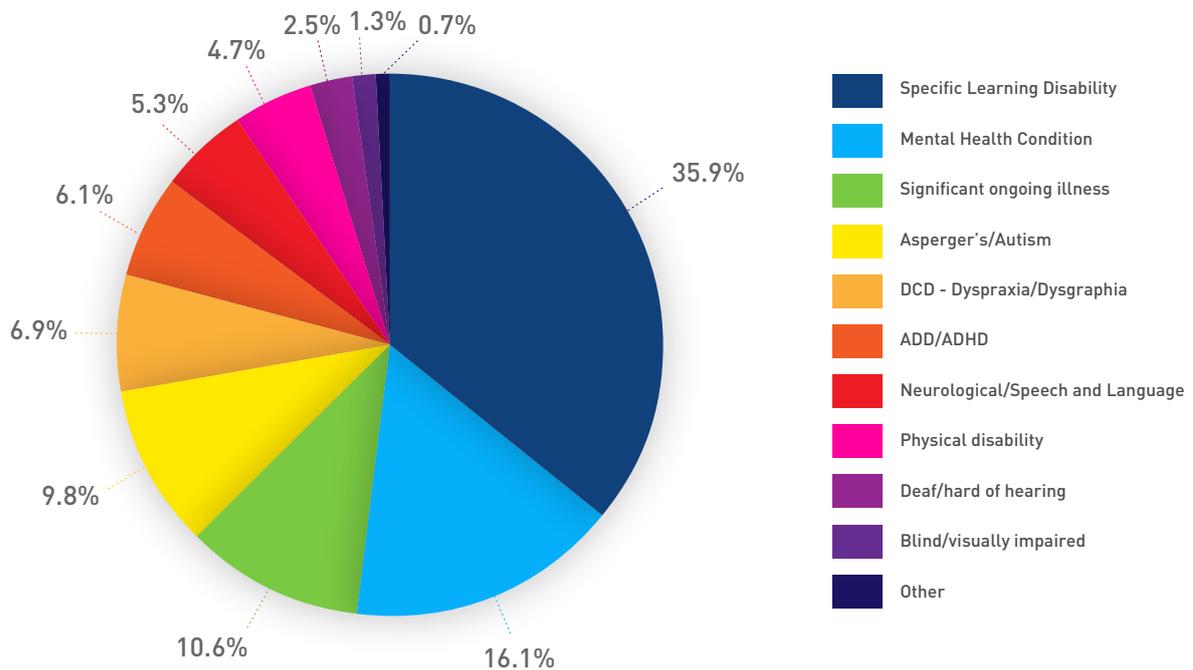
A detailed analysis of both year’s datasets illustrates an increase in the number of students registered with disability support services in all of the individual disability categories. Some of the more notable increases, relative to 2019/20 data, include Asperger’s/Autism (23.1% increase), ADD/ADHD (24% increase), and Neurological/ Speech and Language (18% increase). Other significant increases derived from the year on year data include the following categories include: Blind/Visually Impaired (8% increase), Deaf/Hard of Hearing (11.4% increase), Dyspraxia/Dysgraphia (17.3% increase), Mental Health Condition (12.7% increase), Significant Ongoing Illness (8.1% increase), Physical Disability (5.7% increase), and Specific Learning Difficulty (10.9% increase).

# 32.9%

increase in students engaging with postgraduate study across all disabilities, despite low participation at postgraduate level generally (just 2.8% of postgrad population)

## New Entrant Primary Disability Breakdown

As reported above, the total number of new entrant undergraduate students registered with disability support services in the responding institutions was 4,324. Of this cohort, 35.9% (n=1,553) of students were in the Specific Ongoing Illness category, 16.1% (n=697) were in the Mental Health Condition category, 10.6% (n=460) were in the Significant Ongoing Illness category, 9.8% (n=422) were in the Asperger's/Autism category, 6.9% (n=299) were in the DCD-Dyspraxia/Dysgraphia category, 5.3% (n=231) were in the Neurological/Speech and Language category, 4.7% (n=203) were in the Physical Disability category, 2.5% (n=109) were in the Deaf/Hard of Hearing category, 1.3% (n=57) were in the Blind/Visually Impaired category, and 0.7% (n=31) were in the "Other" category.



**Figure 5. Breakdown of New Entrant Students by Category of Primary Disability, 2020/21**

## Undergraduate Primary Disability Breakdown

In the academic year analysed in this report (2020/21), responding institutions reported that 16,140 undergraduate students were registered with disability support services, a 10.9% (1,592) increase in actual numbers of students from 2019/20 (n=14,548).

When analysed by disability category, the undergraduate groups with the highest participation rates were the same as the previous year: Significant Learning Difficulty at 36.2% (n=5,838), Mental Health Condition at 16.6% (n=2,685) and Significant Ongoing Illness at 11.3% (n=1,826) of total undergraduate students with disabilities respectively.

The other categories of disabilities were recorded as follows: Asperger's/Autism at 8.5% (n=1,376), DCD-Dyspraxia/Dysgraphia at 6.7% (n=1,077), Physical Disability at 5.6% (n=908), Neurological/ Speech and Language at 4.9% (n=787), Deaf/Hard of Hearing at 2.4% (n=382), Blind/Visually Impaired at 1.5% (n=241), and Other at 0.7% (n=109) of total undergraduate students with disabilities.

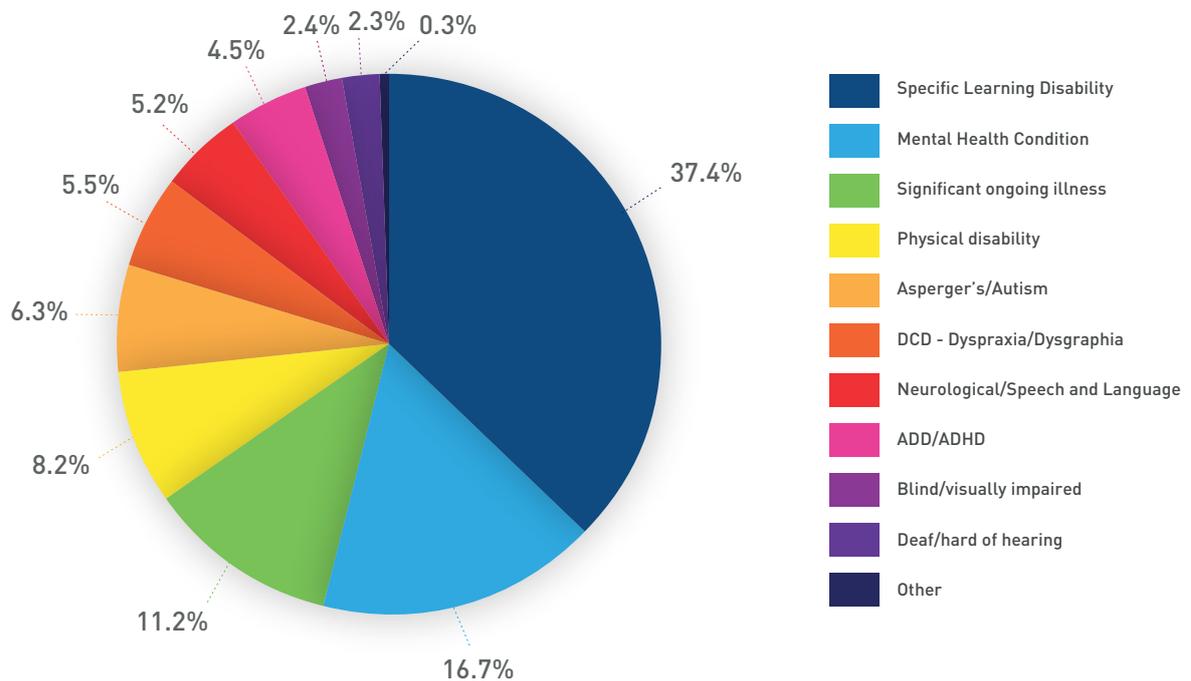
## Postgraduate Primary Disability Breakdown

Responding institutions reported that 1,726 postgraduate students with disabilities had registered with disability support services in the academic year 2020/21. This data reflects a 33% (428) increase in actual numbers from 2019/20.

Replicating findings from last year, we can see from Figure 6 that the three categories of disability with the highest participation rates were: Specific Learning Difficulty at 36.5% (n=646), Mental Health at 16.3% (n=289), and Significant Ongoing Illness at 10.9% (n=193) of total postgraduate students with disabilities.

Interestingly, this finding is replicated in the undergraduate data (previously discussed), and is consistent with the trend exhibited in the previous year's report, (AHEAD, 2021).

The other categories of disabilities were recorded as follows: Physical Disability at 8% (n=142), Asperger's/Autism at 6.1% (n=108), DCD-Dyspraxia/Dysgraphia at 5.4% (n=95), Neurological/Speech and Language at 5.1% (n=90), ADD/ADHD at 4.4% (n=77), Deaf of Hearing at 2.3% (n=41), Blind/Visually Impaired at 2.3% (n=40), and Other at 0.3% (n=5) of total postgraduate students with disabilities.



**Figure 6. Postgraduate Disability Profile (percentage).**

# Fields of Study

This section of the report explores the fields of study undertaken by students with disabilities. From the total recorded cohort of students with disabilities across all fields of study and categories of disability (n=17,866), responding institutions were asked to complete a subject breakdown corresponding with the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) definition of various subject categorisations. As a recognised and international standard, this enables comparative analysis with HEA data, which is also, classified using these categories.

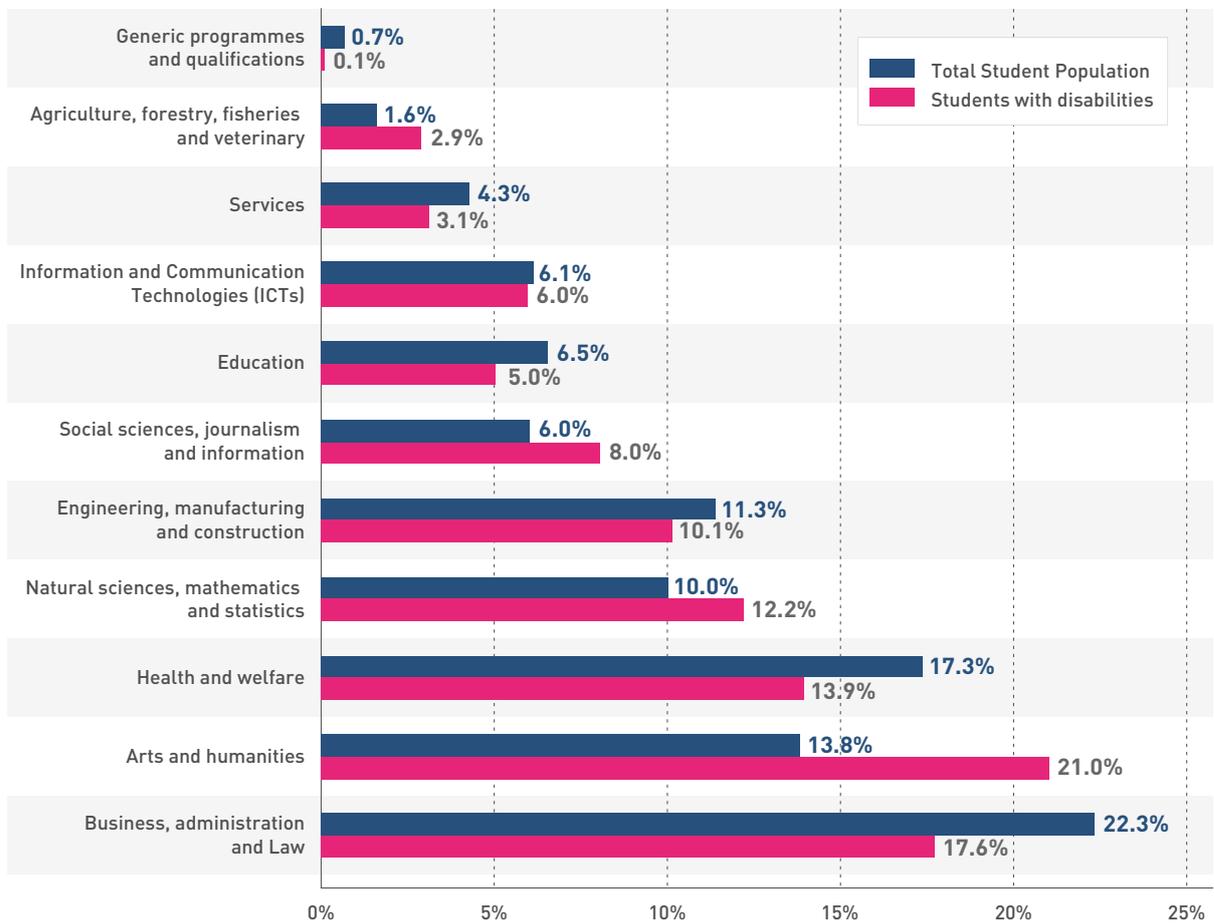
Figure 7 illustrates the percentage of students with disabilities participating in programmes in various ISCED fields of study in the academic year 2020/21 compared with the total student population. The statistics regarding the total student breakdown are taken from HEA published data for this academic year.<sup>4</sup>

Similar to the previous two years (AHEAD 2021), courses of study in Arts and Humanities recorded the highest enrolment of students with disabilities in 2020/21 (21%: n= 3,628).

Other areas of study were: Business, Administration and Law (17.6%, n=3,053, increase of 1.79%), Health and Welfare (13.9%, n=2,405, decrease of 1.02%), Science and Mathematics (12.2%, n=2,110, increase of 1.41%), Engineering, Manufacturing & Construction (10.1%, n=1,749, decrease of .4%), Social Sciences, Journalism and Information (8%, n=1,388, decrease of .71%), Information & Communication Technologies (6%, n=1,035, decrease of .82%), Education (5%, n=873, decrease of .4%), Services (3.1%, n=545, decrease of .19%), Agriculture and Veterinary (2.9%, n=504, increase of .41%), and Generic Programmes (0.1%, n=25 students, increase of 0.31%). This data, and a comparison with the fields of study breakdown for all students, can be observed in Figure 7.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://hea.ie/statistics/data-for-download-and-visualisations/enrolments/key-facts-figures-2020-2021/>



**Figure 7. Breakdown of fields of study of students with disabilities compared to the total student population.**

When comparing the data pertaining to students with disabilities with of the total student population, the greatest percentage point difference in courses of study was observed in the Art and Humanities field of study. Whilst the participation rate for students with disabilities in this Arts and Humanities was 21% of the total disability cohort, the corresponding figure for the total student population was 13.8%. This trend, a higher representation of students with disabilities in Arts and Humanities courses, is consistent with many of our previous participation rate reports (AHEAD 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017, 2016). Conversely, participation rates for courses of study in the field of Business, Administration and Law show the largest percentage point difference in which the total student participation rate is higher than that percentage of students with disabilities - 22.3% of the total student population studied in this field, compared to 17.6% of the total student with disability cohort studying in this field. This data also replicates the finding from the previous year's data, (AHEAD 2021).

Participation rates for courses in the area of Health and Welfare highlights a notable disparity: 13.9% for students with disabilities compared to 17.3% for the total student population. The field of Education also highlights a disparity with 5% of students with disabilities enrolled, compared to 6.5% for the total student population.

These findings are relevant as they highlight sustained trends of under- or over-representations in these fields of study. These findings are replicated in year-on-year benchmarking (AHEAD 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017, and 2016). There is a myriad of possible reasons why these findings are repeated, and further research is required to analyse why some of these disparities are more significant than others. Such research is important in terms of commitments to The Bologna Convention (which aspires to have an educational sphere reflective of civil society) and The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), where access to tertiary education on an equal basis with others is enshrined.

## Fields of Study Breakdown by Disability

The 2020/21 surveys completed by the 25 responding institutions included data that disaggregated the participation rates of students with disabilities by areas of study and disability categories. This section of the report now examines this data to explore the breakdown of disability category, cross-referenced with field of study.

Separate tables of data that represent each disability category are included to facilitate interpretation of the data. Subsequently, a number of key findings are briefly discussed and compared with the 2019/20 dataset. The disability category “Other” is excluded from this analysis due to the diversity in disabilities included in this category. Again, fields of study are based on the ISCED Classifications.

In terms of interpretation of the data in this section, it should be noted that one responding institution was unable to provide a breakdown of students with disabilities by fields of study (n=551 students). To enable accurate analysis, this has been adjusted for in the percentage calculations.

Thus, the tables in this section present an individual breakdown of each disability category by field of study. Each table consists of the participation rates in all fields of study across (i) the total student population (as per HEA data), (ii) the total students with disability population breakdown across all fields of study (as per AHEAD data), (iii) the percentage of students in this disability cohort who are enrolled in each field of study, and (iv) the number of students in this category of disability enrolled across each field of study.

## ADD/ADHD

**Table 1 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the ADD/ADHD category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all students with disabilities (SWD) and for the student population in general.**

5.5% of all SWDs are in ADD/ADHD Category	% of Total Students Studying in this Field	% of Total SWD Studying in this Field	% of Students in ADD/ADHD Category Studying in this Field	Numbers in ADD/ADHD Category Studying in this Field
Generic Programmes and Qualifications	0.7%	0.1%	0.1% <sup>5</sup>	1
Education	6.5%	5.0%	2.1%	20
Arts and Humanities	13.8%	21.0%	24.9%	237
Social Sciences, Journalism, and Information	6.0%	8.0%	9.9%	94
Business, Administration, and Law	22.3%	17.6%	17.2%	163
Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics	10.0%	12.2%	11.9%	113
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	6.1%	6.0%	7.1%	67
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	11.3%	10.1%	10.5%	100
Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary	1.6%	2.9%	2.1%	20
Health and Welfare	17.3%	13.9%	12.3%	117
Services	4.3%	3.1%	1.9%	18
<b>Total</b>				950 <sup>6</sup>

5 Highest and lowest participation rates in each table have been marked with green/red backgrounds for ease of interpretation.

6 The totals in these tables differ from the previously discussed totals as one institution was unable to provide a breakdown fields of study for 551 students.

- Almost one in four students in the ADD/ADHD category were enrolled in Arts and Humanities (24.9%), with slightly less than one in five enrolled in Business, Administration, and Law (17.2%). This over/under-representation in these fields is characteristic of the total students with disabilities cohort.
- Students in this disability category were less than half as likely (2.1%) than the general disability cohort (5%) to study in field of Education, and three times less likely than the total student population (6.5%) to be enrolled in this field of study.
- The two fields of study that students in this category were least likely to be enrolled in were Services (1.9%) and Generic Programmes and Qualifications (0.1%).
- The majority of other fields of study were relatively consistent with Figure 8, which represents a breakdown of fields of study by the students with disability (total) cohort.

## Asperger's/Autism

**Table 2 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Asperger's/Autism category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all students with disabilities (SWD) and for the student population in general.**

8.3% of all SWDs are in Asperger's/Autism Category	% of Total Students Studying in this Field	% of Total Students with Disabilities Studying in this Field	% of Students in Asperger's/Autism Category Studying in this Field	Numbers in Asperger's/Autism Category Studying in this Field
Generic Programmes and Qualifications	0.7%	0.1%	0.1%	2
Education	6.5%	5.0%	1.3%	18
Arts and Humanities	13.8%	21.0%	31.0%	444
Social Sciences, Journalism and Information	6.0%	8.0%	6.2%	89
Business, Administration, and Law	22.3%	17.6%	10.9%	156
Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics	10.0%	12.2%	17.0%	244
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	6.1%	6.0%	15.9%	228
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	11.3%	10.1%	9.8%	140
Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary	1.6%	2.9%	1.0%	15
Health and welfare	17.3%	13.9%	4.6%	66
Services	4.3%	3.1%	2.1%	30
<b>Total</b>				1,432

- Students in the Asperger's/Autism category were five times less likely (1.3%) than the total student population to be enrolled in Education (6.5%), and four times less likely than the total student with disability population (5%).
- Slightly less than one in three (31%) students in this disability category were enrolled in Arts and Humanities courses, compared to approximately one in five of all students with disabilities (8%) and one in seven of the total student population (6%).
- Students from this category were half as likely to be enrolled in Business, Administration, and Law (10.9%) when compared with the total student population enrolled in these fields of study (22.3%), while relative to Information and Communication Technologies, this category of students were almost three times as likely to be enrolled in this field of study (15.9%) than the total student population (6.1%) and the total student with disability cohort (6%).
- Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary and Generic Programmes and Qualifications (both 0.1%) were the fields of study with the lowest rate of participation for this category, with Arts and Humanities (31%) and Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics (17%) being the two fields of study with the highest representation.
- This category of disability was under-represented in the Health and Welfare field of study (4.6%), with these students being almost four times less likely to be enrolled in this field of study than the total student population (17.3%).

## Blind/Visually Impaired

**Table 3 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Blind/Visually Impaired category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all students with disabilities (SWD) and for the student population in general.**

1.6% of all SWDs are in Blind/Visually Impaired Category	% of Total Students Studying in this Field	% of Total Students with Disabilities Studying in this Field	% of Students in Blind/Visually Impaired Category Studying in this Field	Numbers in Blind/Visually Impaired Studying in this Field
Generic Programmes and Qualifications	0.7%	0.1%	0.0%	0
Education	6.5%	5.0%	4.0%	11
Arts and Humanities	13.8%	21.0%	23.3%	64
Social Sciences, journalism, and Information	6.0%	8.0%	6.9%	19
Business, Administration, and Law	22.3%	17.6%	22.2%	61
Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics	10.0%	12.2%	12.0%	33
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	6.1%	6.0%	6.2%	17
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	11.3%	10.1%	5.5%	15
Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary	1.6%	2.9%	1.5%	4
Health and welfare	17.3%	13.9%	15.6%	43
Services	4.3%	3.1%	2.9%	8
<b>Total</b>				<b>275</b>

- Students in the Blind/Visually Impaired category were less than half as likely to be enrolled in Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction courses (5.5%) relative to the total percentage of student in this field of study (11.3%).
- Students in this disability category were half as likely (5.5%), relative to the total student with disability cohort (11.3%), to be enrolled in Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction courses.
- Blind and Visually Impaired students were approximately half as likely to be enrolled in Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary courses (1.5%) relative to the total student with disability cohort (2.9%).
- The courses of study that this cohort of student were most likely to be enrolled in were in the Arts and Humanities field (23.3%), and in the Business, Administration, and Law field (22.2%).

## Deaf/Hard of Hearing

**Table 4 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Deaf/Hard of Hearing category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all students with disabilities (SWD) and for the student population in general.**

2.4% of all SWDs are in Deaf/ Hard of Hearing Category	% of Total Students Studying in this Field	% of Total Students with Disabilities Studying in this Field	% of Students in Deaf/Hard of Hearing Category Studying in this Field	Numbers in Deaf/ Hard of Hearing Category Studying in this Field
Generic Programmes and Qualifications	0.7%	0.1%	0.0%	0
Education	6.5%	5.0%	6.8%	28
Arts and Humanities	13.8%	21.0%	21.5%	89
Social Sciences, Journalism, and Information	6.0%	8.0%	8.2%	34
Business, Administration, and Law	22.3%	17.6%	19.1%	79
Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics	10.0%	12.2%	12.3%	51
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	6.1%	6.0%	4.6%	19
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	11.3%	10.1%	8.2%	34
Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary	1.6%	2.9%	3.1%	13
Health and Welfare	17.3%	13.9%	15.3%	63
Services	4.3%	3.1%	0.7%	3
<b>Total</b>				<b>413</b>

- The percentages of students in the Deaf/Hard of Hearing category who were studying in the various field of study were reasonably consistent with the percentages that were reflective of students with disabilities in general. However, students in the Deaf/Hard of Hearing Category were more than four times less likely to be enrolled in the Services field of study.
- The two areas of study with the highest participation rate for this cohort were Arts and Humanities (21.5%) and Business, Administration, and Law (19.1%).
- The two fields of study with the lowest participation rate for this cohort were Services (0.7%) and Generic Programmes and Qualifications (0%).

## DCD-Dyspraxia

**Table 5 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the DCD-Dyspraxia category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all students with disabilities (SWD) and for the student population in general.**

6.6% of all SWDs are in DCD - Dyspraxia Category	% of Total Students Studying in this Field	% of Total Students with Disabilities Studying in this Field	% of Students in DCD - Dyspraxia Category Studying in this Field	Numbers in DCD - Dyspraxia Studying in this Field
Generic Programmes and Qualifications	0.7%	0.1%	0.0%	0
Education	6.5%	5.0%	3.6%	40
Arts and Humanities	13.8%	21.0%	23.7%	267
Social Sciences, Journalism, and Information	6.0%	8.0%	7.7%	87
Business, Administration, and Law	22.3%	17.6%	22.3%	251
Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics	10.0%	12.2%	10.8%	122
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	6.1%	6.0%	9.6%	108
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	11.3%	10.1%	9.7%	109
Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary	1.6%	2.9%	2.0%	23
Health and Welfare	17.3%	13.9%	7.2%	81
Services	4.3%	3.1%	3.4%	38
<b>Total</b>				<b>1,126</b>

- This cohort of students was almost half as likely to be enrolled in Health and Welfare courses of study than the general students with disability cohort, and were less than half as likely relative to the total student population.
- Students in this disability category were almost half as likely to be enrolled in the field of Education, relative to the general disability cohort. Students in this disability category were one and a half times as likely to be enrolled on courses related to Information and Communication Technologies.
- Students in this category had the highest participation rate in the Arts and Humanities (23.7%) and Business, Administration and Law (2.3%) fields of study.
- The fields of study with the lowest participation rate within this disability category were Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary (2%) and Generic Programmes and Qualifications (0%).

## Mental Health Condition

**Table 6 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Mental Health Condition category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all students with disabilities (SWD) and for the student population in general.**

16.6% of all SWDs are in Mental Health Condition Category	% of Total Students Studying in this Field	% of Total Students with Disabilities Studying in this Field	% of Students in Mental Health Condition Category Studying in this Field	Numbers in Mental Health Condition Category Studying in this Field
Generic Programmes and Qualifications	0.7%	0.1%	0.2%	6
Education	6.5%	5.0%	3.8%	111
Arts and humanities	13.8%	21.0%	26.9%	784
Social sciences, journalism and information	6.0%	8.0%	11.7%	341
Business, administration and law	22.3%	17.6%	14.2%	414
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	10.0%	12.2%	13.7%	400
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	6.1%	6.0%	4.6%	133
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	11.3%	10.1%	5.0%	145
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	1.6%	2.9%	2.3%	67
Health and welfare	17.3%	13.9%	16.0%	468
Services	4.3%	3.1%	1.7%	49
<b>Total</b>				<b>2,918</b>

- Students in this disability category (5%) were approximately half as likely to be enrolled in the Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction field of study than total of students studying this field (11.3%), and students from the general disability cohort (10.1%).
- Students in this disability category were less than half as likely as the general population, and almost half as likely as the total student with disability population, to be studying in this area of study.
- The highest participation rates for students in the Mental Health Condition category were in relation to the Health and Welfare (16%) and Arts and Humanities (26.9%, almost twice the rate for the general student population) fields of study.
- The lowest participation rates were for courses in the Services (1.7%) and Generic Programmes and Qualifications (0.2%) fields of study

## Neurological/Speech and Language

**Table 7 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Neurological/Speech and Language category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all students with disabilities (SWD) and for the student population in general.**

4.9% of all SWDs are in Neurological/Speech and Language Category	% of Total Students Studying in this Field	% of Total Students with Disabilities Studying in this Field	% of Students in Neurological/Speech and Language Category Studying in this Field	Numbers in Neurological/Speech and Language Studying in this Field
Generic Programmes and Qualifications	0.7%	0.1%	0.4%	3
Education	6.5%	5.0%	5.4%	45
Arts and Humanities	13.8%	21.0%	20.9%	173
Social Sciences, Journalism, and Information	6.0%	8.0%	8.6%	71
Business, Administration, and Law	22.3%	17.6%	20.0%	165
Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics	10.0%	12.2%	14.1%	117
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	6.1%	6.0%	3.9%	32
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	11.3%	10.1%	8.9%	74
Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary	1.6%	2.9%	2.3%	19
Health and Welfare	17.3%	13.9%	13.7%	113
Services	4.3%	3.1%	1.8%	15
Total				827

- Students in this disability category were two and a half times as likely as the total disability population to be studying in the area of Generic Programmes and Qualifications (0.4%), and just over half as likely to be enrolled in this field of study relative to the general student population.
- Students in this disability category were a little more than half as likely to be engaged in the Services field of study (1.8%) compared to the total students with disabilities cohort (3.1%). The fields of study with the lowest rates of participation in this disability category reported by responding institutions were Services (1.8%) and Generic programmes and qualifications, (0.4%).
- The two fields of study with the highest reported participation rate were Arts and Humanities (20.9%) and Business, Administration, and Law (20%).

## Significant On-going Illness

**Table 8 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Significant On-going Illness category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all students with disabilities (SWD) and for the student population in general.**

11.3% of all SWDs are in Significant Ongoing Illness Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total Students with Disabilities Studying Field	% of Students in Significant Ongoing Illness Category Studying Field	Numbers in Significant Ongoing Illness Category Studying Field
Generic Programmes and Qualifications	0.7%	0.1%	0.2%	4
Education	6.5%	5.0%	7.2%	141
Arts and Humanities	13.8%	21.0%	19.8%	389
Social Sciences, Journalism and Information	6.0%	8.0%	7.3%	143
Business, Administration, and Law	22.3%	17.6%	18.6%	366
Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics	10.0%	12.2%	14.9%	293
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	6.1%	6.0%	4.0%	79
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	11.3%	10.1%	7.9%	156
Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary	1.6%	2.9%	2.0%	39
Health and Welfare	17.3%	13.9%	16.9%	333
Services	4.3%	3.1%	1.3%	26
<b>Total</b>				<b>1,969</b>

- Students in this disability category were less than half as likely (1.3%) as other students with disabilities (3.1%) to be enrolled in the Services field of study, and over three times less likely than the general student population (4.3%).
- Students in this disability category were significantly more likely to study in the field of Education (7.2%) than other students with disabilities (5%).
- This cohort of students was significantly less likely to study in the field of Information and Communication Technologies (4%) as the total student with disability cohort (6%) and the total student population (6.1%).

## Physical Disability

**Table 9 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Physical Disability category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all students with disabilities (SWD) and for the student population in general.**

5.9% of all SWDs are in Physical Disability Category	% of Total Students Studying in this Field	% of Total Students with Disabilities Studying in this Field	% of Students in Physical Disability Category Studying in this Field	Numbers in Physical Disability Category Studying in this Field
Generic Programmes and Qualifications	0.7%	0.1%	0.2%	2
Education	6.5%	5.0%	6.9%	70
Arts and Humanities	13.8%	21.0%	19.7%	199
Social Sciences, Journalism and Information	6.0%	8.0%	9.8%	99
Business, Administration, and Law	22.3%	17.6%	18.2%	184
Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics	10.0%	12.2%	11.5%	116
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	6.1%	6.0%	6.9%	70
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	11.3%	10.1%	5.7%	58
Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary	1.6%	2.9%	3.7%	37
Health and Welfare	17.3%	13.9%	15.9%	161
Services	4.3%	3.1%	1.6%	16
<b>Total</b>				<b>1,012</b>

- Students from this disability category were approximately half as likely to be enrolled in Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction (5.7%) than the total student with disability cohort (10.1%) and total students studying this field (11.3%).
- These students were significantly more likely to study Education (6.9%), relative to the total student with disability population (5%).
- Students in this disability category were approximately half as likely to study in the field of Services (1.6%) than the total students with disabilities population (3.1%).

## Specific Learning Difficulty

**Table 10 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Specific Learning Difficulty Category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all students with disabilities (SWD) and for the student population in general.**

36.3% of all SWDs are in Specific Learning Difficulty Category	% of Total Students Studying in this Field	% of Total Students with Disabilities Studying in this Field	% of Students in Specific Learning Difficulty Category Studying in this Field	Numbers in Specific Learning Difficulty Category Studying in this Field
Generic Programmes and Qualifications	0.7%	0.1%	0.1%	7
Education	6.5%	5.0%	5.7%	361
Arts and Humanities	13.8%	21.0%	15.5%	972
Social Sciences, Journalism and Information	6.0%	8.0%	6.4%	402
Business, Administration, and Law	22.3%	17.6%	19.2%	1205
Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics	10.0%	12.2%	9.8%	613
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	6.1%	6.0%	4.4%	276
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	11.3%	10.1%	14.5%	910
Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary	1.6%	2.9%	4.1%	260
Health and Welfare	17.3%	13.9%	14.9%	938
Services	4.3%	3.1%	5.4%	340
<b>Total</b>				<b>6,284</b>

- In the Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary field of study, this category of students (4.1%) were over twice as likely to be enrolled when compared with the total student population (1.6%), and one and a half times as likely relative to the total disability cohort (2.9%).
- Students in this category enrolled in Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction courses (14.5%) were significantly more likely to be participating in this field of study relative to the total student with disability population (10.1).
- The fields of study with the highest states of participation reported by responding participants were Business, Administration, and Law (19.2%) and Arts and Humanities (15.5%).
- The fields of study with the lowest rates of participation relative to this disability category cohort were Generic Programmes and Qualifications (0.1%) and Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary (4.1%).

## Other

**Table 11 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Other category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all students with disabilities and for the student population in general.**

0.6% of all SWDs are in Other Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total Students with Disabilities Studying Field	% of Students in Other Category Studying Field	Numbers in Other Category Studying Field
Generic Programmes and Qualifications	0.7%	0.1%	0.0%	0
Education	6.5%	5.0%	25.7%	28
Arts and Humanities	13.8%	21.0%	9.2%	10
Social Sciences, Journalism and Information	6.0%	8.0%	8.3%	9
Business, Administration, and Law	22.3%	17.6%	8.3%	9
Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics	10.0%	12.2%	7.3%	8
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	6.1%	6.0%	5.5%	6
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	11.3%	10.1%	7.3%	8
Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary	1.6%	2.9%	6.4%	7
Health and Welfare	17.3%	13.9%	20.2%	22
Services	4.3%	3.1%	1.8%	2
<b>Total</b>				109

**85%**

**of students with disabilities  
were recommended exam  
accommodations**

# Examination Accommodations

As a result of the impact of Covid-19 on assessment formats in the responding institutions, a breakdown of the realisation of recommended examination accommodations was difficult for the majority of institutions to ascertain accurately. Therefore, although recommended accommodations were provided by the majority of responding institutions, reporting the number of exam accommodations that were actually implemented for students with disabilities was not possible across any responding institutions. Fourteen of responding institutions stated that they were unable to provide this specific data, as many of these institutions used at-home examination, continuous and/or alternative means of assessment for the academic year 2020/21, as opposed to their traditional in-person examinations.

AHEAD's research that explored the "Learning from Home" (AHEAD, 2020, 2021a) experience for students with disabilities demonstrated that, for many students with disabilities, the imposed changes in examination format was welcomed. This section of the research is predicated upon recommended examination accommodations elicited from needs assessments reports, as it has not been possible to determine the actual number of accommodations that were implemented by responding institutions, as per previous AHEAD research informed by participation rates, (AHEAD, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2020,).

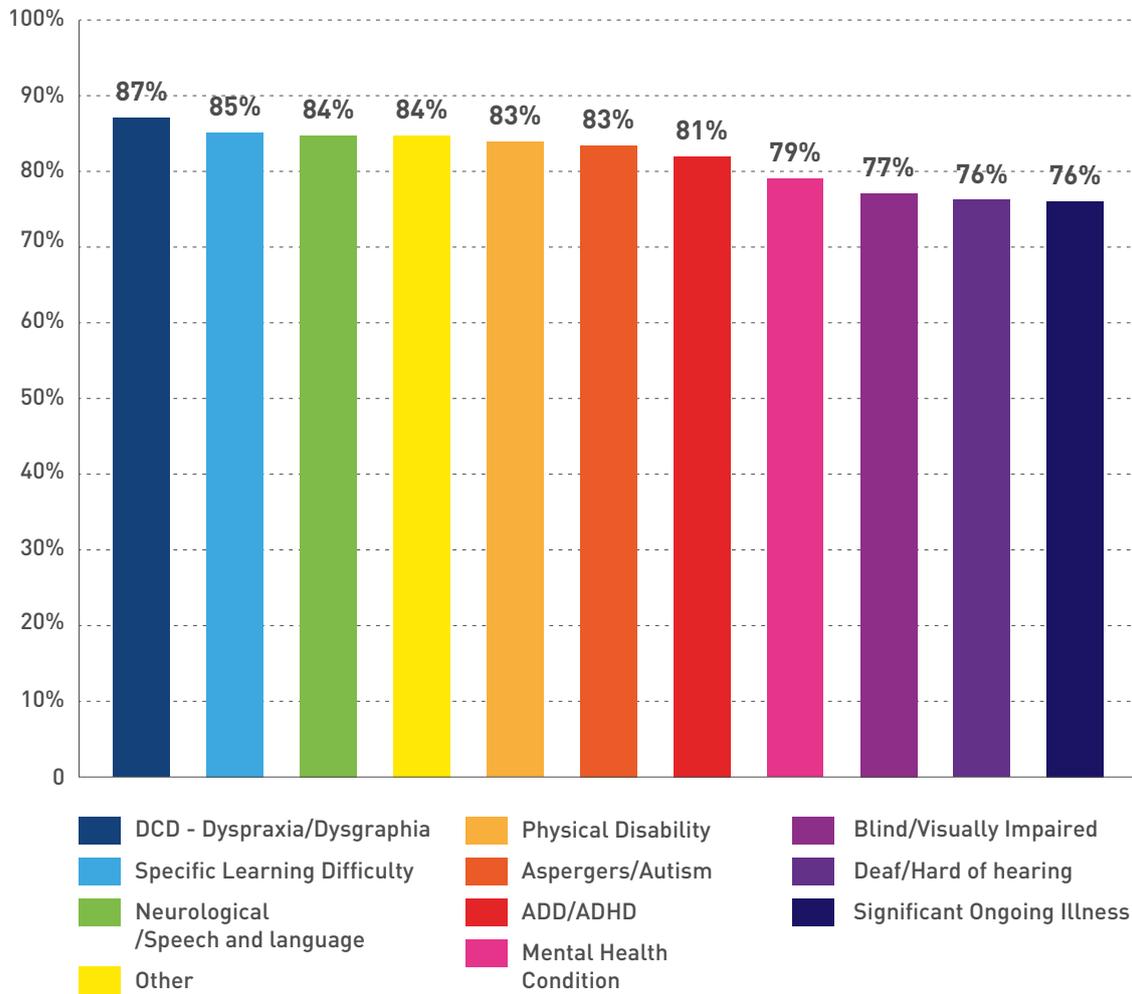
Responding institutions identified a total of 15,162 students who had one or more exam accommodations recommended in their needs assessments report. This represents 85% of total students with disabilities in the responding institutions. In comparison with 2019/20 data, this shows a yearly increase of 1,367 students (from 13,795 students), or a 9.9% increase on the number of students receiving exam accommodations relative to the previous year's data-sets, however the percentage of total students with disabilities in receipt of exam accommodations, dropped from 87% to 85% in the same period.

Although it is accepted that 2020/21 was unique in terms of being a challenging and difficult academic year because of Covid-19, it is notable that none of the responding institutions were able to provide accurate statistics in relation to the actual implementation of recommended examination accommodations. This potentially highlights the need for increased oversight by support services to ensure that each student's needs assessment recommendations are implemented fully and accurately. This is again synonymous with our Learning from Home Research (AHEAD, 2020, 2021a), in which a sizeable cohort of students reported that the recommended accommodations contained in their needs assessment report were not fully applied. With improved oversight and inter-departmental communication, this issue could possibly be remedied to enable students to access all of the supports agreed with the institution. Institutions should consider the resource implications for already over-stretched support services in ensuring quality in the delivery of supports, and the legal risk of a lack of quality assurance measures.

## Examination Accommodations by Category of Disability

As noted, the majority of responding institutions were unable to provide a detailed breakdown of examination accommodations that were implemented. However, all but one of the responding institutions did provide a breakdown of recommended exam accommodations by category of disability. The one responding institution unable to provide the data breakdown for students with disabilities registered with disability (n=507) is taken into account when interpreting the numerical data and percentages regarding category of disability.

In 2020/21, the responding institutions that did provide a breakdown of recommended accommodations by disability category indicated that the percentage range across all disability categories in which students had been recommended at least one accommodation was between 76% (Significant Ongoing Illness and Deaf/Hard of Hearing) and 87% (DCD-Dyspraxia/Dysgraphia). This is illustrated in Figure 8. Specific Learning Difficulty was the second highest category for recommended accommodations. These statistics replicate those from last year (AHEAD, 2021). Upon closer examination, the categories with the highest percentage of students who were recommended exam accommodations were DCD-Dyspraxia (87%, n=1,014 students), Specific Learning Difficulty (85%, n=5,490 students) and Neurological/Speech and Language (84%, n=739 students), and Other (84%, n=96 students). Conversely, the two categories with the lowest percentage were Significant Ongoing Illness (76%, n=1,530 students) and Deaf/Hard of Hearing (76%, n=319 students), with Blind/Visually Impaired marginally higher (77%, n=216 students). These statistics are again similar to those from last year (AHEAD 2021), in that the DCD-Dyspraxia and Deaf/Hard of Hearing categories had the highest and lowest percentages of recommended accommodations respectively.

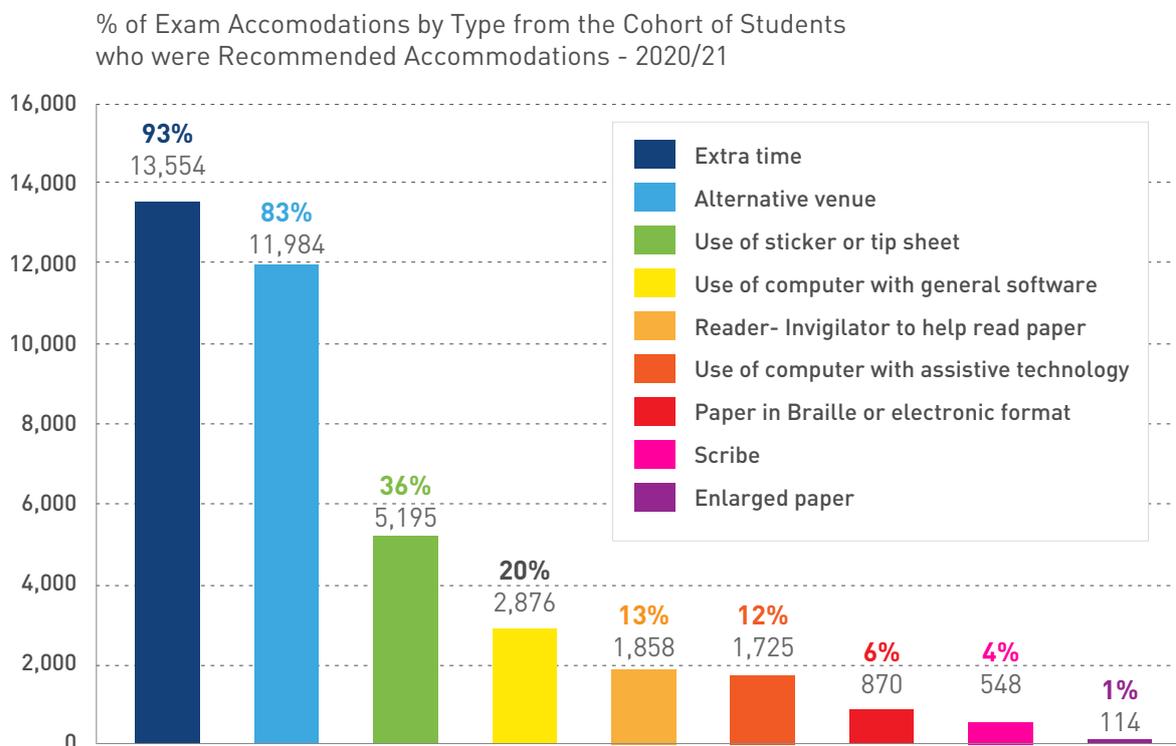


**Figure 8. Breakdown of Exam Accommodations recommended by % of Disability Category 2020/21<sup>7</sup>**

<sup>7</sup> Percentages have been adjusted to reflect the 507 students from the institution that was unable to provide this data.

## Examination Accommodations by Type

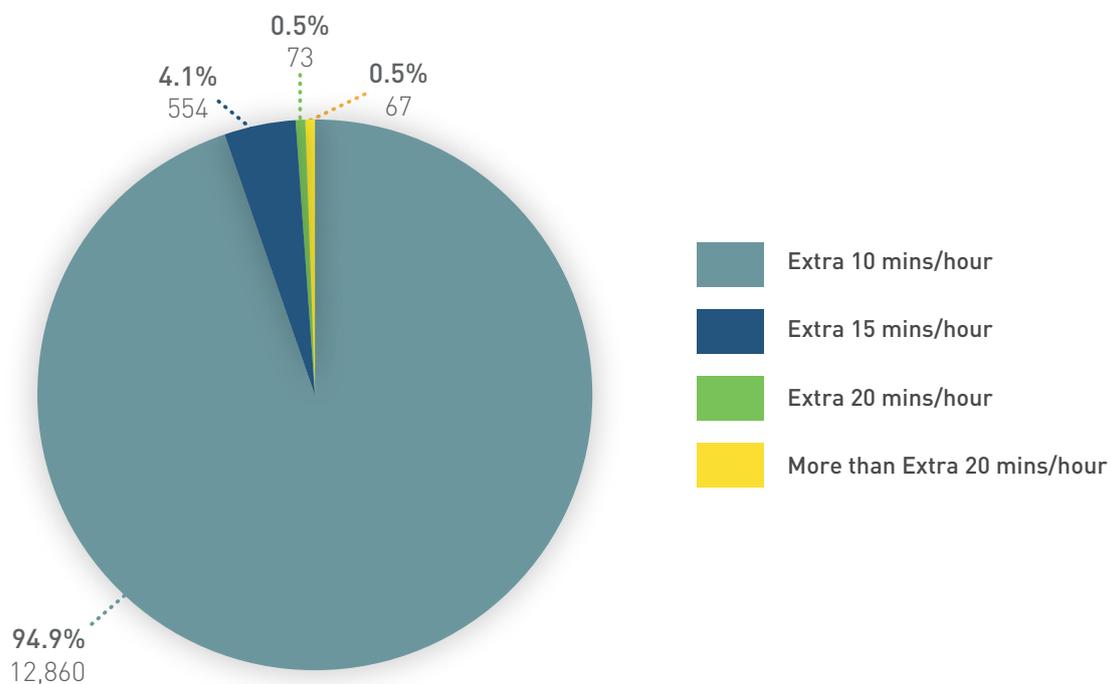
All but one responding institution (n=653), provided disaggregated data regarding the type of exam accommodations that were recommended to students in their needs assessment for the year 2020/21, and this is considered when calculating percentages by accommodation type. The following accommodations were included in this inquiry: extra time, alternative venue, use of tip sheets/stickers, reader-invigilator to help read paper, use of computers with general software of assistive technology installed, Scribe, enlarged paper or paper in Braille or electronic format. Figure 9 illustrates this breakdown visually with the percentage of students with disabilities who received accommodations and the number of students recommended these accommodations in the responding institutions. The most recommended examination accommodation (as with a number of our previous participation report studies) was extra time (93%, n=13,554 students), (AHEAD, 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017).



**Figure 9. Breakdown of examination recommended accommodations by students with disabilities in 2020/21.**

## Extra Time Breakdown

Of the 15,162 students who had recommendations for examination accommodations, 13,554 (93%) had a recommendation for extra time in which to complete their examination (the most common recommendation). Accommodations related to extra time are traditionally broken down into four categories; (i) an extra 10 minutes, (ii) an extra 15 minutes, (iii) an extra 20 minutes, and (iv) more than 20 minutes per hour of the duration of the examination. The suitability of these arbitrary time allocations for certain disabilities is debatable. However, this is beyond the scope of this research and is explored in more depth in our Learning from Home studies, (AHEAD, 2020, 2021a). Of the 13,554 students who had a recommendation for extra time in their needs assessment<sup>8</sup>, 12,860 (94.9%) were recommended an extra 10 minutes per hour, 554 (4.1%) an extra 15 minutes per hour, 73 (0.5%) an extra 20 minutes per hour, and 67 students (0.5%) were recommended over 20 minutes per hour of examination time. These figures are illustrated in Figure 10, which is a visual breakdown of extra time examination accommodations from responding institutions for the academic year 2020/21.

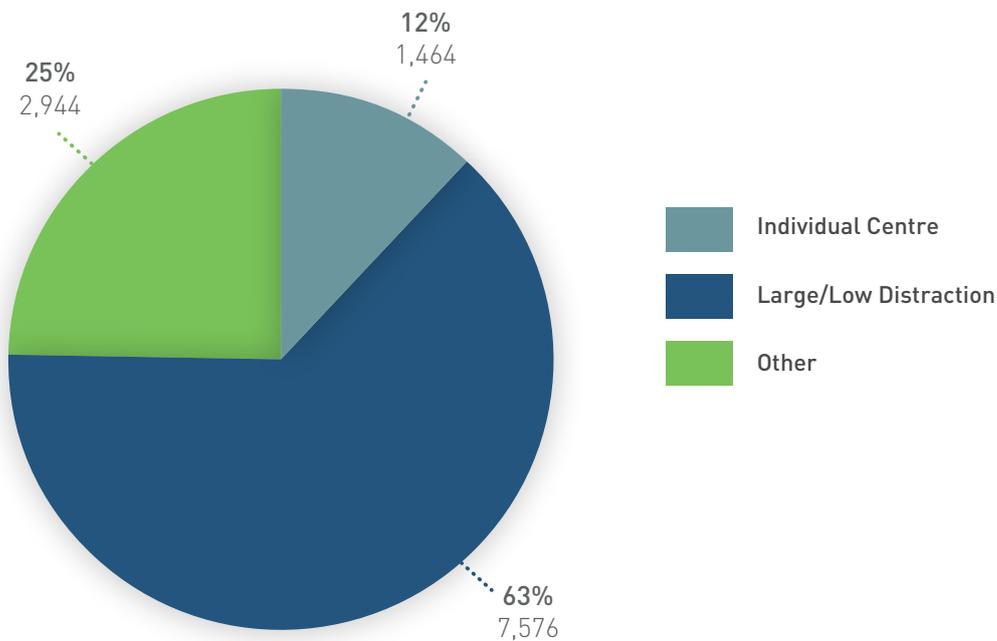


**Figure 10. Number of students with disabilities receiving varying amounts of extra time per hour in examinations 2020/21**

<sup>8</sup> The vast majority of responding institutions were unable to ascertain if these accommodations were implemented due to the many different formats of exams in the academic year.

## Alternative Venue

Figure 11 represents a breakdown of the number of students with disabilities who had a recommendation for an alternative examination venue as an exam accommodation. The total number was 11,984, which represents 83% of students with disabilities who were recommended at least one accommodation. This reflected a minor increase (2%, n=221 students) when compared with the previous year's data. As noted previously, the caveat to this data is that traditional on-campus examinations were not used by many institutions for the academic year 2020/21, as a response to Covid-19 restrictions. Therefore, alternative venues were likely not implemented as an accommodation in many cases, despite these being recommended in needs assessments. Therefore, this analysis is again informed by recommended accommodations as opposed to those that were implemented. Of those recommended alternative accommodations, the majority 63% (n=7,576 students) were granted the use of venues that were large and were low in distraction. Almost one-eighth (12%, n=1,464) of students were recommended the use of an individual examination location, and one-quarter (25%, n=2,944) of students were recommended an alternative venue under the label of "Other".



**Figure 11. Number of students with disabilities who were recommended alternative types of venues for examinations 2020/21.**

**44%**

**increase in the number  
of students per disability  
support staff member in  
the last 8 years**

# Inside Services

The research will now explore the number of support staff available to students with disabilities in each responding institution. The rationale for this question was to ascertain the number of staff members employed by responding institutions with responsibility for providing support to students with disabilities, and to then use this data to calculate the number of students per staff member.<sup>9</sup> The 25 responding institutions reported a total of 414 students with disabilities per learning support staff member, 199 per disability support service staff member, and a combined total of 134 students with disabilities per support staff member in 2020/21.



**Figure 12. Number of students per disability support staff member in HEIs from 2011/12 to 2020/21.**

<sup>9</sup> Methodology: Responses were delivered as a decimal number where one full time (5 days a week) staff member = 1, and part-time staff members were included as a pro rata fraction of 1. For example, a college with one full time staff member working 5 days a week and one part time staff member working 2 days a week would report 1.4 staff members. Where staff members had shared responsibility over students with disabilities as well as other student groups, they were asked to estimate how much of their remit was dedicated to students with disabilities

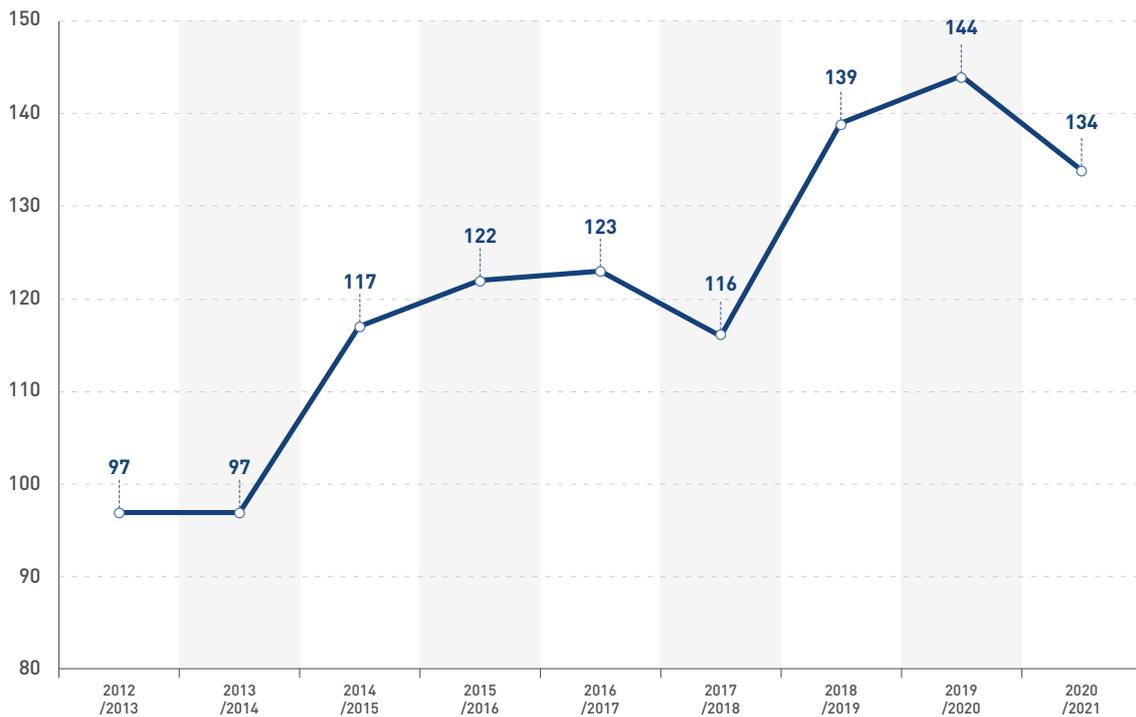
Drawing from a ten year databank of AHEAD’s research in this area, Figure 12 highlights the increase from 131 students with disabilities per disability support service staff member in 2011/12 to 199 for the academic year 2020/21 - representative of a 52% increase over that period, (AHEAD, 2012).



**Figure 13. Number of students per learning support staff member in HEIs from 2011/12 to 2020/21.**

Furthermore, within the same time frame, the data illustrates that the number of students with disabilities per learning support staff member increased by 26% in that period, from 319 students with disabilities per learning support staff in the academic year 2011/12 (AHEAD, 2012), to 414 students with disabilities per staff member in 2020/21 (see Figure 13.). This illustrates that the welcome increase in students with disabilities accessing higher education has not been matched with a similar increase in the number of support staff - to reflect the exponential increase of 268% over the last 12 years. The obvious ramifications of this are under-resourced support services and over-stretched services, which may have contributed to some of the findings of our Learning from Home research, in which a sizeable cohort of students with disabilities stated that recommended accommodations were not implemented, (AHEAD, 2021a). The rising caseload of support staff in these institutions, and the lack of increased resources to meet growing demand, therefore requires urgent attention.

When both data-sets are combined, the number of students per support staff member was reported to be 134. As such, the trend is sustained, with Figure 14 illustrative of a 44% increase in the total/combined number of support staff per student since 2012/13.



**Figure 14. Number of students per support staff member - total (disability/learning combined) 2012/13-20/21.**

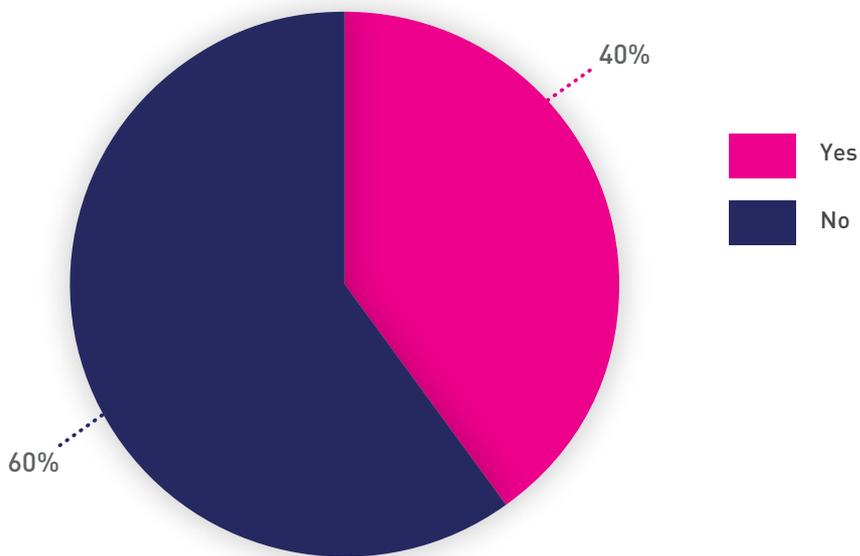
## On the Ground-Opinion

Responding institutions were given the opportunity to anonymously submit additional information and comments through what we term “On the Ground” questions. A number of these comments are listed below, with the full list of comments contained in Appendix 4. Two of the questions included are illustrated in Figure 15 and Figure 16. Our third question (C) asked: “Do you believe that changes to academic practice developed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic will result in a more accessible educational experience for students with disabilities? Do you think these changes will result in long term ramifications to modular design?”. A breakdown of respondents’ data for this question is presented in Figure 17. This question was particularly important, considering that many of these changes were perceived to be aligned with a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach, an inclusive framework for teaching and learning that AHEAD have, and continue to, advocate for.

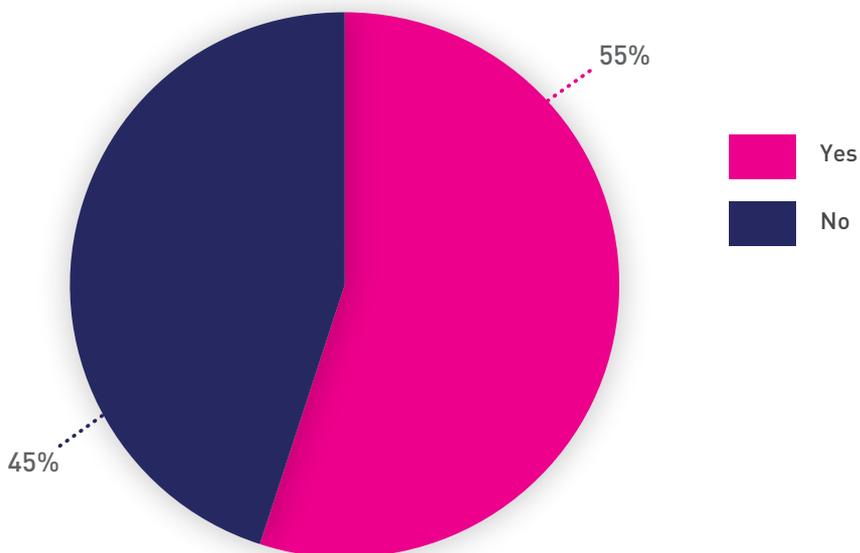
As these were optional questions, and not all responding institutions answered all questions.

The survey also gathered information on whether responding institutions collected or monitored data concerning the participation of students with disabilities in study abroad programmes, such as Erasmus. We also asked if the disability/access office collaborated with their institutional international office in the targeted promotion of mobility programmes for students with disabilities, and the organisation of supports for these students while on international exchange programmes.

The promotion of inclusive mobility practices is an emerging area of interest for AHEAD.



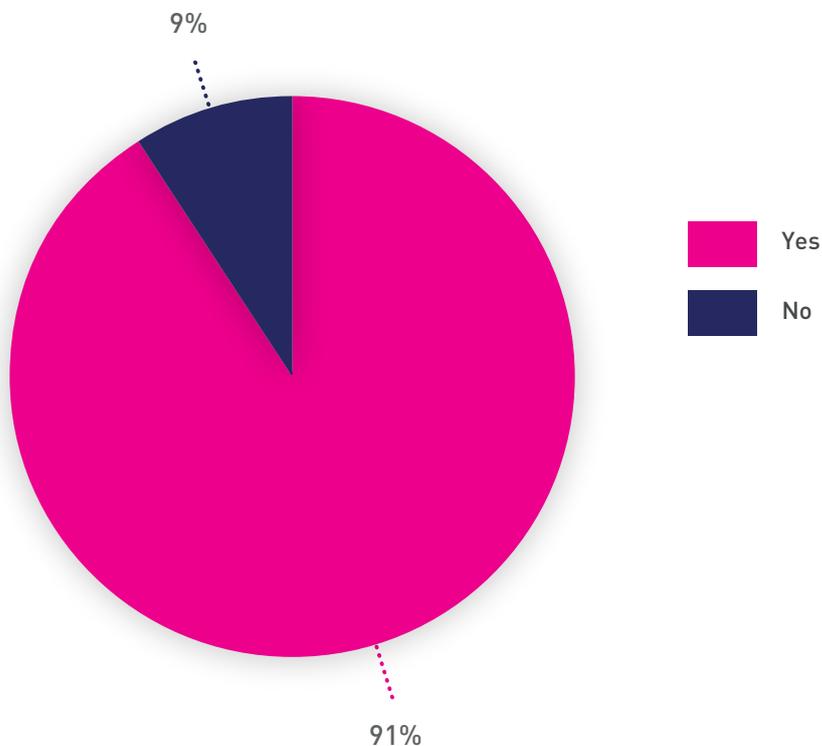
**Figure 15. Q.A. Responding institutions' oversight of participation rates of students with disabilities in international mobility programmes.**



**Figure 16. Q.B. Does the disability/access office collaborate with the international office in the targeted promotion of mobility programmes to students with disabilities and the organisation of supports for students with disabilities on mobility?**

Prior AHEAD research and submission consultations have explored the lack of engagement with extra-curricular activities for students with disabilities (AHEAD, 2021a). Furthermore, the recent work of Rath (2020) has shown that students with disabilities are often deprived of the opportunity to avail of such activities that are crucial not just to building cultural capital, but also to well-being and experiencing a full college experience. Figure 15 (Question A) illustrates that the majority (60%) of responding institutions did not collect data or monitor the participation of students with disabilities in international mobility programmes.

When we inquired into collaboration between the DSS and International Office regarding the 'targeted promotion' and 'organisation of supports' for students with disabilities concerning international exchange programmes, the data reflects only a slight majority, 55% of responding institutions, stated that they engaged in such collaboration. AHEAD believes that coordination and collaboration between the disability/access office and the international office is vital to effectively promote and deliver inclusive mobility opportunities for students with disabilities.



**Figure 18. Do you believe that Covid-19 will significantly change how you provide support for students with disabilities and what supports are provided?**

Question C asked respondents to comment on the impact of Covid-19, in particular regarding how institutions will change how they provide supports for students with disabilities. Again, this question was included following findings from our “Learning from Home” research, which postulated that the Covid-19 pandemic had highlighted the need for innovative responses to teaching and learning and a change from traditional practices and models, (AHEAD, 2021a). A significant majority (91%) of responding staff members agreed that the pandemic would influence the provision of supports for students with disabilities.

## Selected Comments

Question A and B were somewhat related, both informed by international mobility opportunities for students with disabilities at responding institutions. Question A was “Does your institution collect/monitor data on the participation of students with disabilities in study abroad programmes such as Erasmus?”. Question B was “Does the disability/access office collaborate with the international office in the targeted promotion of mobility programmes to students with disabilities and the organisation of supports for students with disabilities on mobility?”

Therefore, many of the selected comments are underpinned by both of these questions, both of which pertain to Erasmus and international programmes for students.

“The collection of this data has just begun and will take a few years to begin to see trends. To the second point, we work with our colleagues in the international office to ensure inward and outward bound students are supported. We ensure incoming students are aware of the supports available and that outgoing students know where to look for this information.”

“Student mobility has been a growth area for our service over the past 5 years. We work closely with colleagues in our Global Offices and with Erasmus co-ordinators to ensure students with disabilities are provided with supports and encouraged to participate. Applicants to study abroad, both incoming and outward are encouraged to seek supports. There has been a steady increase in the numbers of students disclosing a disability in their application and seeking additional supports. We have developed a video, guidelines and a checklist to assist students to begin their study abroad journey.”

“We promote all Erasmus programmes but we have not had any applications from students. It is difficult for healthcare students to meet the minimum Erasmus requirements and also to meet the requirements of their courses.”

“Regarding question 1, yes we work with the Erasmus office to check who has applied for the following year and reach out to those students with the Disability Service with information around supports and the additional Erasmus+ grant and offer a needs assessment and discussion before they go on Erasmus/study abroad. However, for question two, no – but we have links with the International Office and would speak at incoming student inductions to highlight how students can access Disability supports. We have a dedicated webpage and pages in our Student Guide to highlight information and supports for incoming and outgoing students.”

“All International and Erasmus students have access to the Disability and Learning Support Service. Accommodations for these students and supports are arranged throughout May and June so they are organised and aware of what is available in good time.”

“We don’t have Erasmus or mobility as part of any of our programmes at present.”

In relation to Question 3 (Do you believe that Covid-19 will significantly change how you provide support for students with disabilities and what supports are provided?), some of the notable comments were as follows:

“I believe the flexibility of teaching has led to a more accessible teaching experience. Overall, we have seen many reasonable accommodations become obsolete for the year and particularly the recording of lectures has massively reduced the need for supports and technology around recording. However, at distance learning is not always beneficial to students with many concerns around lack of interaction and difficulties with concentration being flagged with my service. I believe we will see medium term changes while we switch to blended learning, but I would be unsure if we will see long term permanent change. It has been noted that academic staff have experienced an increase in workload over the last year, but hopefully many of the changes can be maintained.”

“We would assume that more departments will offer flexibility in teaching and learning following the remote study of the past 15 months. Many of our students really benefited from pre-recorded lectures and alternative type assessment. We would be hope that these positive changes to teaching and learning will be adopted into the future when students resume to campus.”

“We are optimistic that there is great opportunity now to implement improved practices when it comes to accessible teaching and learning and an improved student experience overall. However, it won't happen easily and there are many challenges ahead in capitalising on this opportunity. Thankfully, the list of allies is increasing. Many academic staff and the majority of students can see the positives that came from Covid and there is already work in progress to make long term changes on improving accessibility for all students.”

“The move to recording online lectures has benefitted all students, and the hope is that with the return to campus, that this will continue to be an aspect of curriculum delivery.”

“Lecturing staff have changed their teaching to a more universal design - let's hope they don't revert back!”

“The pandemic has enabled an online learning environment to emerge, but I do not believe that the majority of new practices will be adopted on a long term basis. Ideally, making all lectures available online would dramatically improve access for all students. However, HEIs do not have the funding to upgrade all their learning spaces with technology to enable online learning to continue.”

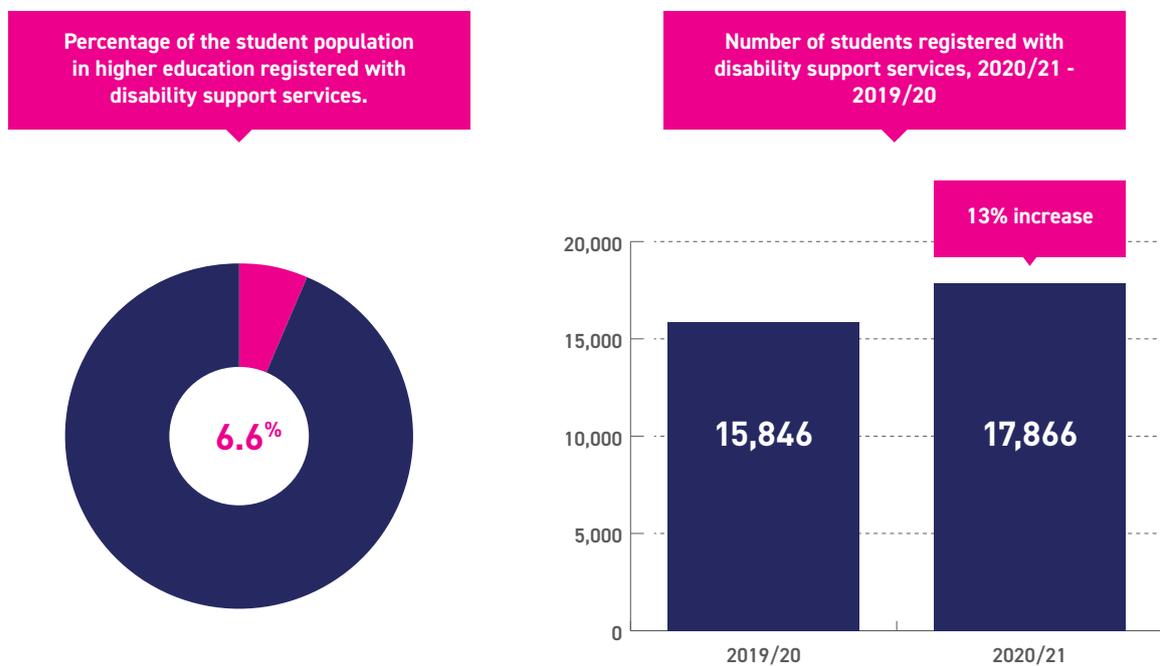
“It should result in long term change if there is a willingness to assess the pros and cons for students. It is possible to take the positive learning from this experience and ensure that learning for students is improved and delivered in a way that will accommodate a wide range of learners.”

“Lecturing staff have been upskilled in delivering content in different ways which should have a greater impact on module design and delivery in the future - also the increased availability of recordings and notes for students is something that needs to be continued into the future. Assessment has changed also and I hope that we would move away from the final written exam as it forces students to request accommodations because of the assessment structure. The benefits experienced by some students with health conditions and disabilities studying online especially has often allowed much more flexibility and being able to complete their study without the physical demands of going to college and some students are requesting to continue this in the future so this also needs to be considered. A flexible approach to delivery of education (online, blended or on campus) would allow many students with many different demands in their lives to complete education successfully.”

# Summary

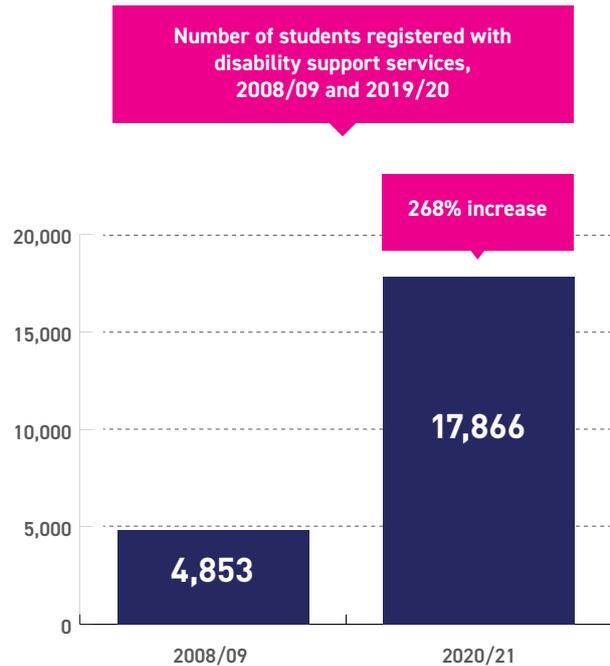
A summary of key findings for the 2020/21 academic year are now examined against the backdrop of preceding AHEAD participation reports, with consideration given to, among other things, the likely impact of Covid-19 on the data accumulated for this academic year:

**6.6% of the student population in higher education is registered with disability support services.**



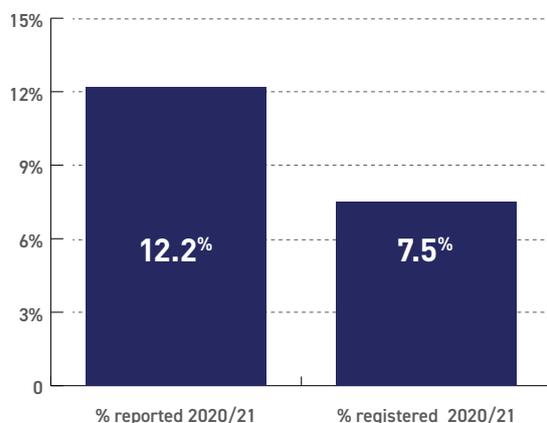
In the 2020/21 academic year, 17,866 students with disabilities were registered with disability support services in higher education, representative of 6.6% of the total student population in the responding institutions (N=269,488). 2020/21 participation data demonstrates a 13% increase in numbers of students with disabilities registered with support services in the responding institutions from 2019/20 (6.3%; n=15,846 of 252,614 students).

- There has been an increase of 268% in the number of students with disabilities registered with disability support services in higher education institutions in the last twelve years (AHEAD, 2009) – from 4,853 in 2008/09 to 17,866 in 2020/21.



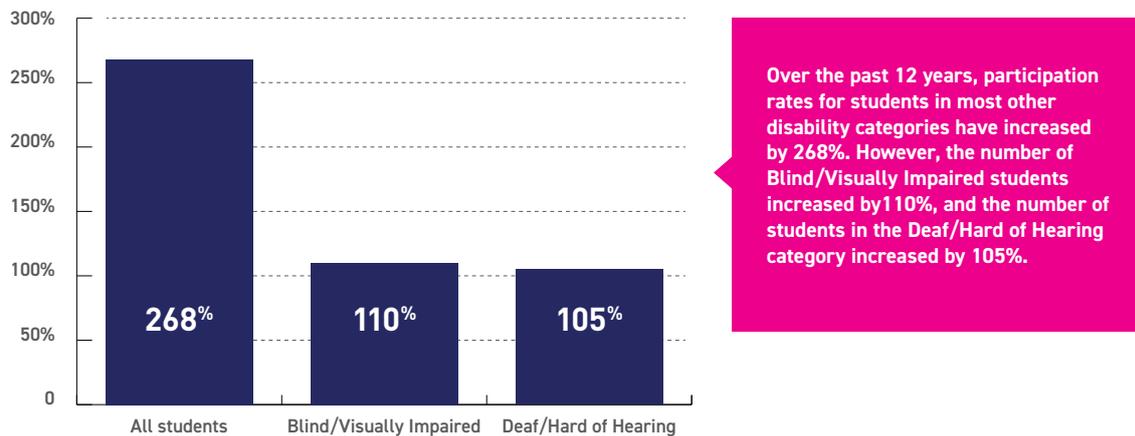
- A significant percentage of new entrant students have a disability but do not disclose and register for support. In 2020/21, 12.2% of new entrant undergraduates reported having one or more disabilities in the HEA Equal Access Survey, but only 7.5% of the new entrant population registered with the disability support services of participating institutions in the AHEAD survey for the same academic year. Although the underlying datasets are not the same, this suggests

Percentage of new entrant undergraduates reported having one or more disabilities vs percentage registered with disability support services



that a significant number of new entrant students with a disability did not disclose their disability and register for disability supports in their first year in higher education in the period under survey. AHEAD recognises that disclosure of disability is a complex issue and there are likely myriad reasons for non-disclosure that require further investigation, such as no requirements for support, no formal diagnosis of disability required to access supports, a desire for independence, or reasons related to the perceived stigma which may be felt by some individuals engaging with support services.

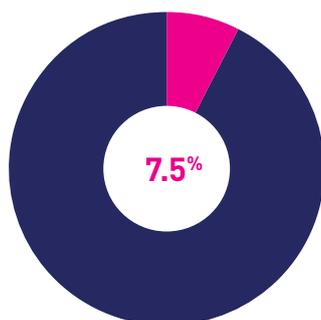
- **The 2020/21 participation rate data highlights that the number of students with sensory disabilities was significantly lower than the other disability categories, sustaining a pattern and trend from the previous year's report, (AHEAD, 2021).** While students in the Deaf/Hard of Hearing category represented 2.4% of the total students in the disability cohort, the participation rate for students in the Blind/Visually Impaired category was 1.6%.



In comparison to the sustained increase in participation rates for students in most other disability categories over the last twelve years (268% in total), these cohorts have witnessed more modest increases in participation rates. In this period, the number of Blind/Visually Impaired students increased from 134 to 282, representative of a 110% increase. Similarly, the number of students in the Deaf/Hard of Hearing category increased from 206 to 422, representative of a 105% increase.

- **The number of new entrant undergraduate students with disabilities registered with support services in responding institutions was 4,324 students, reflecting 7.5% of all new entrants.**

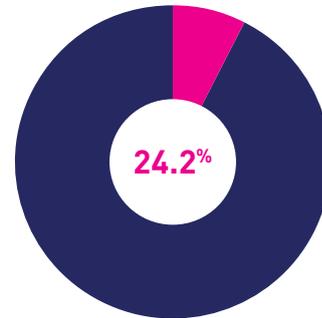
The percentage of new entrant undergraduate students with disabilities registered with support services in 2020/21 was 7.5%



This was an increase of 6.1% on the previous year's numerical data; however, the 7.5% of the total number of new entrant undergraduates was equal with the previous year's percentage. This is due to the pre-discussed increased numbers of participating institutions with relatively large populations.

- **Almost 25% (n=1,048) of new registrations with disability support services were not in their first year of study.** As such, these students had chosen not to disclose their disability in their first year of study. Interestingly, the percentage of new registrations not in their first year of study was up significantly from 20% in 2019/20.

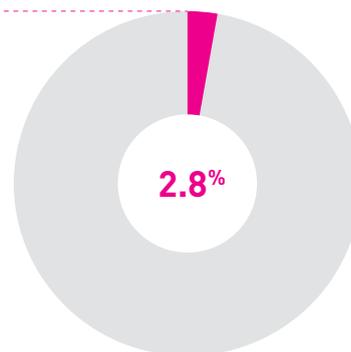
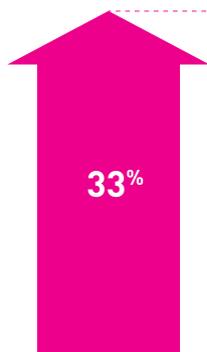
Almost a quarter (n=1,048) of new registrations with disability support services were not in their first year of study.



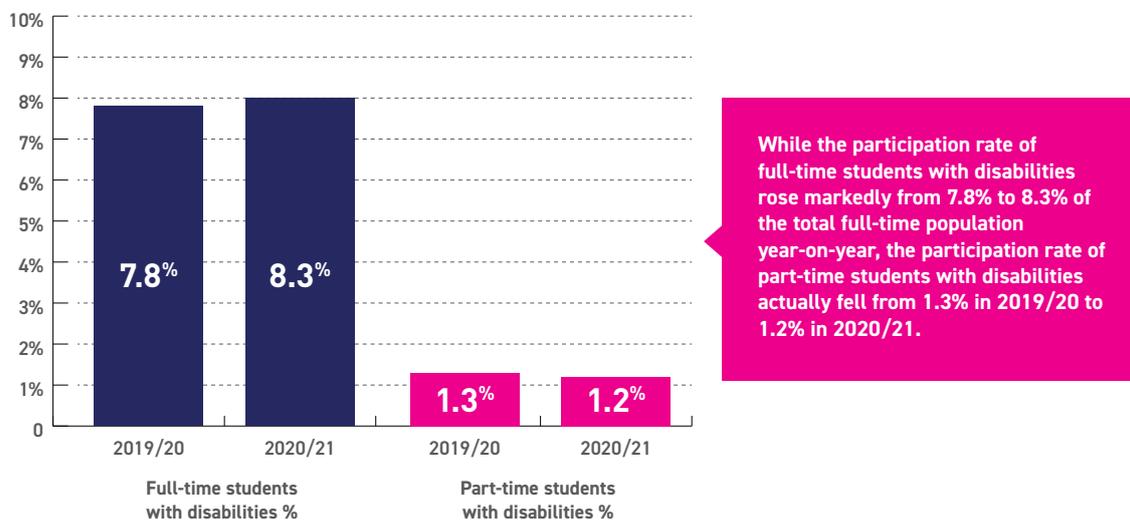
- **There has been a significant rise in numbers of postgraduate students with disabilities registered with support services.** The number of undergraduate students with disabilities registered with support services (n=16,140) increased by 10.9% from the previous year's data, representing 7.8% of undergraduate students with disabilities across all institutions for the 2020/21 academic year. The number of postgraduate students with disabilities registered with disability support services however, increased by 33% (n=428) across all responding institutions. Although this increase is welcome, the participation rate of postgraduate students with disabilities remained low overall, at 2.8% of the total postgraduate cohort. This pattern of persistently low representation at the postgraduate level compared to the undergraduate level is a consistent finding in AHEAD research.

The number of postgraduate students with disabilities registered with disability support services however, increased by 33% (n=428)

However the participation rate of postgraduate students with disabilities remains low, at 2.8% of the total postgraduate cohort.

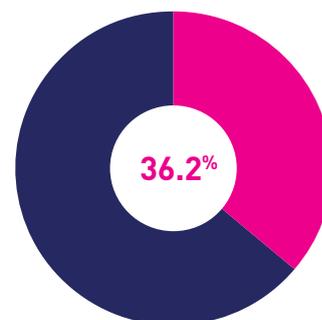


- **The participation rate of students with disabilities in full-time study has risen markedly year-on-year, while part-time participation rate for 2020/21 has decreased slightly.** There were 17,080 full-time students with disabilities, representing 8.3% of the total number of students engaging with full-time programmes. Responding institutions reported that 786 students with disabilities were enrolled in part-time study, representative of 1.2% of all students studying part-time. While the participation rate of full-time students with disabilities rose markedly from 7.8% to 8.3% of the total full-time population year-on-year, the participation rate of part-time students with disabilities actually fell from 1.3% in 2019/20 to 1.2% in 2020/21. This sustains the trend of students with disabilities being persistently under-represented concerning part-time study, (AHEAD, 1994, 2009, 2013, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019b, 2021b).

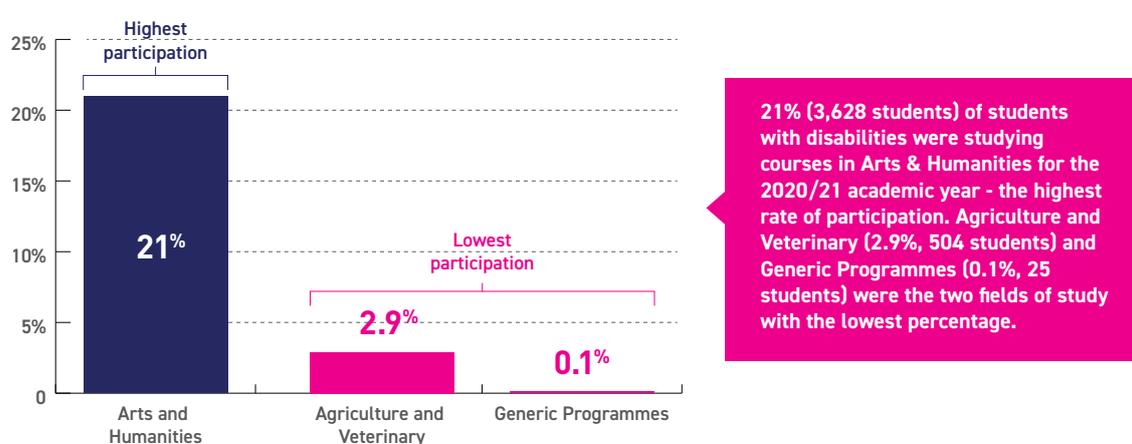


- **The most commonly reported disability category of students who were registered with the disability support service in their institution were those in the Specific Learning Difficulty category,** at 36.2% (6,484 students) of all students with disabilities. The second and third most commonly reported categories were Mental Health Condition (16.6%, n= 2,974 students), and Significant Ongoing Illness (11.3%, n=2,019 students). The lowest participation rates were in relation to students in the Other category (0.9%, n=156 students), those who were Blind/Visually Impaired (1.6%, n=282 students), or were Deaf/Hard of Hearing (2.4%, n=422 students).

The most commonly reported disability category of students were those in the Specific Learning Difficulty category, at 36.2%

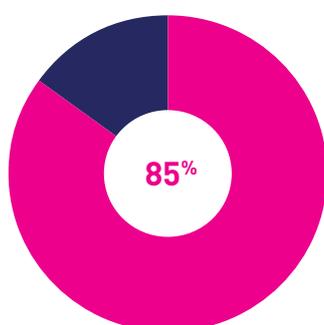


- **As in previous year’s reports, courses in the Arts and Humanities had the highest percentage of students with disabilities enrolled in 2020/21.** This trend has been replicated both in the previous year’s data and the preceding year’s reports (AHEAD, 2021). Responding institutions reported that 21% (3,628 students) of students with disabilities were studying courses in this field for the 2020/21 academic year, which was the highest rate of participation for this cohort by a significant margin. Agriculture and Veterinary (2.9%, 504 students) and Generic Programmes (0.1%, 25 students) were the two fields of study with the lowest percentage of students with disabilities enrolled.



- **85% of students with disabilities were recommended one or more exam accommodations in 2020/21.**

85% of students with disabilities were recommended one or more exam accommodations in 2020/21



The data concerning exam accommodations for this academic year was based exclusively on those that were recommended as opposed to actually implemented exam accommodations, since most institutions could not confirm their implementation due to the swift changes in assessment practices precipitated by COVID. The lack of institutional visibility on whether recommended exam accommodations were actually implemented is in itself an interesting finding, which should cause institutions to consider the quality assurance measures

implemented concerning delivery of supports. The percentage of all students with disabilities who were recommended exam accommodations was down slightly from 87% in 2019/20 (AHEAD, 2021).

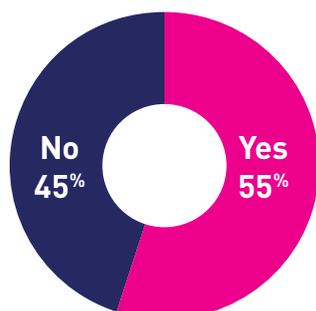
- **There has been a 44% rise in the number of students with disabilities per support staff member in the last 8 years.** Across all 25 responding institutions in 2020/21, there were 414 students with disabilities per learning support staff member and 199 students with disabilities per disability support staff member. Combined, this represented 134 students with disabilities per support staff member. The combined students to support staff figure has risen 45% since 2012/13, when there was 97 students per support staff member. The rising caseload of support staff in these institutions, and the lack of increased resources to meet growing demand has implications for the quality of support provided to students with disabilities and requires urgent attention.

In 2012/13 there was 97 students per support staff member. In 2020/21, there were 134 students with disabilities per support staff member.



- **Only a small majority of disability support services collaborate with the international office in the promotion of international mobility to students with disabilities, and the organisation of supports for participating students, and the majority do not collect data on participation.**

55% of disability support services collaborate with the international office, while 45% do not.



While 55% of disability support services said that this collaboration occurs in their institution, 45% said it did not. Additionally, 60% of support services said they collected no data on the participation of students with disabilities in study abroad programmes, while 40% did collect data on it.

# Recommendations

The recommendations below are derived from the findings of this research, and informed by other national and international literature, and AHEAD's knowledge of the higher education sector. AHEAD builds the knowledge base to support our mission through sustained research on inclusion in higher education, monitoring of international best practice, and continuous engagement with students and graduates with disabilities, staff in HEIs and state bodies.

These recommendations are in line with AHEAD's mission to create inclusive environments in education and employment for people with disabilities, and will support the sector to meet its legal obligations set out under equality law. They will also support the state to work towards goals agreed to in international mechanisms concerning equity and inclusion, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the UNCRPD.

## **AHEAD RECOMMEND THAT THE EMBEDDING OF UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING (UDL) PRACTICES IS SUPPORTED AT ALL LEVELS OF HIGHER EDUCATION TO SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS, EQUITY AND INCLUSION.**

The findings of the report indicate the importance of implementing universal design and UDL practices to advance equity of learning for what is becoming an ever more diverse student body. With its emphasis on diversity, inclusion, flexibility, and choice, UDL is an international, evidence-based approach that can help alleviate some of the most pressing issues in higher education, (Davies et al., 2013). It addresses the growing tension created by an increasingly diverse student population engaging with a traditional 'one size fits all' curriculum (Capp, 2017). Fovet (2020) argues that systematic UDL implementation reduces pressure on accessibility services, allows the majority of students' needs to be addressed in the classroom itself, and reduces overall costs while transforming pedagogy. In this way, UDL provides a clear and effective way to create more inclusive higher education environments in a sustainable fashion. Examples of the findings in this report which support the need for a UDL approach are:

- **Changing demographics** – greater diversity: increase of 268% regarding in students with disabilities engaging with higher education support services in the last twelve years.
- **Significant numbers of undisclosed students:** 12.2% of new entrant undergraduates reported having one or more disabilities in the HEA Equal Access Survey, but only 7.5% of the new entrant population registered with the disability support services of participating institutions in the AHEAD survey for the same academic year. A UDL approach will build more support in design and delivery, reaching undisclosed students with disabilities where traditional support services cannot.
- **Overstretched support services – rising caseloads:** a 44% rise in the number of students with disabilities per support staff member in the last 8 years highlights the rising caseloads of support staff. A UDL approach will spread responsibility for inclusion across the campus, reduce the need for reasonable accommodations, and the associated financial and administrative resources required to plan and implement such accommodations.

- **High numbers recommended exam accommodations:** 85% of students with disabilities were recommended exam accommodations. A UDL approach to assessment will dramatically reduce the number of accommodations required by building more choice of assessment in as standard, reducing the financial and administrative resources required to plan and implement such accommodations.

AHEAD recommends a range of coordinated actions at the national (macro), institutional (meso) and practitioner (micro) levels in order to coherently embed universal design for learning practice in higher education.

- **National (Macro):** AHEAD recommends that the HEA support the collaborative development of a National Charter for Universal Design in Higher Education, to develop shared indicators of success on the application of universal design and UDL in higher education. It is recommended that UDL is included as a specific point of reporting within the next update of the HEA Higher Education System Performance Framework (HEA, 2018) to monitor institutional progress on UDL implementation, and that the HEA build on the important development of the PATH 4 Universal Design Fund by examining ways to sustain this fund beyond 2023.
- **Institutional (Meso):** AHEAD recommends that institutions review and update related policy and strategy to ensure that tangible objectives concerning the implementation of universal design and UDL are included. Institutions can take many other steps to promote UDL practice at the institutional level such as; the strategic facilitation of professional development opportunities in the field; the creation of UD for HE steering groups and communities of practice; the hiring of dedicated staffing reporting direct to senior management on the institutional implementation of UDL; the conducting of accessibility audits; and the promotion of key academic practices associated with UDL such as the facilitation of recorded lectures/the implementation of student choice in assessment.
- **Practitioner Level (Micro):** AHEAD encourages practitioners working right across the higher education to engage in professional development on the application of universal design/UDL, and to use learnings from this CPD to build more flexibility, accessibility, student voice and choice into their practice. Practitioners should consider forming or joining communities of practice on universal design practice to share learning and embed UD in the culture of the institution.

## THE OVER-REPRESENTATION REPRESENTATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN FIELDS OF STUDY WITH LOWER GRADUATE OUTCOMES, AND UNDER-REPRESENTATION IN FIELDS WITH HIGHER OUTCOMES SHOULD BE ADDRESSED WITH TARGETED NATIONAL COMMITMENTS, STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

This research highlights that students with disabilities are over-represented in some fields of study with amongst the lowest graduate outcomes, and are under-represented in some fields with some of the highest graduate outcomes. This is particularly evident in the Arts and Humanities area, with almost one in four (21%) students with disabilities participating in courses in this area, in comparison to around 1 in 7 in the general student population (13.8%). According to 2020 data published by the HEA, Arts and Humanities is among the fields of study with the lowest graduate outcomes concerning employment rates and average salary earned upon graduation. Nine months after graduation, graduates of Arts and Humanities programmes had the lowest full-time employment rates of graduates across all fields by some distance (just 39.6%) (<https://hea.ie/statistics/graduate-outcomes-data-and-reports/graduate-outcomes-2020/main-graduate-destination/>), and earned the lowest average salary across all fields by some distance (€27,951) (<https://hea.ie/statistics/graduate-outcomes-data-and-reports/graduate-outcomes-2020/earnings-analysis/>). Conversely, students with disabilities are notably under-represented in some fields of study associated with amongst the highest employment and earnings and outcomes. They include:

- **Education;** of which 83.4% of graduates are in full time employment, earning an average salary of €40,615. Only 5% of students with disabilities are undertaking programmes in this field in comparison to 6.5% of the general student population in the responding institutions.
- **Health and Welfare;** of which 79.4% of graduates are in full time employment, earning an average salary of €36,797. Only 13.9% of students with disabilities are undertaking programmes in this field in comparison to 17.3% of the general student population in the responding institutions.
- **Business, Administration and Law;** of which 69.1% of graduates are in full time employment, earning an average salary of €36,225. Only 17.6% of students with disabilities are undertaking programmes in this field in comparison to 22.3% of the general student population in the responding institutions.

AHEAD acknowledge that the differences in the field of study profile of students with disabilities in comparison to the general student population are likely an outcome of a number of factors, including personal choice. However, data should be closely monitored, with national measures implemented to boost participation in fields of low participation, to ensure that lower graduate outcomes do not reinforce the existing links between poverty and disability, (Indecon, 2022). Measures that would help to address the issues identified include a review of guidance offered to students with disabilities to ensure they are making informed choices at the point of entry, the introduction of targeted funding streams to support participation, such as those currently under PATH 1, and development of targeted outreach programmes by higher education institutions.

### **AHEAD RECOMMEND THE HEA DEVELOP IMPROVED DATA COLLECTION EFFORTS TO TRACK THE PROGRESSION AND GRADUATE OUTCOMES OF STUDENTS AND GRADUATES WITH DISABILITIES, TO SUPPORT THE SECTOR TO ORIENTATE POLICY TOWARDS EQUITY OF GRADUATE OUTCOMES**

AHEAD commend the role of national policy and national access mechanisms, such as the National Access Plan and the introduction of the Disability Access Route to Education, in advancing a significant increase in the participation rate of students with disabilities in higher education in the last decade. However, little is known at a national level about the progression and graduate outcomes of students with disabilities. What data that does exist suggests that higher rates of engagement in higher education are not translating into labour market participation, (Government of Ireland, 2015), with Ireland recording amongst the lowest employment rates of people with disabilities in Europe, at just 32.3% - significantly lower than the EU average of 50.8%, (European Disability Forum, 2020).

Additionally, this research highlights that although year-on-year progress has been made, engagement of people with disabilities in postgraduate study, which is associated with significantly higher graduate earnings and employment rates, remains notably low. [This data is available here](#). Just 2.8% of the total post-graduate population were registered with disability support services, in comparison to 7.8% at under-graduate level, a topic which requires further exploration.

By improving data collection and monitoring systems, perhaps through inclusion in a revised Data Access Plan for higher education, the HEA should track the progression and graduate outcomes of students and graduates with disabilities to support it to orientate policy towards equity of graduate outcomes. In this way, the higher education sector could make a greater contribution to addressing historically low employment rates for people with disabilities, and weakening the consistent links between poverty and disability displayed across Europe (European Disability Forum, 2020).

## **AHEAD RECOMMENDS NATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ACTION TO MONITOR AND INCREASE PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY**

Participation in Erasmus + mobility opportunities is associated with increased employability, and participants report their engagement increased their technical, inter-personal and inter-cultural skills and competences, as well as their self-confidence, ability to achieve goals, and social and cultural openness, (European et al., 2019). Although there is a dearth of data regarding the participation of students with disabilities in international mobility in Ireland, primarily due to the limited oversight and departmental collaboration reported in this research, the available data for participation in Erasmus + collected through self-reporting of disability in a European-wide survey of participants suggests that students with disabilities make up about 4% of all Erasmus participants (1% disability, and 3% health condition). Considering that 12.2% of all new entrant undergraduates in higher education in Ireland self-reported having one or more disabilities in the HEA Equal Access Survey, indications are that participation in Erasmus is comparatively low.

The “On the Ground” section of this research revealed that only 40% of institutions collect data on the participation of students with disabilities in international mobility programmes, which may hamper national and institutional efforts to take an evidence-based approach to developing inclusive mobility practices. Additionally, in only a slight majority of institutions (55%) did the Disability/Access service collaborate with the International Office around targeted promotion of mobility opportunities to students with disabilities, and the organisation of supports for students engaging in mobility. This type of collaborative action is a key recommendation of the Inclusive Mobility Framework, an evidenced based tool developed by the Erasmus funded EPFIME project. [An overview of the framework can be accessed here.](#)

AHEAD recommends a range of coordinated actions at the national (macro), institutional (meso) and practitioner (micro) levels in order to increase participation in mobility opportunities.

- **National (Macro):** AHEAD recommends that the HEA consider actions to improve data collection on the participation of students with disabilities in international mobility, perhaps through a revised Data Access Plan, and the setting of national targets for participation. It is recommended that the HEA and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation, and Science (DFHERIS), examine current policy around inclusive mobility, by utilising the National Agency/Department section of the Inclusive Mobility Framework, an evidenced based tool developed by the Erasmus funded EPFIME project. Additionally, it is recommended that DFHERIS should engage with other government departments to explore unintended structural barriers to the engagement of students with disabilities on mobility opportunities. One example known to AHEAD is that the eligibility for Disability Allowance, and other associated social welfare payments, require 'residency status' for eligibility. This means payments for Disability Allowance are immediately ceased for the duration of study abroad, which is a major barrier to participation.
  
- **Institutional (Meso):** AHEAD recommends that institutions implement the Inclusive Mobility Framework, an evidenced based tool developed by the Erasmus funded EPFIME project. It is recommended institutions utilise the associated inclusive mobility self-assessment tool and the inclusive mobility guidelines for higher education institutions to support development of an inclusive mobility strategy and associated practices. Tracking data at an institutional level is a vital step to inform the development of an inclusive mobility strategy.
  
- **Practitioner Level (Micro):** AHEAD encourages practitioners working in HEI disability and international offices to build relationships and engage in collaborative actions to promote mobility and organise supports for students with disabilities who participate. More support and guidance can be found in the aforementioned inclusive mobility guidelines for higher education institutions.

## **THE HEA AND INSTITUTIONS SHOULD URGENTLY CONSIDER HOW THEY FUND AND QUALITY ASSURE THE PROVISION OF DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES TO ENSURE RECOMMENDED SUPPORTS ARE FULLY IMPLEMENTED**

A key finding from this research was that while the responding institutions provided data on the number of students with disabilities who were recommended exam supports in their needs assessments, they were unable to report the number of students who actually received them. This was in part due to the swift move to varying forms of assessment in the wake of the first Covid-19 lockdown, but it raises interesting questions about the oversight and quality assurance practices in place to monitor the provision of supports.

AHEAD's Learning from Home Research (AHEAD, 2020, 2021a) for example, highlighted that a sizeable cohort of students with disabilities were not satisfied that the recommended accommodations contained in their needs assessment report were fully applied.

Additionally, this research highlights the rising caseloads of support staff. A 268% increase in the number of students with disabilities participating in higher education in the last 12 years has not been met with a corresponding increase in disability or learning support staff. In fact, there has been a 44% rise in the number of students with disabilities per support staff member recorded in the last 8 years alone. This increasing strain on the services raises questions about the ability of these services to continue ensuring that quality support is provided in a timely fashion, in line with the legal obligation to provide reasonable accommodations to people with disabilities. To provide a better student experience, promote quality and reduce legal risk, AHEAD recommends:

- **National (Macro):** AHEAD recommends that the HEA consider how the next National Access Plan and HEA Higher Education System Performance Framework (HEA, 2018) can contribute to monitoring quality processes in the provision of support services. Urgent engagement with institutions is necessary to address the staffing levels in Disability Support Services, linking staffing/funding levels to the rising caseloads of these services.
- **Institutional (Meso):** AHEAD recommends that institutions review the procedures they have in place to evaluate and quality-assure the provision of supports, ensuring the student voice is consistently captured and considered in updates to process in the provision of supports. Urgent engagement between institutions and national bodies is necessary to address the staffing levels in Disability Support Services, linking staffing/funding levels to the rising caseloads of these services.

The provision of quality supports advances a relevant contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in particular pertaining to Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 - Number of students with disabilities studying within each responding higher education institution

Institution Name	Total Students with Disabilities	Students with Disabilities as a % of Total Institution Population
AIT	400	6%
CIT	985	7.7%
DCU	940	5.2%
DKIT	275	5.3%
DLIADT	270	10.3%
GMIT	635	7.8%
ITC	298	2.9%
ITS	411	5.8%
ITTRA	291	8.4%
LIT	551	6.7%
LYIT	347	7.1%
MIC	208	4.1%
MIE	81	6.3%
MU	1056	7.4%
NCAD	150	11.5%
NCI	222	3.2%
NUIG	1387	7.2%
RCSI	162	3.5%
St Angela's	115	7.3%
TCD	1888	10%
TuD	1825	6.3%
UCC	1735	7.5%
UCD	2039	6.6%
UL	954	5.5%
WIT	641	7.1%

**Average percentage:** 6.6%, total students with disabilities 17,866 (students registered with supports).

**MTU:** at their request, Tralee IT and Cork IT are recorded separately despite both now being amalgamated as MTU.

## Appendix 2 - Fields of Study

The Fields of Study are listed as per the international standard classification of education (ISCED). The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) is a framework for assembling, compiling and analysing cross-nationally comparable statistics on education. ISCED is a member of the United Nations International Family of Economic and Social Classifications and is the reference classification for organizing education programmes and related qualifications by levels and fields of education. [The ISCED is viewable here.](#)

### Generic programmes and qualifications

- Basic programmes and qualifications
- Literacy and numeracy
- Personal skills

### Education

- Education not further defined or elsewhere classified
- Education science
- Training for pre-school teachers
- Teacher training without subject specialisation
- Teacher training with subject specialisation
- Inter-disciplinary programmes and qualifications involving education

**Inter-disciplinary programmes and qualifications to which the greatest intended learning time is devoted to education.**

## Arts and Humanities

- Arts not further defined or elsewhere classified
- Audio-visual techniques and media production
- Audio-visual techniques and media production
- Fashion, interior and industrial design
- Fine arts
- Handicrafts
- Music and performing arts
- Humanities (except languages) not further defined or elsewhere classified
- Religion and theology
- History and archaeology
- History
- Philosophy and ethics
- Languages not further defined or elsewhere classified
  - Language acquisition
  - Literature and linguistics
  - Inter-disciplinary programmes and qualifications involving arts and humanities
- Inter-disciplinary programmes and qualifications to which the greatest intended learning time is devoted to arts and humanities.
- Social Sciences, Journalism and Information
- Social and behavioural sciences not further defined or elsewhere classified
- Economics
- Political sciences and civics
- Psychology
- Sociology and cultural studies
- Journalism and information not further defined or elsewhere classified
- Journalism and reporting
- Library, information and archival studies
- Inter-disciplinary programmes and qualifications involving social sciences, journalism and information

**Inter-disciplinary programmes and qualifications to which the greatest intended learning time is devoted to social sciences, journalism and information.**

### **Business, Administration and Law**

- Business and administration
- Accounting and taxation
- Finance, banking and insurance
- Management and administration
- Marketing and advertising
- Secretarial and office work
- Wholesale and retail sales
- Work skills
- Law
- Inter-disciplinary programmes and qualifications involving business, administration and law

**Inter-disciplinary programmes and qualifications to which the greatest intended learning time is devoted to business, administration and law.**

### **Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics**

- Biological and related sciences not further defined or elsewhere classified
- Biology
- Biochemistry
- Environment not further defined or elsewhere classified
- Environmental sciences
- Natural environments and wildlife
- Physical sciences not further defined or elsewhere classified
- Chemistry
- Earth sciences
- Physics
- Mathematics and statistics not further defined or elsewhere classified
- Mathematics
- Statistics
- Inter-disciplinary programmes and qualifications involving natural sciences, mathematics and statistics

**Inter-disciplinary or broad programmes and qualifications to which the greatest intended learning time is devoted to natural sciences, mathematics and statistics.**

### **Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)**

- Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) not further defined or elsewhere classified
- Computer use
- Database and network design and administration
- Software and applications development and analysis
- Information and Communication Technologies not elsewhere classified
- Inter-disciplinary programmes and qualifications involving Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)
- Inter-disciplinary programmes and qualifications involving Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)

**Inter-disciplinary programmes and qualifications to which the greatest intended learning time is devoted to information and communication technologies (ICTs).**

## **Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction**

- Engineering and engineering trades not further defined or elsewhere classified
- Chemical engineering and processes
- Environmental protection technology
- Electricity and energy
- Electronics and automation
- Mechanics and metal trades
- Motor vehicles, ships and aircraft
- Engineering and engineering trades not elsewhere classified
- Manufacturing and processing
- Food processing
- Materials (glass, paper, plastic and wood)
- Textiles (clothes, footwear and leather)
- Mining and extraction
- Architecture and construction
- Architecture and town planning
- Building and civil engineering
- Inter-disciplinary programmes and qualifications involving engineering, manufacturing and construction

## **Inter-disciplinary or broad programmes and qualifications to which the greatest intended learning time is devoted to engineering, manufacturing and construction.**

- Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary
- Agriculture not further defined or elsewhere classified
- Crop and livestock production
- Horticulture
- Forestry
- Fisheries
- Veterinary
- Inter-disciplinary programmes and qualifications involving agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary

## **Inter-disciplinary or broad programmes and qualifications to which the greatest intended learning time is devoted to agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary.**

## Health and Welfare

- Health not further defined or elsewhere classified
- Dental studies
- Medicine
- Nursing and midwifery
- Medical diagnostic and treatment technology
- Therapy and rehabilitation
- Pharmacy
- Traditional and complementary medicine and therapy
- Welfare not further defined or elsewhere classified
- Care of elderly and of disabled adults
- Child care and youth services
- Social work and counselling
- Inter-disciplinary programmes and qualifications involving health and welfare

**Inter-disciplinary or broad programmes and qualifications to which the greatest intended learning time is devoted to health and welfare.**

## Services

- Personal services not further defined or elsewhere classified
- Domestic services
- Hair and beauty services
- Hotel, restaurants and catering
- Sports
- Travel, tourism and leisure
- Hygiene and occupational health services
- Community sanitation
- Occupational health and safety
- Security services not further defined or elsewhere classified
- Military and defence
- Protection of persons and property
- Transport services
- Inter-disciplinary programmes and qualifications involving services

**Inter-disciplinary programmes and qualifications to which the greatest intended learning time is devoted to services.**

### Appendix 3 - Inside the Services

"Admin staff shared with wider Access Team."

"It is hard to estimate 12b as we have a number of 6 part-time LS staff giving a number of hours as needed each week."

"(We have) Access Officer, Disability Officer, Learning Support staff (x1 Assistant Psychologist and x 1 part-time Psychologist), part-time maths tutor."

"For 20-21 we have a Part Time 2.5 days per week AT Technical Assistant to help out with AT. Not sure how long this post will be available to the service for."

"There is one full time Access & Disability Officer and one full time Administrator. There are two full time Learning Support Staff. There are 18 staff on part-time hours employed in a range of roles including: Learning Support, Assistive Technology, Academic Tutor, Educational Support Worker, Electronic Note taker. This number does not include agency staff employed as Sign Language Interpreters."

"An Assistive Technologist position will commence working with us in June 2021."

## Appendix 4 - On the Ground Comments (not listed in the selected comments section)

**Question 1.** Does your institution collect/monitor data on the participation of students with disabilities in study abroad programmes such as Erasmus?

**Question 2.** Does the disability/access office collaborate with the international office in the targeted promotion of mobility programmes to students with disabilities and the organisation of supports for students with disabilities on mobility?

As discussed in the main body of the research, question 1 and 2 were frequently answered by respondents using one quote due to both questions pertaining to international study, with question 2 often answered as a sub-question to question 1

“We have no historical data but the plan going forward is to start collecting this data. The plan is to develop the engagement going forward.”

“The Disability Support Service liaises with the international office in relation to students registered with DSS going abroad who may need additional supports and advise in relation to their host university. Disability Support staff also liaise with the international office in relation to queries from incoming support on how to register for disability supports at NUI Galway and ensuring the new students are aware of the supports they can avail of if they choose to study at NUI Galway.”

“Limited collaboration at key points in the year, motivated by student interest in study abroad.”

“The Disability Office make students registered with us aware of Erasmus through information provided by our International Office. We liaise with them if any students with disabilities express an interest in studying abroad.”

“13A - Yes we work with the Erasmus office to check who has applied for the following year and reach out to those students with the Disability Service with information around supports and the additional Erasmus+ grant and offer a needs assessment and discussion before they go on Erasmus/study abroad. 13B No - but we have links with the International Office and would speak at incoming student inductions to highlight how students can access Disability supports. We have a dedicated webpage and pages in our Student Guide to highlight information and supports for incoming and outgoing students.”

**Question 3.** Do you believe that the Covid-19 will significantly change how you provide support for students with disabilities and what supports are provided?

“All MCQ exams are now online, this reduces anxiety for many students as they can now choose to do exams at home or in a study space in the college. It also supports students that live a distance from the college better. These students can choose to take their lectures online, and to travel at off peak hours for tutorials and meetings.”

“I think there will be a positive impact in the area of teaching and assessment, but this will need to be supported in a broad institutional way if it is to be widely applied across all courses. New forms of assessment will need to be built in at the module design stage. I hope these changes happen in light of a greater push for UDL in third level as a whole.”

“We would hope so. Recording of content has always been an area which was difficult to navigate. As this has become common place it is hoped that this will be allowed to continue. Awareness of Accessible Design and Content has also increased which benefits all our students.”

“There are elements of learning that have improved things for student with disabilities and I think some of these will remain in place. The recording of lectures is a prime example of this.”

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