

Going to College

A guide for
students with
disabilities



creating inclusive environments in education
and employment for people with disabilities

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Planning your future – considering your options

Are you about to finish school and thinking about your options? Or perhaps you have been out of school for a number of years and are thinking of returning to education. Well, there are lots of options available to you.

However, there are a number of things you ought to consider before you apply – what are your interests and do you want a career in it? This will probably be one of the most important decisions you will make in life, as we spend around 70% of a given year in work so you should choose an area that interests you and plays to your strengths.

Talking to a career guidance counsellor can be very helpful, particularly if you are unsure or need advice about your options. You can do this by making an appointment to see your school career guidance teacher. If you've already left school or are an adult learner contact your local Education and Training Boards (ETB) or Further Education College for information about free adult guidance services.

Attend careers fairs such as Higher Options or AHEAD's annual Better Options college fair – see our website www.ahead.ie/betteroptions for information.

For information about adult guidance services check out <http://www.aegai.ie/services/>

How do I apply to college?

- The standard entry route into higher education is through the **CAO (Central Applications Office)** which is based on the Leaving Certificate Examination results.
- Attainment of points qualifies the student for the course of their choice. This is the most commonly known way of getting into higher education but there are alternative routes specifically for students with a disability or specific learning difficulty, known as supplementary admissions. The most common of these is called DARE - Disability Access Route to Education.
- Colleges who operate supplementary entry schemes e.g. DARE recognise that the impact of a student's disability may have put them at an educational disadvantage at school. Applying to college through DARE or other supplementary entry schemes may allow the student to enter a course below the standard CAO points requirement.

You must attain the minimum core subject entry requirements for your chosen course unless you have an approved language exemption e.g. Irish. However, be advised, language waivers are not automatically accepted by colleges running supplementary entry schemes e.g. DARE - a student must apply directly to Trinity College Dublin and the National University of Ireland for a language waiver.

For a list of the colleges who participate in DARE visit www.accesscollege.ie

The vast majority of third level colleges now participate in the DARE scheme, but if the third level college you are interested in applying for is not listed, contact the admissions office to see if they operate their own supplementary admissions scheme.

How do I apply to college/s that operate supplementary admissions schemes e.g. DARE?

- **Apply to the CAO by 17.15 on the 1st of February.**
- **You must be under the age of 23 years on January 1st of the year of entry.**
- **Tick the box on the CAO Form in answer to the question “Do you have a ‘Disability/ Specific Learning Difficulty’ on the online CAO application form.**

You will then be directed to a separate online application form called the **Supplementary Information Form (SIF)** for completion. Completion of the SIF form allows students with disabilities or specific learning difficulties to be considered for supplementary admissions schemes operated in specific colleges nationwide, including **DARE - Disability Access Route to Education.**

When completed, the CAO will then circulate the information provided to all the colleges of the applicant’s choice.

IMPORTANT

The non-completion and non-return of the **Supplementary Information Form (SIF)** will exclude students from any nonstandard entry routes available in a number of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

However, if you don't disclose on your CAO application and then find you need disability related support when you start college, contact the Disability or Access service, because regardless of whether or not you got your place through DARE or another nonstandard entry route, once you have a verified disability you can avail of a range of supports.

How do I complete the Supplementary Information Form (SIF)?

There are 4 steps to completing the Supplementary Information Form (SIF):

1. Complete and submit your **Personal Statement** (Section A) - by 1st March.
2. If you wish to be considered for the DARE scheme you must select '**Yes**' to the question '**Do you wish to be considered for DARE**' on Section A by 1st March.
3. Download Section B - **Second Level Academic Reference** as this form must be completed by the appropriate teacher in your school. It needs to be downloaded, completed and returned by post to the CAO by 1st April.
4. Download Section C - **Evidence of Disability Form**. This must be completed by the appropriate medical professional (only if you do not already have a report verifying your disability which meets the DARE criteria). This must be returned by post to the CAO by 1st April.

Students with a specific learning difficulty must provide an educational psychologist report. This can be of any age, but it must contain up to date attainment scores, undertaken within the last three years by your school, or an educational psychologist.

TIPS

- Ensure you have the appropriate Evidence of Disability reports well in advance of making your application.
- For application purposes, age limits may be placed on certain types of medical reports. For medical report age limits check out www.accesscollege.ie, for other colleges, contact the admissions office.
- Make sure you or your parents/guardians post the Evidence of Disability form and The Educational Impact Statement to the CAO. Do not depend on the school to do this!
- Remember to get a 'certificate of postage' for everything you post to the CAO.
- Keep original medical reports and send good quality copies to the CAO. Make sure all the pages are in the correct order and write your CAO number and name at the top of each page.
- Completing the DARE application can be daunting so get assistance from your parents/guardians.
- Late applications or documentation will not be accepted under any circumstances so check all closing dates on CAO or www.accesscollege.ie website.

The HEAR scheme

Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) is a college and university scheme which offers places on reduced points and extra college support to school leavers from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Eligible students are entitled to apply for both HEAR and DARE and if deemed eligible for both routes may be given preference in the allocation of reduced points places.

For more information check out www.accesscollege.ie

What happens next?

Your application will be processed and you will be informed of whether you are eligible for DARE. This means you can compete for one of the reduced points places on offer in Higher Education Institutions operating the DARE scheme.

You must still meet the core entry requirements for your chosen course.

Applicants who are offered places as a result of supplementary admissions e.g. DARE are normally notified through the first or second round of CAO offers.

You will still be considered for DARE and other supplementary admissions schemes if you use the change of mind form or make a late application. However, you must still submit the Supplementary Information Form (SIF) and supporting documentation by the dates specified.

Mature Applicants

Mature applicants are not eligible for supplementary admission schemes e.g. DARE. Contact individual colleges for mature applicant information.





Other Educational Options

Further Education and Training

Don't despair if you are aiming to move on to higher education but don't achieve enough points from your Leaving Certificate, or if you're a mature applicant. Further Education and Training (FET) colleges offer a wide range of educational choices including apprenticeships, post leaving cert courses and adult education.

Obtaining a FETAC Level 5 or 6 qualification in your local Further Education and Training college may enable you to progress to higher education as part of the Higher Education Links Scheme. As many as 1 in 5 applicants to CAO have a FETAC award.

For more information check out www.fetchcourses.ie

What are Access Programmes?

Many Higher Education Institutions run **Access Programmes** which are designed specifically for people who may not have the conventional educational requirements and/or who come from socio-economic backgrounds which are underrepresented at third level. The aim of an Access course is to enable students to acquire the skills, knowledge and confidence to compete on an equal footing with those students who enter higher education through the conventional entry channels, for example, Leaving Certificate students.

Participants who successfully complete an Access Course will receive a **Certificate of Completion** from the college and will be eligible to apply for direct entry (via the CAO) to third level degree courses. Interviews with the Department/College Head may also be required as part of the application process.

Are there Access Courses for school leavers?

Some Access Courses cater for school leavers while others only cater for mature applicants.

How can I find out more information about Access Courses?

Contact the Adult Education Office or the Admissions Office of the Higher Education Institution (HEI) you are interested in attending or check out their college website.

Disclosure – why you should inform an education provider about your disability or specific learning difficulty

This helps colleges to plan ahead and ensure that the support needs of their students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties are met. You may require disability related support or assistance to carry out your studies and to participate in college activities.

Once you have accepted your place you should contact the **Disability Support Service** or **Access Officer** in the college to discuss any equipment and/or services you may require to fully participate in your course. The Disability or Access Officer will carry out a **Needs Assessment** and then submit a claim for funding from the Fund for Students with Disabilities on your behalf, which is used to pay for equipment and/or supports that have been identified as necessary.

If you obtained your college place through the DARE scheme or disclosed your disability on your college application form the college will already know you have a disability and will contact you to make an appointment for a chat. But be proactive - the beginning of the year is a busy time for the Disability/Access service! Call in and make yourself known, and remember to check your student email account regularly!

Whether or not you choose to disclose a disability is entirely up to you, but if you choose not to disclose you will not be able to avail of the services provided by the Disability Supports Service in college.

Get yourself orientated!

If you have a **physical or sensory disability** you should arrange for an on-campus orientation prior to the start of term. This will enable you to become familiar with routes to and from lectures, the canteen, the library, the students union offices, etc.

If you are a **wheelchair user** you should make direct contact with the college(s) prior to accepting your place and check how accessible the buildings are. Wheelchair access has improved vastly over the last few years, however, it is always a good idea to visit the campus yourself to check out if it caters to your needs. You might want to consider the size of the campus and things like transport and accommodation. For example, can you commute from where you are currently living, if not, do they have accessible accommodation on campus?



Disability Support Services

The aim of the Disability Support Service is to provide support for students with disabilities during their time at college.

The Disability Support office is concerned with the following areas:

- Assisting with admissions.
- Carrying out Needs Assessments to identify the support needs of students with disabilities/or specific learning difficulties.
- Organising assistive technology.
- Co-ordinating learning support services.
- Liaising with the examinations office.

For further information about each third level institution's specific services contact the Disability or Access Office of the institution in question.

Assistive Technology

Assistive technology is an umbrella term for any device, piece of equipment, system, or software that allows an individual to perform a task they would otherwise be unable to do, or increases the ease and safety with which the task can be performed. Some assistive technology is specifically designed to support people with disabilities or impairments in their everyday tasks.

In college, assistive technology is usually used by students with disabilities or specific learning difficulties to support independent learning and to increase the accessibility of materials. Some examples of assistive technology include voice recognition systems, voice synthesis, Braille embossing, alternative computer input devices (track-balls, switches, etc), SpeedText and recording devices.

Tip: If you have been given a new piece of assistive technology or computer software package it is important that you receive adequate training from the designated staff in the college.

Learning Support Service

This service helps students to develop learning strategies to assist them in their studies. It does this through a variety of courses, workshops and other programs.

These sessions are not about academic support. At third level the students are in control of their own learning. The role of the learning support tutor is to facilitate the student to develop independent learning skills and strategies to enable them to cope with the demands of progressing through their course work.

Examples of services include:

- Study skills
- Tutor support
- Reading techniques
- Research skills
- Note-taking
- Memory techniques
- Essay writing
- Revision tips
- Time management
- Examination preparation

Get to grips with studying at third level, check out the study skills website Quest for Learning at www.questforlearning.org

Examination Facilities

Examinations are central to the academic process and students with disabilities are encouraged to request appropriate supports and arrangements for the examinations at the beginning of each academic year.

Students with a disability or specific learning difficulty can access the following facilities during examinations if they are deemed necessary:

- Extra time
- Transcription of examinations
- Enlarged examination papers
- Brailled examination papers
- Recording of examinations
- Use of assistive technology
- Provision of individual rooms
- Sitting examinations in an alternative centre
- Sign language interpreters/Personal Assistance - the use of any specific personnel must be approved by the institution prior to the examination

To avail of any support services, the student will have to negotiate with lecturers, tutors and the Disability/Access Officer in the college.

It is the student's responsibility to apply well in advance to the appropriate college authority (Disability/Access Officer or Examination Office) for provision of facilities or supports as they may involve administrative and timetabling changes.

Students must have adequate working practice in any facility which they request to use in the examination, for example, assistive technology. This is to safeguard against delays and errors during the examination.



College Fees and Funding

Many first time undergraduate students attending publicly funded third-level courses do not have to pay tuition fees if they come under the terms of the Free Fees Initiative. However, if you are not entitled to the **Student Grant (SUSI)** you will have to pay the **Student Contribution Fee**.

The Student Grant

The Student Grant Scheme is the main financial support scheme for students.

To qualify for a student grant, applicants must fulfill the conditions of the scheme as regards:

- Nationality and immigration status
- Residence
- Means
- Be attending an approved course in an approved institution

The amount given depends on where the student lives in relation to the third level institution i.e. the amount differs if you live within or outside of a 45 kilometre radius of the college.

The Student Grant is available to students in full-time Post Leaving Certificate Courses (PLCs) and full-time higher education undergraduate/postgraduate courses.

Student grants are divided into **maintenance grants, fee grants** and the **postgraduate contribution**.

A maintenance grant is a contribution towards the student's living costs.

Note: If you are getting a maintenance grant, you cannot get a Back to Education Allowance or Vocational Training and Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) allowance

A fee grant can cover any of the following 3 elements:

- All or part of the student contribution.
- Costs of essential field trips.
- All or part of a student's tuition fees (unless covered by the Free Fees Scheme).

How do I apply for the Student Grant?

- Applicants apply online through the [SUSI.ie](https://www.susi.ie) website.
- Applicants do not need to know the exact course they will be attending in order to apply online. Applicants will need their **Personal Public Service Number (PPS Number)** and an email address to apply online.
- The student grant is not specifically for students with disabilities but can be availed of by them.

For more information check out the following websites:

www.studentfinance.ie or www.citizensinformation.ie

Back to Education Allowance Scheme

This funding scheme is administered by the Department of Social Protection. To avail of the **Back to Education Allowance (BETA)** scheme students must be registered on a full time course and have been in receipt of specified social payments for the previous 12 months (in certain circumstances 9 months will suffice).

The rate of payment is the same amount as the Disability Allowance but includes:

- A once-a-year cost of education payment at the start of the academic year.
- Students can work while on the scheme without it affecting their payment.
- BTEA recipients are not eligible for the maintenance part of the Student Grant, but are eligible to apply to have the Student Services Charge paid on their behalf under the Student Grant scheme.

Students should contact their local Citizens Information Centre or Social Welfare Office for more information.

Student Assistance Fund

The **Student Assistance Fund** provides financial support to full or part-time students who are experiencing financial difficulties while attending a third level college. Students can apply for the Student Assistance Fund to help with either temporary or ongoing financial difficulties. Note though eligibility is subject to a means test.

For more information about funding at third level check out the following website: www.studentfinance.ie

How do I avail of disability related supports in college?

- Contact and register with the Disability or Access Service in college at the beginning of term.
- Each publicly funded Higher Education Institution (HEI) is given a grant from the Higher Education Authority called the **Fund for Students with Disabilities**. This fund enables colleges to provide specialist equipment and support services for students with a disability or specific learning difficulty.
- After a student's support needs have been assessed by the Disability or Access Officer, the Disability or Access Officer submit a claim to the Fund for Students with Disabilities within the college. Once the supports have been agreed these must be signed off by the Disability or Access Officer and the student.
- Support services can include: personal assistants, sign language interpreters, SpeedText operators, photocopying, additional tuition, and learning support.
- Specialist equipment can include: Recording devices, radio aids, computer software e.g. JAWS, Text HELP.

- The Fund for Students with Disabilities is only available to students attending FETAC level 5 or above accredited courses.
- Students attending FETAC accredited courses in their local further education college/ETB need to contact the designated disability support person or the Principal to discuss their disability support needs. Unlike Higher Education Institutions, ETB's make individual applications to the HEA (Higher Education Authority) for funding from the Fund for Students with Disabilities.
- Any equipment provided remains the property of the college.
- No money will go directly to the student and it cannot be used to cover other costs such as food, books or study materials.
- Information provided by the student with a disability will be treated as strictly confidential and is subject to the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998 and General Data Protection Rules (GDPR).



Your Legal Rights

The Education Act (1998) is concerned with promoting equality in our educational system. According to this Act, educational institutions must provide students with a disability or learning difficulty with adequate resources, accommodations and supports to meet their educational needs.

Educational institutions must establish and maintain an admissions policy that provides for maximum accessibility within education.

The Equal Status Act (2000) outlines specific provisions for education known as reasonable accommodation.

‘A reasonable accommodation can be any means of providing special treatment or facilities if, without such accommodations it would be impossible or unduly difficult for the person to avail of the service provided by the educational establishment’. (Section 4)

However, the act goes on to state that the service provider (educational establishment) will not have to provide that accommodation if it gives rise to more than a ‘nominal cost’.

Where funding is available to meet the costs of accommodations required, such as the Special Fund for Students with Disabilities in third level, then the educational institution is obliged to pursue them in addition to covering any other costs up to a ‘nominal level’ which will be defined through case law.

Reasonable accommodation ensures that students with a disability:

- are not hindered by their disability, enabling them to compete on an equal basis with other students.
- enjoy equal access to courses, facilities or benefits provided by the third level institution.

The Disability Act (2004) places a number of statutory obligations on colleges to:

- provide accessible information.
- ensure accessible buildings (Part M compliant by 2015).
- ensure access to all elements of college services.
- carry out individual needs assessments for students with disabilities and provide them with disability related supports, if deemed necessary.



Studying at college: what to expect

There is a different approach to learning and teaching in college than at school.

- The student is expected to work on their own for longer periods, without a tutor in the room to guide them.
- It's the student's responsibility to ensure that they attend lectures and hand in assignments on time.
- The student can feel that their study lacks structure. However, it can also be very liberating – giving them more freedom to study in ways that suit them. Taking advantage of this freedom and gaining an understanding of their own learning pattern can help the student to study more effectively.

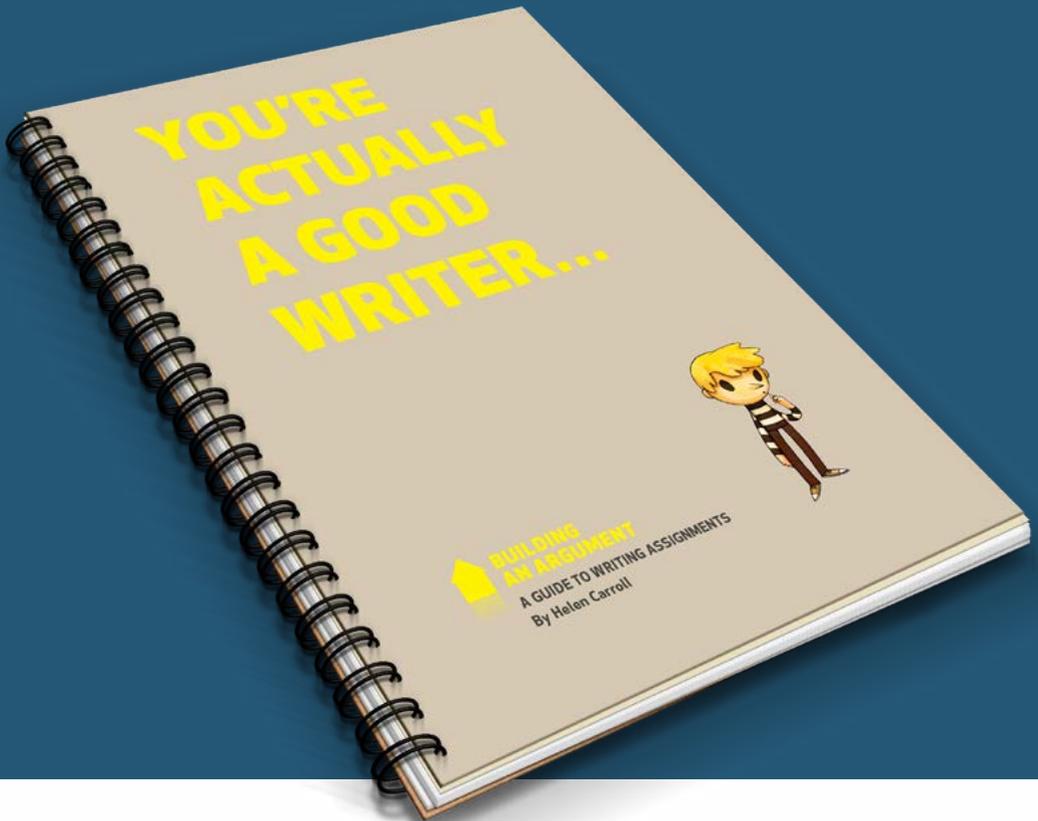
Teaching methods – these can differ, but at least some of the following can be expected:

- **Lectures** provide a general overview of a subject or topic. They can vary in size, length and frequency. Lecturers deliver the material using microphones, overhead projection notes and blackboards. Students are expected to listen, take notes and participate only if invited.
- **Seminars** are aimed at developing a discussion of topics. Size is generally small to medium with approximately 10 to 30 participants. A student or a group of students may be asked to open a discussion with a presentation. It is vital to prepare for seminars by completing readings or preparing discussion materials as the student's participation is assessed. Attendance and contribution at seminars often count towards a final subject mark.
- **Tutorials** are delivered in small groups of 5 to 20 or on an individual basis. They are used to provide feedback on the student's work and facilitate discussion of topics delivered in lectures. Tutorials are rarely of more than an hour's duration and can occur weekly or only once or twice a term.

Your guide to writing assignments in college

Get to grips with writing assignments! Order a copy of 'A Guide to Writing Assignments' by Helen Carroll from the publications section on the AHEAD website.

This invaluable guide takes a flatpack approach to academic writing and helps you build an argument from the ground up.



Making contact with lecturers

While tutors are often reasonably accessible, it is sometimes more difficult to make contact with a lecturer.

Some lecturers are available to speak to students directly after a lecture. Others will request that the student make an appointment to speak in private and at a scheduled hour. The student should adhere to the office hours or visiting hours specified by the lecturer in question.

All departments and even individual lecturers have certain preferences regarding the behaviour of or contact with students; essay writing styles and assignment presentation. The student needs to be alert and get to know what individual lecturers or departments prefer.

Assessments

How departments assess learning can vary. Some will base it on coursework or continuous assessment, or by formal exams, while others implement a mixture of methods.

Deadlines and extensions

These exist in order to train the student in time management and task completion. It is in the student's interest to adhere to them. In special circumstances, such as illness or bereavement, exceptions may be made but a lecturer is under no obligation to provide such consideration and in some cases may not be in a position to facilitate requests for consideration.

Due to the impact of the student's disability or specific learning difficulty they may be able to avail of deadline extensions for assignments but need to be aware that this can lead to an accumulation of assignments.

Getting the most from the learning environment

Students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties need to be aware of their own learning needs.

Firstly, the student needs to register with the Disability Support Service or Access Service, and then make themselves known to their lecturers so they are made aware of any learning or support needs at the beginning of the academic year.

Deaf or hard of hearing students require:

- The lecturer/tutor to face the group when speaking.
- Copies of lecture notes and/or overheads in advance.
- Different means of recording notes such as a SpeedText operator, sign language interpreter and/or note-taker.
- Academic staff to directly address the student, not the interpreter or assistant.
- Prioritised reading lists available in advance so that they have sufficient time to translate material into an accessible format.
- Flexibility of assignment deadlines.

Students with visual impairments require:

- Background noise to be kept to a minimum.
- Different means of recording notes, such as a recording device, laptops with adaptive technology, Braille and Speak and/or note-takers.
- Lecture notes available in advance and in electronic format.
- Prioritised reading lists available in advance so they have sufficient time to translate material into an accessible format.

Students with mobility impairments need to ensure:

- Ramps and doors are wide enough for easy access.
- Classrooms, lecture halls and theatre spaces are physically accessible.
- Laboratory and other workspace equipment can be adapted where necessary.
- Availability of wheelchair accessible toilets.

Students with specific learning difficulties will benefit from:

- Access to assistive technology.
- Different means of recording notes, such as recording device, laptops with adaptive technology, and/or note-takers.
- Lecture notes available in advance and in electronic (alternative) format.
- Lecture notes online (e.g. Blackboard/Moodle).
- Prioritised reading lists available in advance so that they have sufficient time to translate material into an accessible (alternative) format.

Make time to enjoy yourself...

College life is not just about going to lectures and studying, it's also about making new friends and having fun. As a new student you may not know any of the other students but remember, all Freshers are in the same boat! You should visit the Students Union office and check out the events calendar. Most colleges have a range of student societies and clubs - joining one of these is a great way to meet people and make new friends.

College can be an exciting but daunting experience. Remember, there are various services in place to offer support such as the disability, counselling and medical services.



For further information contact

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