



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHE
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY



University of Galway *Widening Participation* Committee

Annual Report 2023-24



University
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“This edition continues to provide evidence of the important strides made by the University to increase the equality of educational opportunity for students from underrepresented groups in higher education.”





Chair's Foreword



I am delighted to write this foreword to the third edition of the University of Galway Widening Participation Committee's (WPC) annual Widening Participation Report. The WPC is a sub-committee of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Campus Committee (EDICC), now in its fourth year of existence. I am privileged to be WPC chair and serve alongside dynamic members from the University's four Colleges, professional services staff, Students' Union and external stakeholders. This edition continues to provide evidence of the important strides made by the University to increase the equality of educational opportunity for students from underrepresented groups in higher education.

The academic year 2023/2024 was a significant milestone in our endeavours to transform access to higher education for students from underrepresented groups. In May 2024, the University's Access Centre celebrated 25 years of the successful delivery of Access Programmes. Since their establishment in 1999, these programmes played a pivotal role in supporting students from underrepresented groups to progress to a full-time undergraduate degree at the University of Galway. A series of on-campus events were held in partnership with graduates of the Programme, current and former University staff members. A commemorative plaque was unveiled outside the Access Centre's office in Áras Uí Chathail by Galway City Mayor, Cllr. Eddie Hoare.

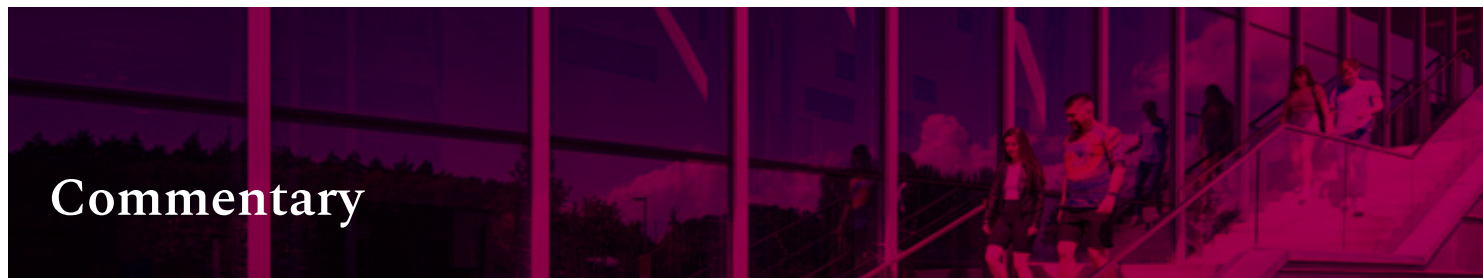
Access programmes have continually developed over the 25 years in order to meet the changing needs of underrepresented students. A noteworthy recent development is the Access Centre's partnership with Grant Thornton to develop a professional mentoring module for students studying business subjects. In 2023/24, this initiative developed further when Medtronic also partnered with the Access Centre to provide professional mentoring to students studying science subjects on the programme.

I would like to acknowledge the outstanding contribution that colleagues involved in the delivery of the Access Programme have shown over the last 25 years in furthering equality in educational opportunity for underrepresented students. I would particularly like to acknowledge the leadership that Head of the Access Centre, Imelda Byrne has demonstrated over these 25 years.

As we shall see throughout this year's Report, a commitment to widening participation continues to be a hallmark of the University of Galway. I want to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to all our University staff and members of the Students' Union who continue to demonstrate this commitment in their work and everyday interactions with students. It is through this whole-of-institution approach that we stand the best chance of ensuring an inclusive environment for all.

John Hannon

Director of Student Services and Chair of the University of Galway Widening Participation Committee



Since the publication of our second annual WPC report, we have seen a number of significant developments and milestones achieved in the area of widening participation. This includes: reporting requirements, strategy development, funding applications and 25 years of the successful delivery of access programmes at University of Galway. In terms of reporting, the ongoing measurement and successful delivery of the National Access Plan 2022-28 is embedded in the HEA Act 2022. According to the Act, HEI's are now required to report on an annual basis to the HEA on the implementation of the NAP – this is a significant departure from previous iterations of NAP. In November 2023, University of Galway submitted its first annual National Access Plan (NAP) report, which aims to evaluate our performance vis-à-vis the overarching ambitions, goals and objectives of the plan. These overarching ambitions are: 'the higher education student body entering, participating in and completing higher education, at all levels and across all programmes reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population' and HEI's ought to be 'inclusive, universally designed environments which support and foster student success and outcomes, equity and diversity and are responsive to the needs of students and wider communities' (HEA, 2002a, p.51). We look forward to our feedback from the HEA regarding our performance in this regard.

If reporting is now an important part of the HEA's overall plans to ensure the successful implementation of widening participation goals in each HEI, so too is strategy development. There have been two major institutional developments here. The University's draft Widening Participation Strategy has gone through two stakeholder engagement sessions, where barriers to the implementation of the Strategy's proposed goals were discussed. These goals are:

Goal 1: To increase access and participation in higher education for people from underrepresented socio-economic groups, and minority status groups.

Goal 2: To engage with schools, FET providers, community groups, employers and the wider community to foster sustained change in beliefs and attitudes about higher education.

Goal 3: To develop collaborative strategic partnerships internally within the university to promote the widening participation agenda.

Goal 4: To collect and disseminate research on widening participation activities delivered throughout the University.

An Internal stakeholder session was held in March 2024 and included representatives from the University's Colleges, Schools, Professional Services and Students Union. This was followed by an external stakeholder engagement session, which was held in April. This latter session included representatives from the NAP priority groups, as well as local DEIS primary and post-primary schools and Further Education and Training (FET) providers. We are pleased to announce that, in recent weeks, the Strategy's goals and sub-actions have been approved by the WPC and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Campus Committee (EDICC). The strategy will now move to its final stages of institutional approval by the University Management Team (UMT) and Údarás na hOllscoile.



Alongside the development of the University's first Widening Participation Strategy, it is important to mention the ongoing work by the University's Strategy Development Team in developing a new University Strategy for the institution. From the standpoint of widening participation, it was great to see the University Strategy 2030 Think-in session on Access and Participation, which provided an important opportunity to gather feedback from colleagues on how the University's commitment to access and widening participation ought to be represented strategically over the next 5 years. We, particularly, look forward to seeing how this strategic commitment supports the overall ambitions of our first Widening Participation Strategy.

In February 2024, we were delighted to hear the announcement by Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Simon Harris T.D. that University of Galway would be awarded additional funding through the HEA's PATH 4 (Phase 2) fund to develop a programme for students with intellectual disabilities. Commencing in 2025, the Cumas Programme - a Foundational Certificate in Learning and Community - will provide students with a third level learning experience which will develop their knowledge, social engagement and employment prospects. As well as participating in classes with other students with intellectual disabilities, students on Cumas will also take part in social activities and academic classes with students without intellectual disabilities, which will help to ensure a greater understanding and appreciation of the potential of people with intellectual disabilities. The securing of funding through Phase 2 of PATH 4, builds on funding acquired through Phase 1 of PATH 4 to develop the University's first multi-sensory room, which was opened last September as part of ongoing efforts to make our campus more inclusive and sensory friendly.

Lastly, but certainly no means least, was the important milestone achieved of 25 years of the successful delivery of the University's Access Programme. The Access Programme was established in 1999, with the aim to provide a supportive, educational environment that prepares students academically and personally for a full-time undergraduate degree at third level. During this time, over 3,500 students have participated on Access Programmes at University Galway, representing over 3,500 people whose lives have been significantly changed by this opportunity. These programmes have been offered in Galway City and County, including trí Ghaeilge, and throughout the BMW region. They continue to represent a vital resource in ensuring students from underrepresented groups have the opportunity to access and meaningfully participate in higher education. We look forward to what the future brings, in terms of reducing barriers to higher education for the most underrepresented, over the next 25 years.

Imelda Byrne

Head of Access Centre

Dr. Daniel Savery

Widening Participation Officer

Abbreviations

PATH	Programme for Access to Higher Education
FET	Further Education and Training
DEIS	Delivering Equality of opportunity In Schools
WP	Widening Participation HEA Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institute HEAR Higher Education Access Route
DARE	Disability Access Route to Education
SLA	School Leaver's Access
MMIE	Mincéirs Mis'l'd in Education
FSD	Fund for Students with Disabilities
UoS	University of Sanctuary
ETP	Educational Transition Project
GRETB	Galway and Roscommon Education Training Board
CALPD	Centre for Adult Learning and Professional Development
CMNHS	College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences
CSE	College of Science and Engineering
CASSCS	College of Arts, Social Science and Celtic Studies
CBPPL	College of Business, Public Policy and Law
APT	Access to Post-Primary Teaching
ATS	Attract-Transition-Succeed
EDI	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
HE	Higher Education
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UD	Universal Design
UDE	Universal Design in Education
AHEAD	Association for Higher Education Access & Disability
FAF	Financial Aid Fund
SAF	Student Assistance Fund
EAS	Equal Access Survey
DIS	Deprivation Index Score
SRS	Student Record System

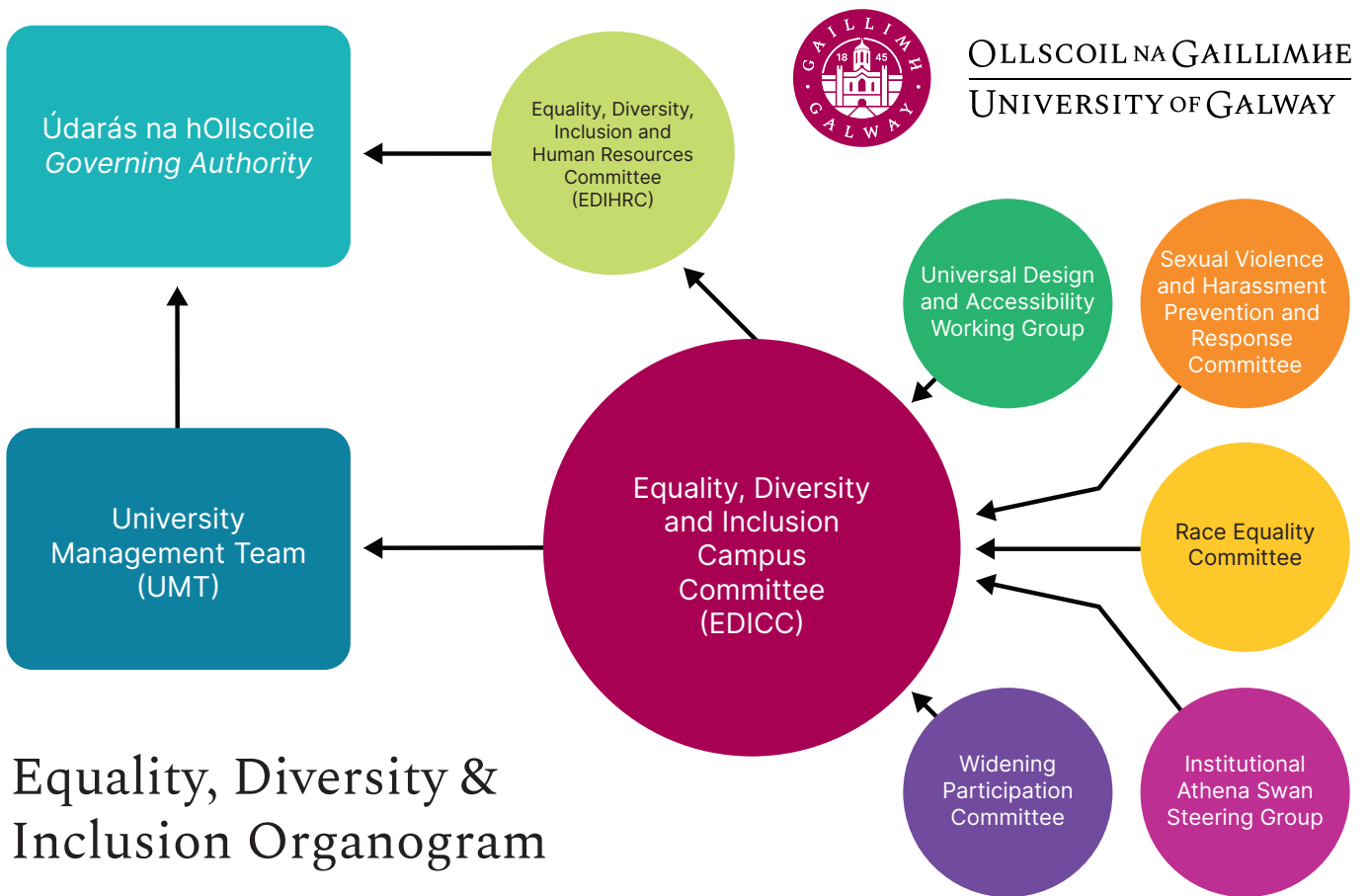
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Governance

Established in 2020, University of Galway's Widening Participation (WP) Committee is a sub-Committee of the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Campus Committee (EDICC). This committee works specifically towards progressing the WP agenda in all areas of the University. The governance structure for this committee is outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Governance at University of Galway



1.

Widening Participation Defined

In order to progress the WP agenda in the University, it is important to define what we mean by this concept. An important initial task of the committee was to establish an agreed upon definition of WP for the institution, which would capture three key elements:

- 1) WP is about creating a more inclusive environment for students who would be traditionally regarded as underrepresented in Higher Education
- 2) WP involves a set of policies and activities developed to improve (1)
- 3) These WP activities and policies (2) take place across the full student lifecycle: Pre-entry, transition, post-entry and employment.

Accordingly, WP may be defined as:

“Widening participation refers to a set of policies and activities which aim to create a more inclusive environment for students who would traditionally be regarded as underrepresented in higher education. These activities cover the full-duration of the student lifecycle (see Figure 2): pre-entry, transition, post-entry and employability.”

Figure 2: The Student Lifecycle



1.1 Widening Participation – Baseline Data

Entry Routes

To ensure the student population reflects the diversity that we find more widely in society, it is important to have good data. Using data from the Student Record System (SRS) we can see the total number of students entering through WP entry routes from 2010 to 2023 outlined below in Table 1. During this time, University of Galway has seen a total 29% increase in students entering through these routes.

Table 1. Number of undergraduate New Entrants (NE) from 2010/11 to 2023/24

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
HEAR Merit	104	140	187	183	198	193	199	181	166	149	162	113	90	95
HEAR Supported	50	50	48	68	69	82	77	56	68	77	68	77	63	67
DARE Merit	21	16	60	40	70	60	85	96	106	94	118	168	179	218
DARE Supported	17	14	20	38	42	35	37	35	59	67	70	79	102	134
Foundation	50	52	49	37	50	31	40	22	11	11	21	16	7	8
FET	7	25	21	14	6	39	62	46	92	99	153	134	94	114
Mature	220	157	127	87	89	75	57	77	66	73	79	86	71	63
Mature Access	69	55	67	52	41	44	42	35	26	23	29	34	19	16
School Leavers Access	58	43	52	49	52	35	56	38	39	36	38	27	19	24
Total	571	552	631	598	617	594	655	586	633	629	738	734	644	739

The Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) and Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) are two national schemes developed by HEI's to increase the number of students entering HE who have a disability (DARE) or who come from socio-economically disadvantaged groups (HEAR) in society. Both the HEAR and DARE schemes offer reduced points places to students on full-time undergraduate programmes and provide additional University supports to students. Figures 2 and 3 chart the increase of students entering through these entry routes over the last 14 years.

Figure 2. Number of HEAR full-time undergraduate New Entrants (NE) from 2010/11 to 2023/24¹

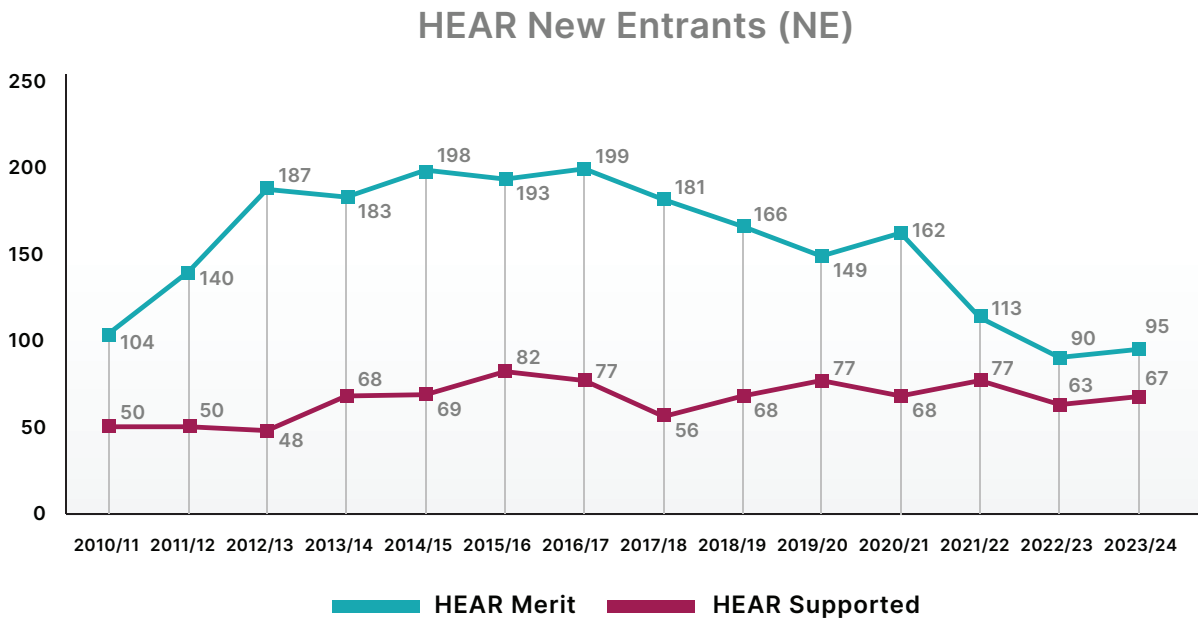
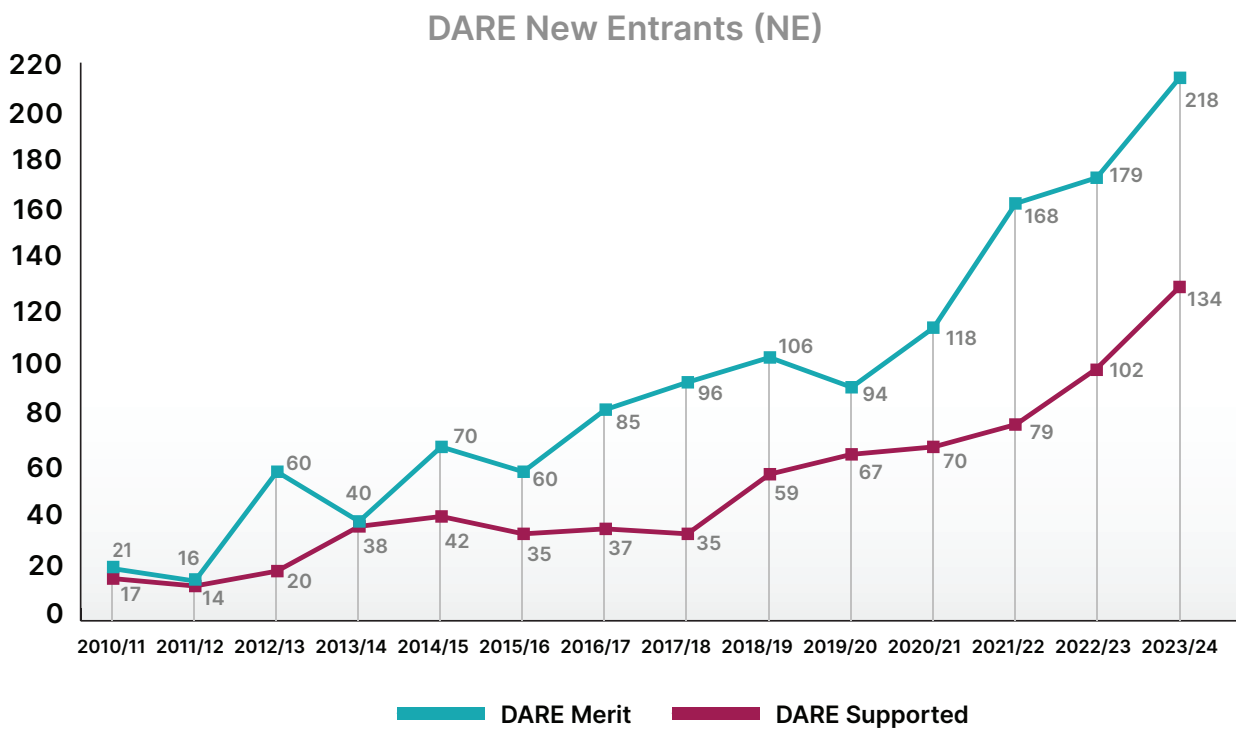


Figure 3. Number of DARE full-time undergraduate New Entrants (NE) from 2010/11 to 2023/24²



¹ HEAR Merit refers to students who were eligible for the scheme but did not need to avail of reduced points; HEAR Supported refers to students who were eligible for the scheme and availed of reduced points.

² See footnote 1 for distinction between merit and supported.

In line with Goal 4 of the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-22³, University of Galway has developed its pathways from Further Education to Higher Education. Figure 4 charts the significant increase of students entering through this entry pathway.

Figure 4. Number of Further Education and Training (FET) full-time undergraduate New Entrants (NE) from 2010/11 to 2023/24

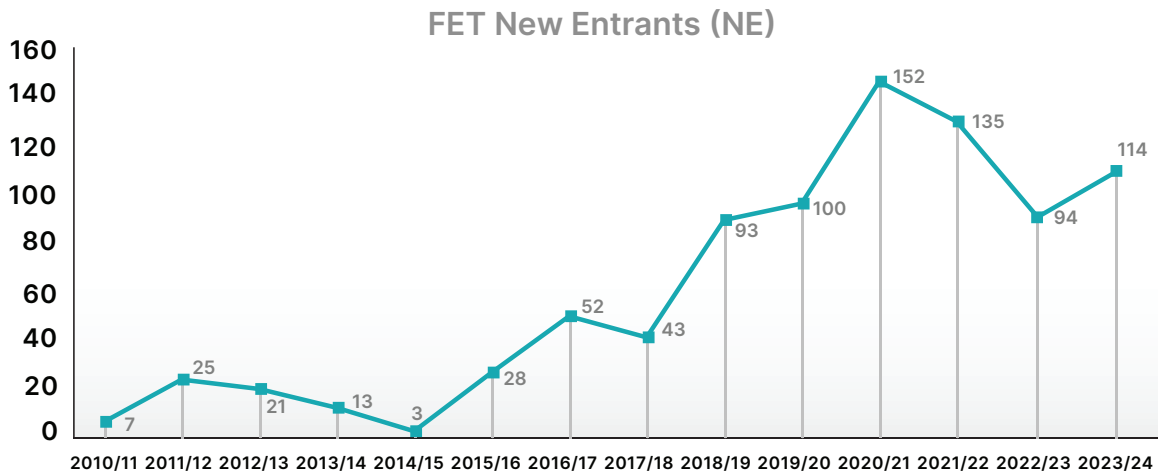
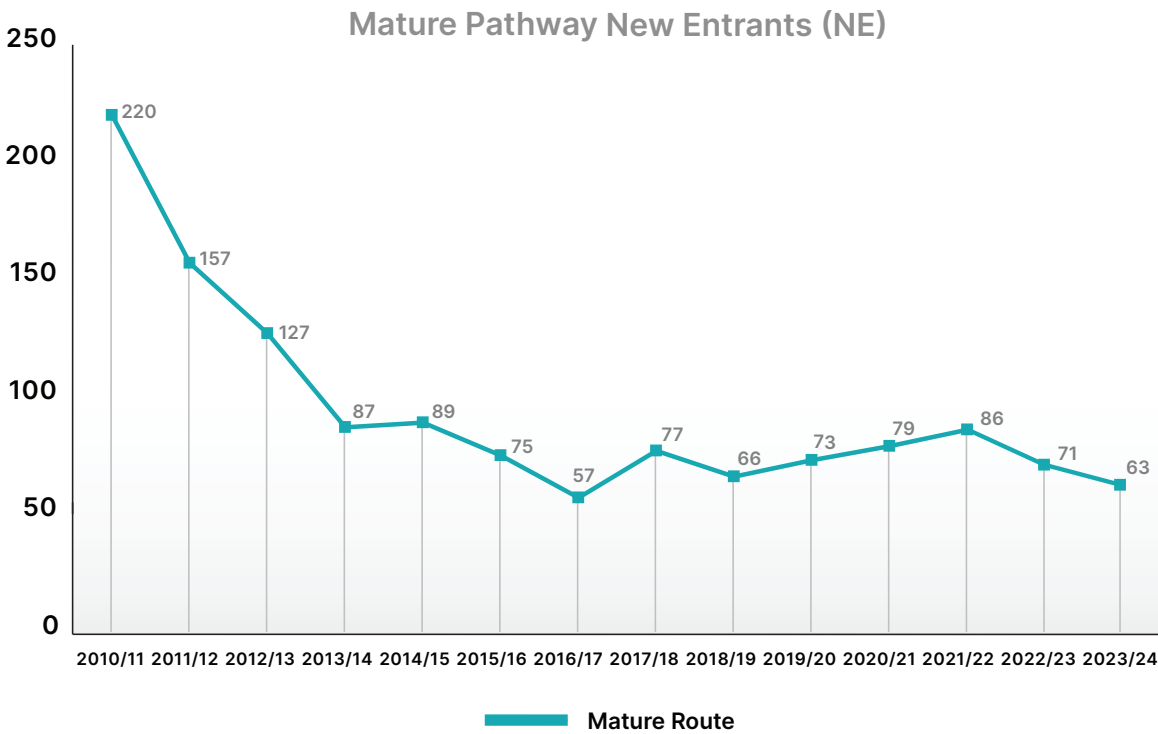


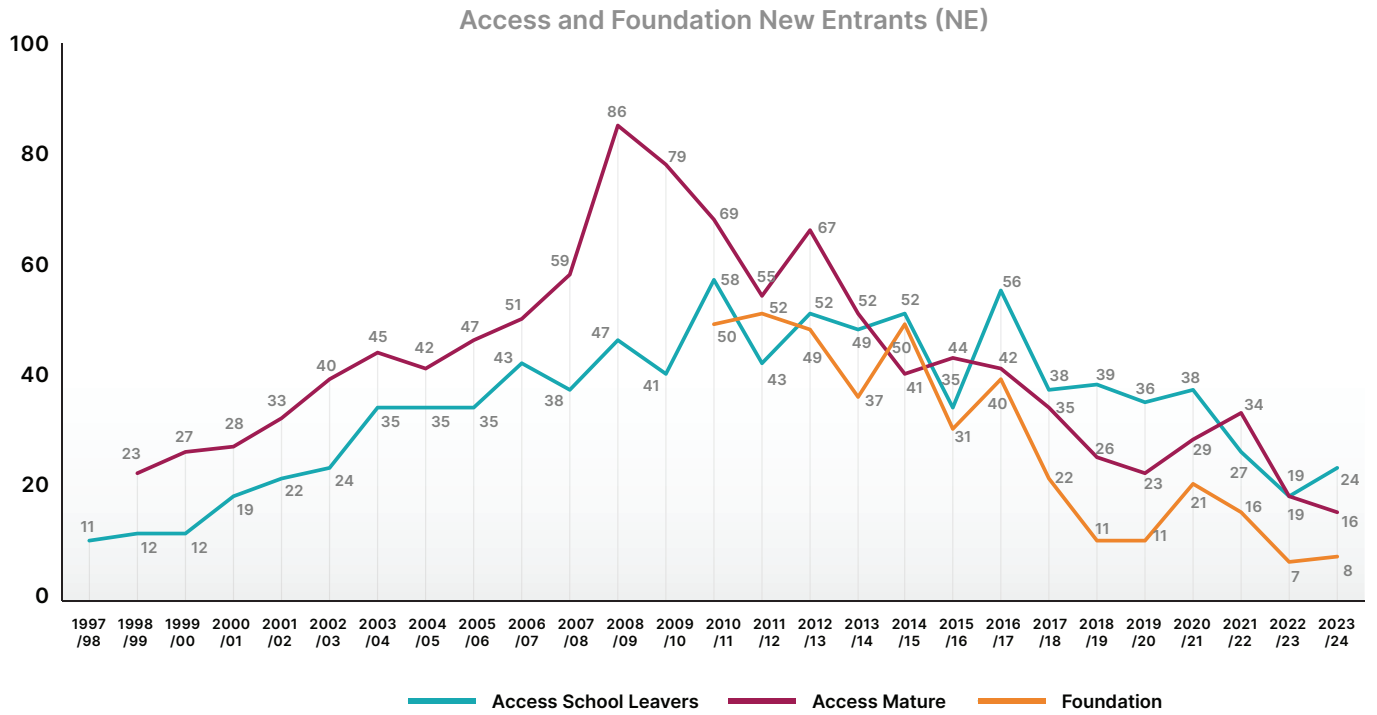
Figure 5. Number of New Entrants (NE) entering through the Mature Student Entry route into full-time undergraduate degrees from 2010/11 to 2023/24³



³ The plan was originally set to run between 2015-2019 but was extended until 2021.

⁴ It is important to note that mature students can also enter through the FET, Access and Foundation pathways, as well as on the basis of their Leaving Certificate results. This chart only relates to students entering through the Mature entry pathway, which has its own specific entry criteria.

Figure 6. Number of Access programme full-time undergraduate New Entrants (NE) from 1999 to 2023/24 and Foundation programme New Entrants (selected period 2010/11 to 2023/24)



1.2 Progression

Figure 7. First Year Progression Rates Disaggregated by Entry Route, from 2015/16 to 2023/24

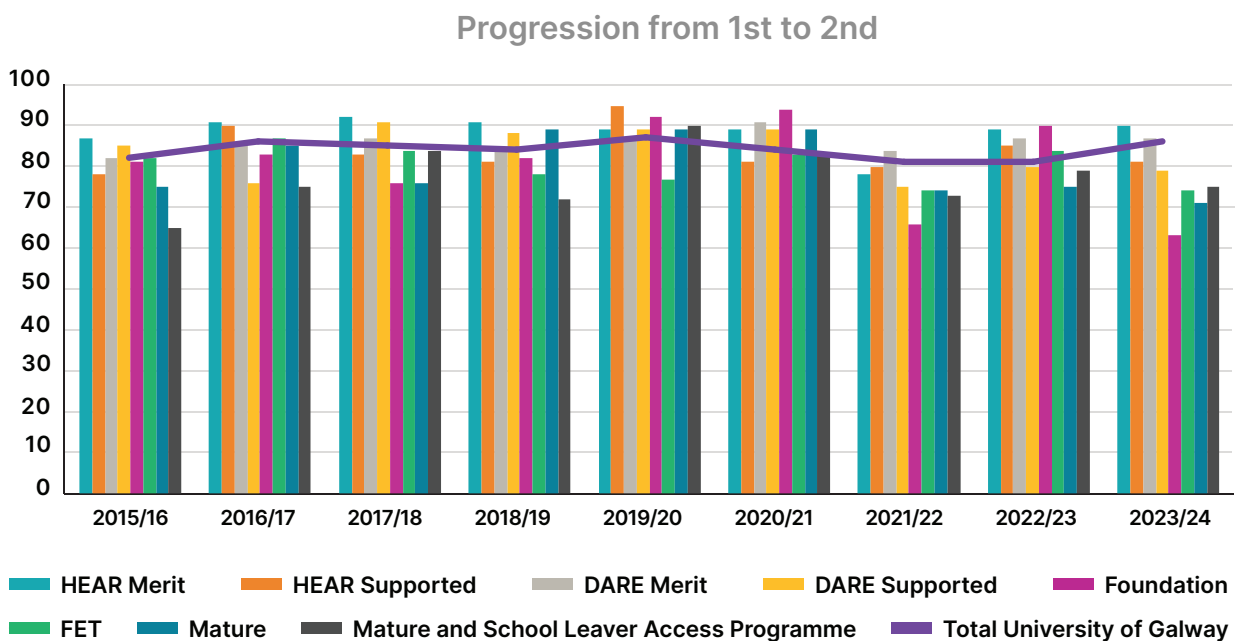


Table 8. Aggregated and Disaggregated Full-time Undergraduate First Year Progression Rates by Target Group, from 2015/16 to 2023/24

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
HEAR Merit	87%	91%	92%	91%	89%	89%	78%	89%	90%
HEAR Supported	78%	90%	83%	81%	95%	81%	80%	85%	81%
DARE Merit	82%	85%	87%	84%	87%	91%	84%	87%	87%
DARE Supported	85%	76%	91%	88%	89%	89%	75%	80%	79%
Foundation	81%	83%	76%	82%	92%	94%	66%	90%	63%
FET	82%	87%	84%	78%	77%	83%	74%	84%	74%
Mature	75%	85%	76%	89%	89%	89%	74%	75%	71%
Mature and School Leaver Access Programme	65%	75%	84%	72%	90%	83%	73%	79%	75%
Aggregated under-represented students	81%	86%	86%	87%	88%	88%	80%	85%	81%
Total University of Galway	82%	86%	85%	84%	87%	84%	81%	81%	86%

1.3 Ethnicity

Table 9. Equal Access Survey Results 2010/11 to 2023/24

Ethnic/ Cultural Background	2010 /11	2011 /12	2012 /13	2013 /14	2014 /15	2015 /16	2016 /17	2017 /18	2018 /19	2019 /20	2020 /21	2021 /22	2022 /23	2023 /24
White Irish	90.95%	92.37%	93.16%	92.54%	93.32%	92.5%	91.9%	88.9%	87.2%	87.1%	82.96%	83.04%	76.26%	76.33%
Irish Traveller (and Roma added in 2020/21)	0.1%	0.08%	0.08%	0.2%	0.15%	0.1%	0.2%	0.4%	0.39%	0.1%	0.51%	0.55%	0.77%	0.9%
Any Other White Background	6.09%	5.45%	5.17%	6.36%	5.61%	6.1%	6.1%	6.6%	7.17%	7.5%	7.78%	7.95%	12.5%	12.07%
Black or Black Irish African	0.3%	1.12%	0.71%	0.41%	0.47%	0.6%	1.0%	1.3%	2.09%	1.7%	2.59%	2.27%	2.32%	2.42%
Other Black Background (new category in 2011/12)		0.32%	0.14%	0.20%	0%	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%	0.39%	0.6%	0.36%	0.27%	0.19%	0.24%
Asian or Asian Irish Chinese	0.71%	0.24%	0.26%	0.1%	0.21%	0.2%	0.3%	1.1%	1.06%	0.9%	0.74%	0.47%	0.7%	0.92%
Other Asian Background	1.82%	0.40%	0.44%	0.15%	0.21%	0.4%	0.3%	1.5%	1.66%	2.1%	2.23%	2.32%	3.62%	3.35%
Other (new category in 2020/21)											2.79%	3.10%	3.63%	3.77%

1.4 Disability Support Registrations

Students with a disability are entitled, under law, to reasonable accommodations. In order to avail of these accommodations, students are invited to register with the Disability Support Service in the Access Centre. The total number of students registering with a disability from 2015/16 to 2023/24 is outlined in figure 10. The breakdown of these annual figures by primary disability category is outlined in table 11. Overall, since the academic years 2015/16 and 2023/24, there has been a **163%** increase in students registering for disability support.

Figure 10. Total Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students registering for Disability Support from 2015/16 to 2023/24

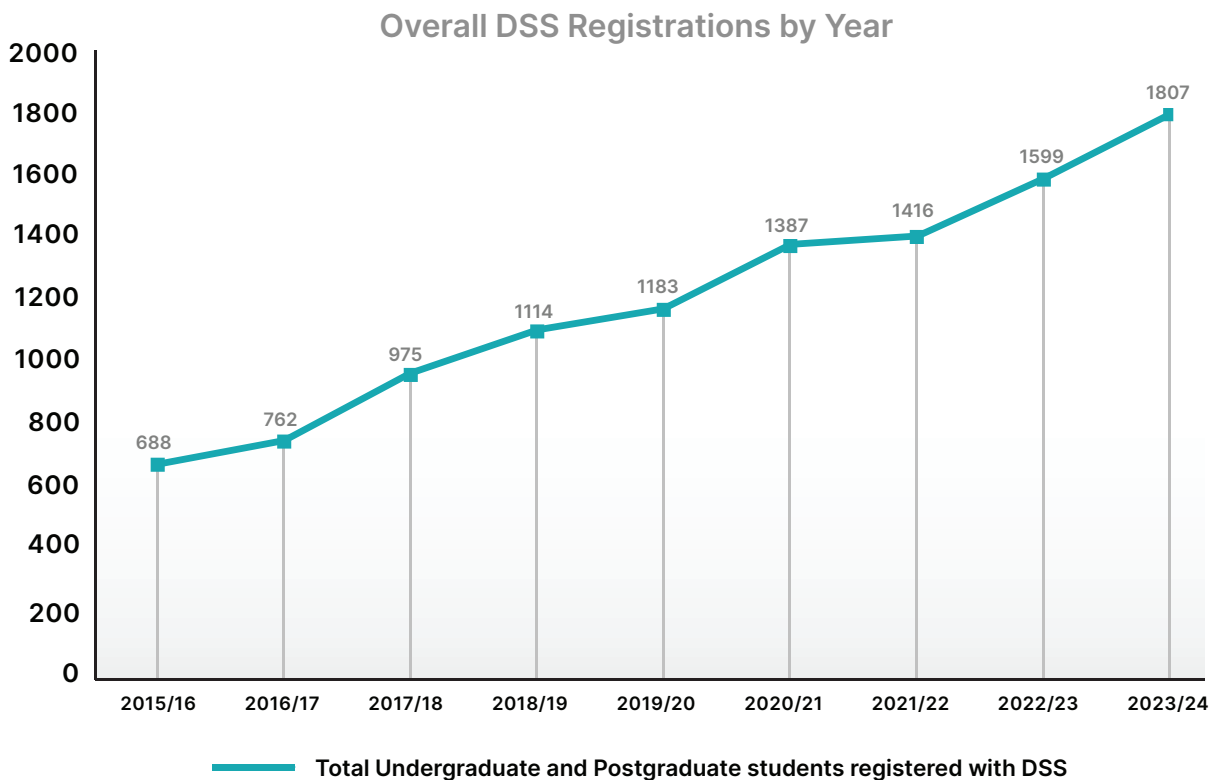


Table 11. Disability Registrations by Primary Disability Category 2015/16 to 2023/24

Primary Disability Category (UG&PG)	2015 /16	2016 /17	2017 /18	2018 /19	2019 /20	2020 /21	2021 /22	2022 /23	2023 /24
Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder (ADD/ADHD)	25	28	39	44	62	74	105	155	203
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	33	39	51	59	67	77	92	107	139
Blind/Vision Impaired (B/VI)	15	20	22	25	30	25	30	36	27
Deaf/Hearing Impaired (D/HI)	12	13	21	25	24	39	44	40	44
Developmental Coordination Disorder(DCD)/Dyspraxia/ Dysgraphia	25	24	31	40	43	59	61	67	82
Mental Health	86	117	207	262	290	327	297	365	411
Neurological	42	49	54	68	66	97	90	98	99
Physical/Mobility	54	57	74	87	89	80	88	92	97
Specific Learning Difficulty (SLD) – Dyslexia, Dyscalculia	286	300	329	347	341	433	441	438	483
Significant Ongoing Illness (SOI)	110	115	147	157	171	176	167	200	214
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	8
TOTAL	688	762	975	1114	1183	1387	1416	1599	1807

Table 12. Total % increase of Primary Disability Categories registrations from 2015/16 to 2023/24

	% Increase 2015/16 – 2023/24
Mental Health Condition	378%
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	321%
Significant Ongoing Illness	94.5%
Specific Learning Difficulties – Dyslexia/Dyscalculia	69%
ADD/ADHD	712%
Physical/Mobility	80%
Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)/Dyspraxia/Dysgraphia	228%
Neurological	136%
Deaf/Hearing Impaired	267%
Blind/Visually Impaired	80%

1.5 DEIS School Data

Figure 13. Number of DEIS full-time undergraduate New Entrants (NE) from 2018/19 to 2023/24

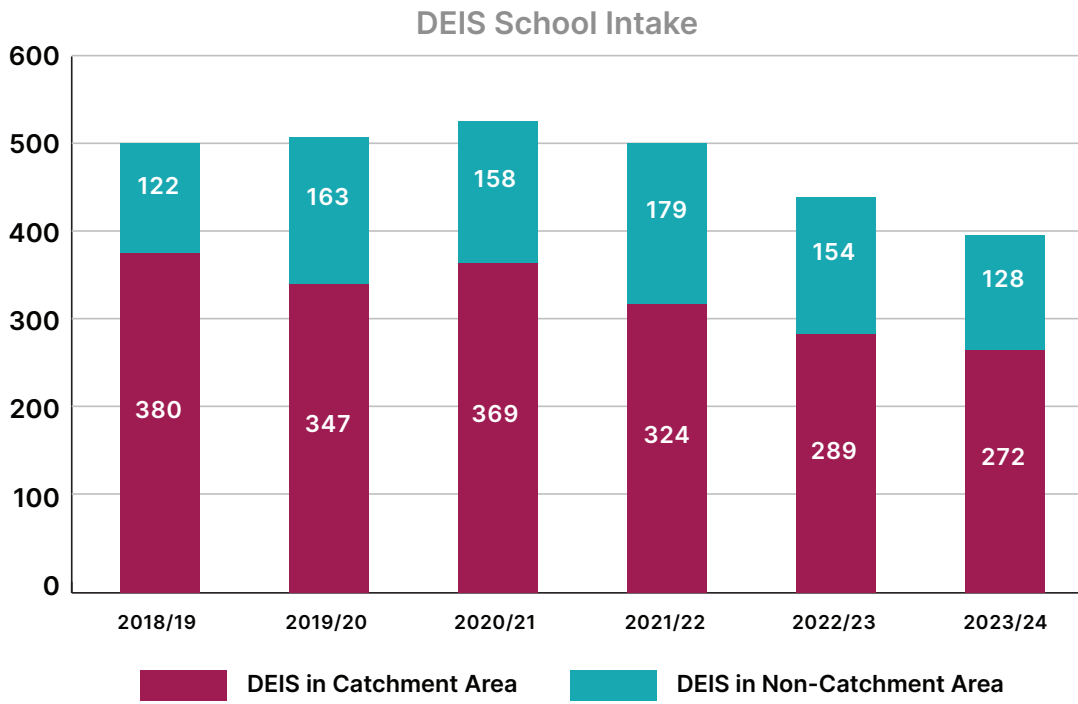


Table 14. Number of DEIS full-time undergraduate New Entrants (NE) from catchment area 2018/19 to 2023/24

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Galway	153	132	140	131	110	110
Mayo	79	78	88	51	59	52
Clare	22	9	20	20	16	18
Roscommon	11	14	31	25	26	37
Sligo	0	1	4	6	6	1
Donegal	115	113	86	91	72	54
TOTAL	380	347	369	324	289	272

1.6 Graduate Outcomes Survey Results

Figure 15 and 16 represents a snapshot of the Graduate Outcomes Survey results for the 6 years 2018 to 2023 (excluding 2019 due to Covid). It represents data for three groups, namely: students registered with the Access Centre's Disability Support Service, Alternative Pathways students and the general student population.

Figure 15. Graduate Outcomes Survey 2018-2023

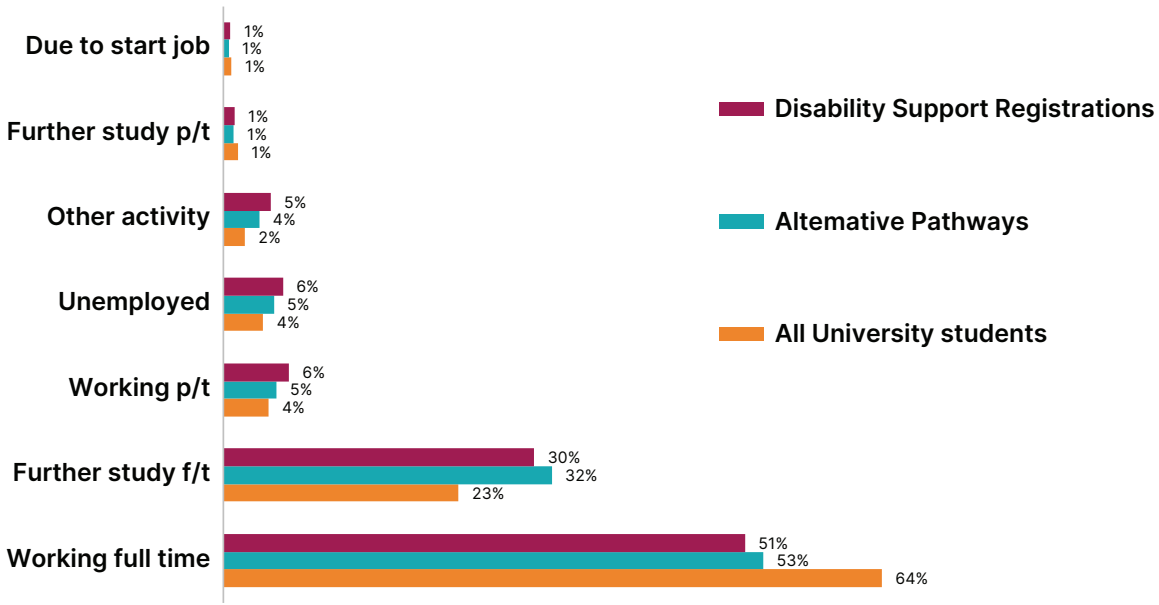
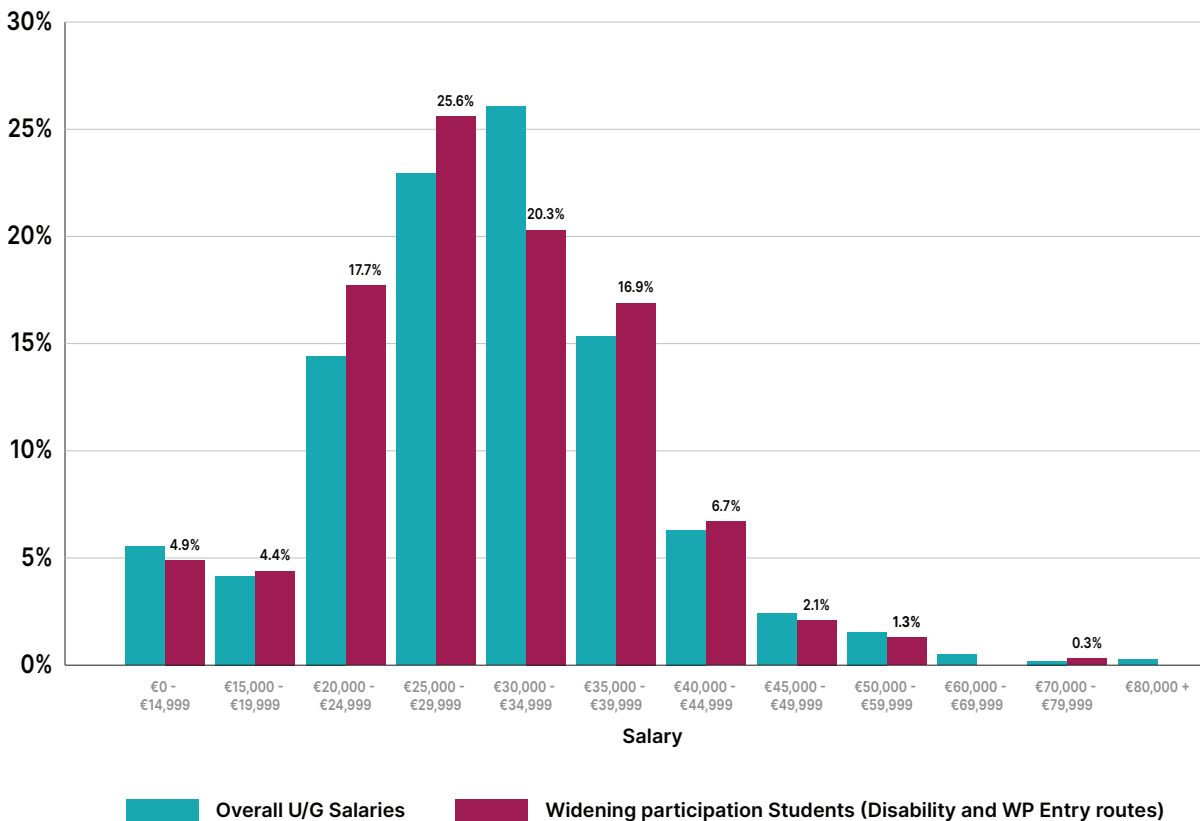


Figure 16. Graduate Salaries (undergraduate) compared for overall student population versus Widening Participation students 9 months after graduation.



2.

Widening Participation Activities

This section outlines some of the many successful WP activities delivered by University of Galway in 2023/24. These activities cover the full student lifecycle.

2.1 Uni4U



Uni4U is a University of Galway Access Centre initiative specifically targeted at students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds attending DEIS primary schools and primary schools linked to the Access Centre in Galway City.

Uni4U sees students and their teachers visit campus each week for seven weeks to engage in workshops with various University departments and schools.

In 23/24 Uni4U worked with 5 different schools in the region and welcomed over 200 primary school students on campus each week over the programme period. Participants engaged in multiple workshops and activities delivered by our campus colleagues and other organisations, including:

- Irish Language and Culture
- Cell Explorers Science Club
- Economics
- Engineering
- Moot Court with the School of Law
- The Computer Museum
- Broadcasting with Flirt FM
- Storytelling
- Mandarin
- Zoology
- Hockey with Hockey Ireland
- Judo with Galway City School of Judo
- Tennis with Tennis Ireland
- Golf with Golf Ireland
- Rugby with Connacht Rugby
- Sports at the Kingfisher Fitness Club
- Italian Language and Culture
- Brain Awareness Week
- Galway International Arts Festival
- Career Development Centre
- Ideas Lab



At the end of each session, participating students were partnered with a University Mentor to reflect on their experience on the programme and talk about their hopes and dreams for the future.

In line with the programmes focus on goal setting and achieving your dreams, this year's awards ceremony for all participating students included talks from the Mayor of the City of Galway, Cllr. Eddie Hoare, Galway United Senior Women's Player and Access Student, Rola Olusola and Galway United Senior Women's Manager, Phil Trill.

2.2 FET2HE Mentoring

Funded through the HEA's PATH 3 fund, in 2023/24 the Access Centre delivered a Community Mentor programme titled FET2HE. This programme matched student Mentors studying science and engineering or arts at University of Galway with Mentees from the FET sector aiming to progress to HE in 2024/25.

In 2023/24 the College of Science and Engineering offered 110 places while the College of Arts, Social Sciences, and Celtic Studies offered 106 places to students entering through the FET entry route. A key motivation behind the delivery of FET2HE mentoring concerns breaking down barriers for students progressing from the FET to HE sector by increasing their levels of social and cultural capital.

Mentees from local FET providers Galway Technical Institute (GTI) and Galway Community College (GCC) were recruited to take part on the programme. Participants were brought on campus for 4 mentoring sessions with University Mentors. Mentees were assigned a mentor who was studying in an area they were interested in. Mentees were given an insightful tour of the campus and a detailed tour of the buildings for that discipline. They also met with colleagues in Student Services and members of our Students Union to discuss the many supports available to students. At the end of each session, Mentees were invited to talk with their Mentors about their own experiences and raise any unanswered questions.

2.3 Uni4U+

The Uni4U+ Programme gives secondary school students the opportunity to visit campus and gain an insight into University life. It is an integral part of the outreach work undertaken at the University of Galway Access Centre. The Outreach team reached out to 27 DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) and 6 non-DEIS Linked Schools, offering support and workshops to the schools. Of the 33 schools contacted, 26 expressed interest in receiving supports.

Several in-school and on-campus workshops, presentations and events took place as part of the Uni4U+ Programme during 2023/24. 1,614 post-primary school students and 39 parents were interacted with.

1st Year Art Competition: This competition, with the theme "Follow your dreams at University of Galway," received a total of 73 entries. The competition encouraged students to explore what University of Galway has to offer, in a fun, informal way. 64 students visited the campus for a presentation of certificates and a display of their work. During the visit, students toured the campus, participated in a quiz and received insights into university life from Róna Hughes, Head of Clubs and Societies.



Transition Year College Cookbook Competition: Four schools participated in this competition, with 93 students attending an on-campus event. The event included a campus tour, presentations on alternative entry routes to higher education and a speech from guest speaker, chef and restaurateur, Dr. JP McMahon. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with 60% of students visiting the campus for the first time.



2.4 Professional Engagement Module (PEM)



Since 2018, students studying the business stream on the Diploma in Foundation Studies: Access Programme have completed the PEM module, in collaboration with Grant Thornton. In 2023, we were delighted to announce the expansion of the programme and welcome Medtronic onboard as a partner. This has given students studying the science and engineering stream of the programme the opportunity to be matched with Mentors from Medtronic.

This experiential based model of learning matches professional Mentors from Grant Thornton and Medtronic with Mentees from the Access programme in a module of structured interactive learning. As a result of taking part in the programme, students:

- Gain exposure to a professional working environment.
- Develop an insight into career progression.
- Hone a skillset for career readiness.
- Cultivate a working/ supportive relationship with their assigned Mentors.
- Develop an understanding and insight into the core requisites of a professional working environment.

As part of PEM in the last year, 13 students received invaluable professional mentoring support from Medtronic, while 6 students spent time with their assigned Mentors at Grant Thornton.

2.5 University of Sanctuary

The University of Sanctuary (UoS) Scholarship Programme continues to make a significant impact by providing educational opportunities for underrepresented groups. For the 2023-2024 academic year, 15 new students were welcomed into the programme, which is now in its fifth year. Open to International Protection applicants, refugees, vulnerable immigrant groups, and Irish Travellers, the programme has supported 53 students to date in collaboration with the University's four Colleges.

To support this cohort on their educational journey, they are paired with both support and academic mentors. UoS Mentors receive bespoke training developed in collaboration with Spirasi, Foróige and the Galway Traveller Movement (GTM).

In honour of World Refugee Day 2023, the UoS Programme partnered with Walk the Walk Galway and the Galway City Partnership BRIDGE Project to host a community walk in Cong Woods. The event aimed to promote intercultural dialogue and community connection, encouraging participants from different backgrounds to come together in solidarity.

The Education Transition Programme (ETP) was another significant initiative for the 2023/24 academic year. Held throughout July at the Institute for Lifecourse and Society (ILAS), the ETP was a free, three-week unaccredited course designed for International Protection applicants, refugees, vulnerable immigrant groups, and Irish Travellers. The programme focused on skill development, facilitating participants' inclusion in education, employment, and society. It was a collaborative effort, drawing contributions from various university departments such as the College of Business, Public Policy & Law, the Chaplaincy, Flirt FM, the Careers Development Centre, the English Language Centre, and the Student Counselling Service.

Participants received a certificate of participation from Dr. Helen Maher, Vice President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

In addition to the UoS Scholarship Programme, the University will welcome students through the EU Passworld Scholarship Programme in 2024/25. These students will be supported with on-campus accommodation and mentor assistance, ensuring they have a smooth transition into university life.

The UoS Programme continues to encourage schools in the region to become designated Schools of Sanctuary. Two new booklets have been developed to support schools in this endeavour, with funding provided by the University. Additionally, UoS plays an active role in the city's Intercultural Strategy, promoting equitable access to education and countering exclusionary narratives.

2.6 Science4Survival

Funded through the HEA's PATH 3 fund, Science4Survival is a Transition year biology outreach initiative designed to promote interest and enthusiasm among second-level males before they indicate their subject choices for senior cycle. It is designed to address the underrepresentation of males in the biological sciences and address the gendered division of labour we find in the sciences. However, Science4Survival is also open to female students.

Employing Science Capital pedagogy, the main target of the programme are DEIS post-primary schools in the west/northwest region, namely: Galway, Mayo, Sligo and Donegal.

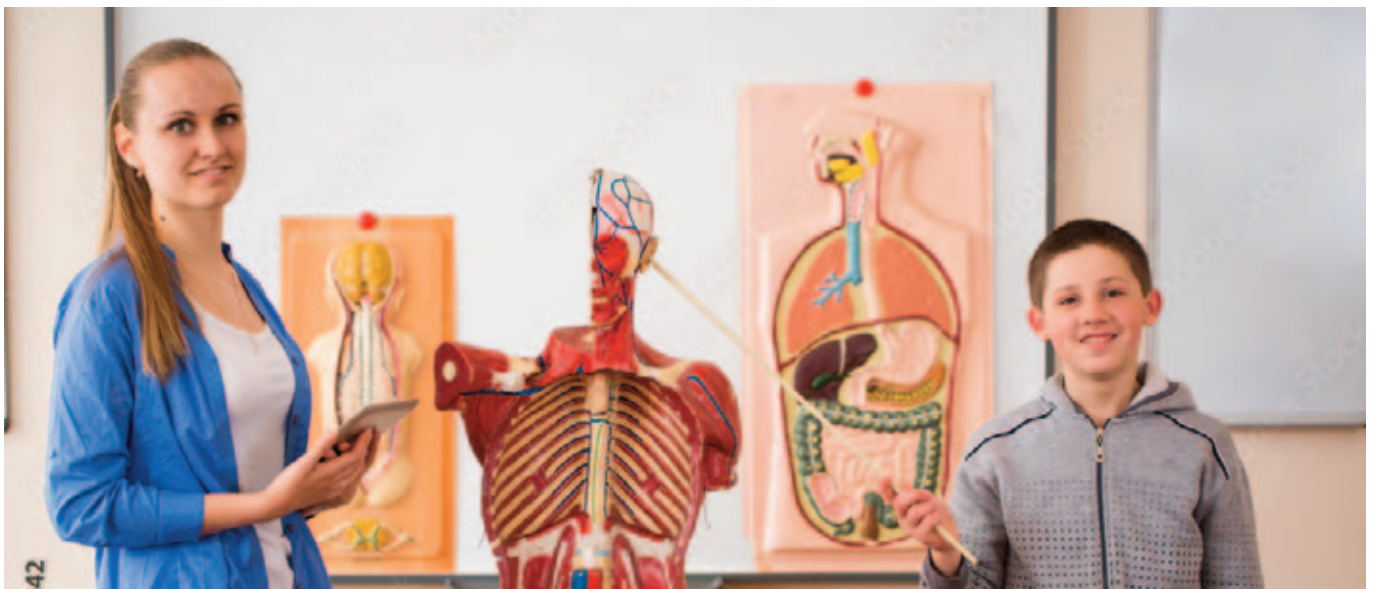
Following a pilot delivery of the programme, respondent data prompted several small-scale updates and adjustments. Researchers revised the module pathway to a core six-week schedule (with optional extensions), whereas the teacher training module remained largely unchanged.

Additional Post-Pilot resource material included:

- 1 visual/literary poster elements
- 2 an eight page Teacher pocket-guide ;
- 3 a more comprehensive module slideshow ;
- 4 draft classroom/lab template slideshow (editable for teacher additions) and ;
- 5 webinar teacher-training recording for subsequent reference and revisit.

In the reporting period, eight schools commenced the Main Study module, and six schools completed it. Eleven teachers participated in teacher training; students submitted 145 pre-module surveys and 82 post-module surveys. In total, 182 students participated in the second generation "Science4Survival" programme.

A key component of the project is to gather data on attitude to the biological sciences among DEIS students. Emerging findings indicate a shift in attitude towards a greater interest in biology for the participant cohort, with their class teacher being a key influencer in this regard.



2.7 Mincéirs Mis'l'd in Education



Traveller Ethnicity Week ran from Monday February 27th until Friday March 1st - marking the anniversary of the Government formally recognising Irish Travellers as a distinct ethnic group and celebrating their culture and heritage including music, craft traditions and language.

The University hosted a range of panel discussions, workshops and cultural exhibitions throughout the week, with a variety of opportunities for staff, students and the public to learn more about Irish Traveller culture, overcoming adversity in education and the experiences of Leaving Certificate students as members of the Irish Traveller community.

Mary Warde Moriarty (Doctor of Laws (LLD)), a traveller, human rights activist, who recently received an honorary degree from University of Galway officially opened this year's series of events, which included:



The presentation of the Michael McDonagh Award - The award was presented at the opening ceremony to Imelda Byrne for showing leadership in promoting Irish Traveller History & Culture, promoting the full participation of Irish Travellers in education and advancement of Irish Traveller human rights.

Traveller Living Exhibition - The exhibition showcased the rich cultural heritage of Irish Traveller life in the 1950s. A fully restored barrel-top wagon and a traditional tent were among the many features.

Traveller Education and Anti-racism - Dr Hannagh McGinley, a member of the Irish Traveller community, talked about her journey through education and working life.

Galway Traveller Movement showcased a document titled *Going for our dreams in a racist society*, telling the stories of five Leaving Certificate students and their school experiences as members of the Irish Traveller Community.

TARGET: Traveller and Roma Grinds Empowering Transition

TARGET is designed for Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied Year 2 students. The grinds take place online with Professional Master of Education students within the University. The grinds are offered in a range of subject including English, Irish, Maths, History, Biology, Physics and German.

“The grinds have been a brilliant support system not only to me but to multiple travellers all around the country. As a young traveller girl within the community, I feel confident enough in myself to take control of my own future and strive to do well on an academic level thanks to the help and support that I received from all involved in the Grinds4Mincéirs.”

In 2024, 8 female Leaving Certificate students, 2 male Leaving Certificate students, 6 female Junior Certificate students and 2 male Junior Certificate students availed of the grinds, with 14 students completing the programme.

2.8 Path 4: Universal Design and Widening Participation

The PATH 4, Phase 1 Universal Design Project, reported on in the Widening Participation Annual Report 2022/23 was completed in AY 2023/24. The Access Centre worked in partnership with the Buildings and Estates Office and Information Systems and Solutions to address accessibility barriers in the built and digital environments. It also worked with national partners across the tertiary education sector to produce the ALTITUDE National Charter for Universal Design in Tertiary Education.

See below for a snapshot of activities and initiatives conducted under PATH 4, Phase 1 and beyond.

Universal Design of the Built Environment

The Buildings and Estates Office secured €1.7m in funding for accessibility improvements identified through PATH 4, Phase 1. A monthly Physical Accessibility Forum was established to enable the participation of disabled students in the prioritisation of accessibility works, by engaging senior University leaders, including the Dean of Students and Directors of Buildings and Estates and Student Services, with representatives from the Students' Union and the Neurodivergent Society.

- Step-free access provided to all large lecture theatres and power-assisted doors enroute.
- Upgrade of emergency evacuation facilities across campus and training provided.
- 70 power-assisted doors installed across campus and improved access to lifts.
- Signage and signposting of accessible routes and lifts.
- Footpath levelling and reconfiguration across campus.

Aspects of this work were presented at the [AHEAD Conference 2024](#) and the [European Access Network \(EAN\) Conference 2025](#), and an article was published in the AHEAD Journal on the [Crowd4Access/University of Galway Citizen Science footpath accessibility mapping project](#).

Universal Design of the Digital Environment and Communications

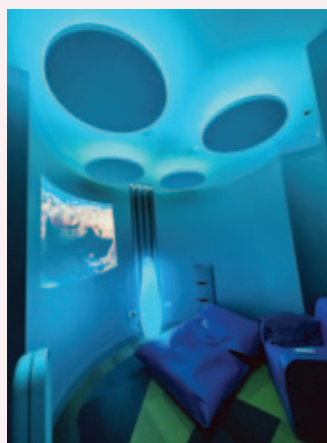
- Web Accessibility audit and response
- University's web accessibility rating improved from initial score of 34% at beginning of NDA weekly auditing exercise to a peak of 95% in July 2023
- Improvement maintained over time – [Silktide Index](#) rating of 94% accessibility and 1st place ranking in Irish Higher Education, August 2024
- Training and development
 - 'Creating Accessible Documents' workshops - 95 now staff trained – and this work was presented at the [Digital Accessibility Conference 2023](#).
 - Bespoke sessions on request.
 - Multiple briefings, workshops and audits with the Marketing and Communications Office.
 - A collaborative project to produce accessible Mathematics exam papers with the School of Mathematics, Statistics and Applied Mathematics.

An online [Accessibility Hub](#) was developed to collate information and guidance on digital, physical and sensory accessibility.

The [ReciteMe](#) language and accessibility toolbar was launched, giving the user the option to adjust their experience on university websites, regardless of their browser.



Sensory-friendly Campus



The Buildings and Estates Office launched a [Sensory Campus Website](#) and [Sensory and Wellbeing Campus Map](#), developed in partnership with landscape architects and neurodivergent students.

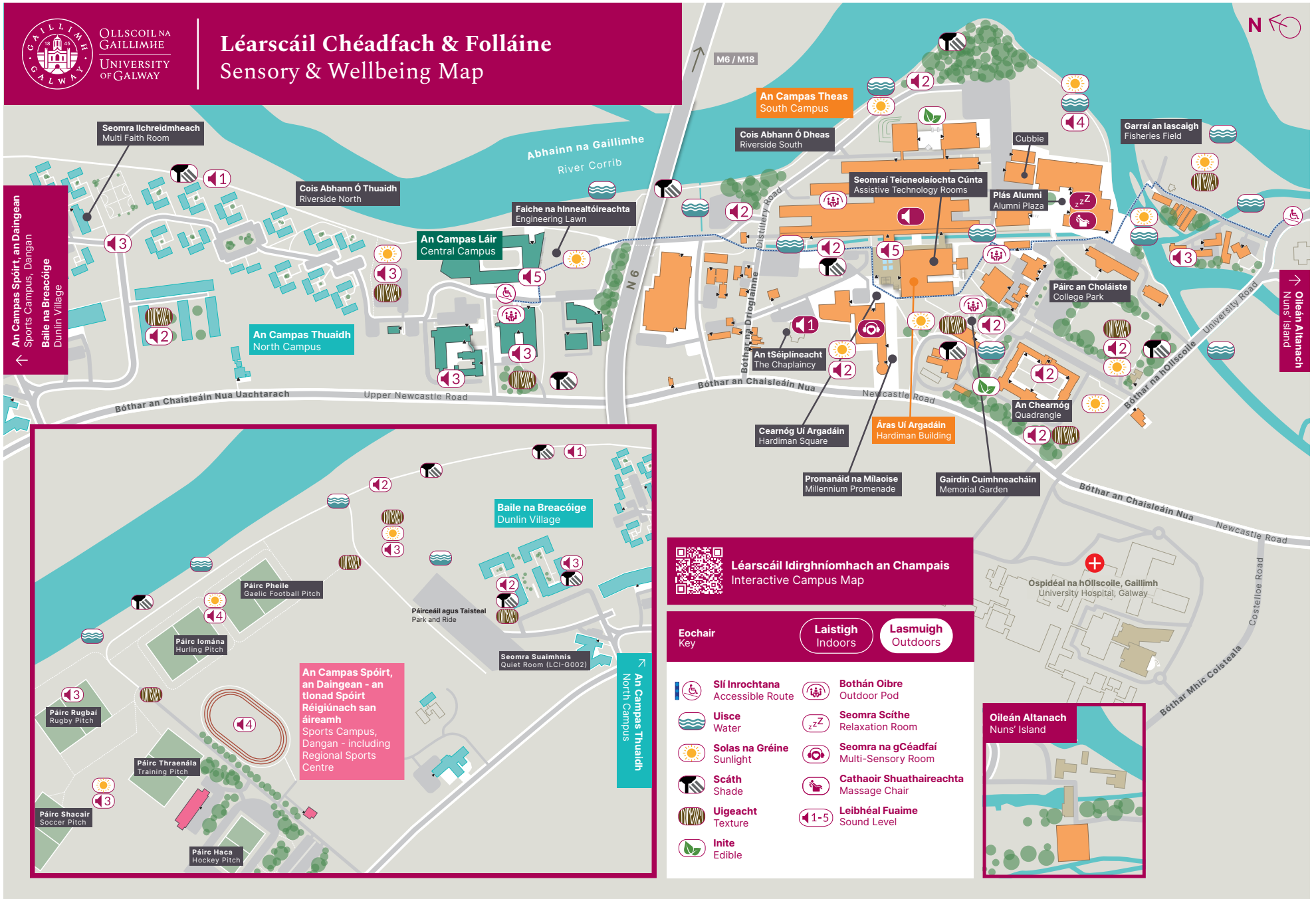
The ALTITUDE Charter for Universal Design in Tertiary Education

March 2024 saw the launch of the [ALTITUDE Charter](#) for Universal Design in Education, following a year-long consultative project led by ATU, in partnership with the University of Galway, UCD and MTU, and lead national collaborator [AHEAD](#), six national agencies, fifteen Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and six Education and Training Board (ETB) representatives.




OLLSCOIL NA
GAILLIMHE
UNIVERSITY
OF GALWAY

Léarscáil Chéadfach & Folláine Sensory & Wellbeing Map



 Léarscáil Idirghníomhach an Champais
Interactive Campus Map

Eochair Key **Laistigh Indoors** **Lasmuigh Outdoors**

- | | |
|---|--|
|  Slí Inrochtana
Accessible Route |  Bothán Oibre
Outdoor Pod |
|  Uisce
Water |  Seomra Scíthe
Relaxation Room |
|  Solas na Gréine
Sunlight |  Seomra na gCéadfaí
Multi-Sensory Room |
|  Scáth
Shade |  Cathaoir Shuathaireachta
Massage Chair |
|  Uigeacht
Texture |  Leibhéal Fuaime
Sound Level |
|  Inite
Edible | |



Cumas



A key priority group in the HEA's *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2022-28 (NAP)*, are students with disabilities including students with intellectual disabilities (HEA, 2022, p. 52). In January 2024, University of Galway was awarded funding through Phase 2 of PATH 4 to develop an educational programme for students with intellectual disabilities. In 2024/25, the new Cumas Programme will offer a full-time, inclusive learning experience for students with intellectual disabilities, blending social activities, academic classes, and work placements to enhance both personal development and employment prospects.

Cumas at University of Galway will commence in 2025 and is planned as a full-time, mixed programme of inclusion for students with intellectual disabilities. The aim of the programme is to provide students with a third level learning experience which will develop their knowledge, social engagement and employment prospects. Students on Cumas take part in social activities and academic classes with students without intellectual disabilities, as well as participating in classes with other students with intellectual disabilities. The programme also provides students with work experience through placement opportunities. While the primary aims of the programme caters to the students and their needs, it is also envisioned that University of Galway and the wider community will benefit by developing a greater understanding and appreciation of the potential of people with intellectual disabilities.

2.9 Micro-credentials at University of Galway

Micro-Credentials

Micro-credentials represent a transformative approach to higher education, designed to provide flexible, targeted learning experiences that meet the evolving needs of adult learners. They offer shorter, competency-based courses that equip learners with specific skills aligned with industry requirements. This accessibility enables individuals to upskill or reskill rapidly, making micro-credentials a powerful tool for lifelong learning and professional advancement.

The benefits of micro-credentials in widening access and participation include:

- **Pathways into Formal Learning:** offering an accessible point of entry for individuals who do not meet the traditional entry requirements for tertiary education or who lack the confidence to undertake full award programmes. Micro-credentials provide a gentle introduction;
- **Increased Accessibility:** offering increased accessibility to learners as much of the short, flexible learning is provided online, hybrid or on-campus. This extends their reach to a broader range of learners, underrepresented groups in education such as women, those returning to education, minorities, disabled learners and those with geographic constraints;
- **Funding:** a learner fee subsidy of 50 – 80% has been offered under the Human Capital Initiative Pillar 1 in AY23/24 increasing the accessibility and affordability of education and reducing financial barriers for socio-economically disadvantaged learners;
- **Expanding portfolio:** over 60 micro-credentials were on offered in AY23/24 in business and management, law, computer science, sustainability, construction innovation, humanities and languages;
- **Website:** www.universityofgalway.ie/courses/micro-credentials/list/

2.10 Recognition of Prior Learning

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is an important component in the provision of an accessible, flexible and permeable education and training system, and is a key enabler of lifelong learning and skills development, encouraging people of all ages to participate in learning pathways. RPL as a concept values all types of learning, regardless of where that learning has occurred (e.g. in formal education settings, workplaces or everyday life). Higher education applicants whose prior learning is formally recognised can be granted access to, advanced entry to, or module exemptions on a programme of study. Thus RPL has the potential to make a significant contribution to University of Galway's efforts in widening access and participation.

University of Galway has made considerable progress in relation to the implementation of RPL across its Colleges and Schools. Specific RPL information and guidance is now provided to potential RPL learners on our dedicated RPL website: www.universityofgalway.ie/rpl/ Learners can also avail of tailored one to one support sessions to assist them in developing their RPL learning Portfolios, an essential component required for an RPL application based on prior experiential learning. University of Galway is also working with employers to raise awareness of the benefits of RPL in addressing upskilling and reskilling requirements in the workforce. Further information is available from Suzanne Golden, RPL Project Lead on rpl@universityofgalway.ie

2.11 Laptop Loan Scheme

As part of a package of supports for higher and further education institutions during the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Department of Further and Higher Education Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) allocated funding to support disadvantaged students in the higher education sector in accessing ICT devices. To date, the Access Centre has been to the fore of this initiative and the process for application, screening and allocation of laptops is consistent with other HEI's in terms of eligibility criteria. Other university units such as ISS, Students Services, Chaplaincy, CALPD and the library have played a crucial role in the success of the scheme.

Under this scheme foundation level, undergraduate and postgraduate students are eligible to apply for a laptop on long-term loan (for the duration of their studies), to assist with their learning. Upon completion of a student's studies at University of Galway, they are required to return their device so it can be given to another student that is unable to gain access to an ICT device for their studies. 1436 students have benefited from the scheme since it started in 2020.

The allocation of devices was based on the following target groups:

- Students disadvantaged by socio-economic barriers
- First Time mature students
- Students with disabilities
- Part- time/ Flexible learning students
- Student who hold further education qualifications
- Students who are a member of the Traveller and Roma Communities
- Students who are lone parents
- Students who are care-experienced
- Students who are members of ethnic minorities

In the academic year 2023/2024, priority was given in the scheme to target groups, Access programme students and first-year HEAR years. There were 158 laptops distributed.



2.12 1916 Bursary

The 1916 Bursary is a financial award funded by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) for students that are under-represented in higher education. The Bursaries are targeted at students who are socio-economically disadvantaged and who are from one or more of the following target groups that have low participation rates in higher education:

- Socio-economic groups that have low participation in higher education
- Mature Students
- Students with a disability
- Irish Travellers
- FET
- Lone parents
- Ethnic minorities

Since 2017/18, and as part of the West/North-West clusters (University of Galway and Atlantic Technological University) overall distribution of bursaries from the HEA, University of Galway has awarded 7 bursaries of €5,000 per annum for the duration of a student's studies.

In 2021/22, however, the bursary scheme was expanded by the HEA to include three tiers of payments:

- **Tier 1 Bursaries:** €5,000 per year
- **Tier 2 Bursaries:** €2,000 per year
- **Tier 3 Once-off payments** of €1,500

Due to this restructuring of payments and a lack of applicants to the overall pool of bursaries in our West/North-West partner institutions, a considerably higher number of University of Galway students were supported through this scheme in 22/23. The full allocation for first year new entrants 23/24 is as follows:

36 Tier 1 Bursaries (€5,000 per year) were awarded.

18 Tier 2 Bursaries (€2,000 per year) were awarded.

53 Tier 3 Once-off payments of €1,500 were awarded.

While continuing students within the University for 23/24 were as follows:

27 Tier 1 Bursaries (€5,000 per year) were awarded.

23 Tier 2 Bursaries (€2,000 per year) were awarded.

2.13 Youth Academy

The Youth Academy was established in 2012 at University of Galway to work with high ability young people to support their learning and academic development. The programme aims to inspire progression to university by introducing children and their families to university life and by creating positive perceptions of the university and its academic programmes. The initiative demonstrates University of Galway's commitment to the wider community by responding to the educational needs of the region and opening the campus to foster children's educational and personal growth.



The Youth Academy offers courses for both primary (4th-6th class) and secondary school (1st-3rd year) students. Classes are over 6 weeks in October/November and February/March each year with week long summer camps also held in July. There are both virtual and in-person course options available, giving students from across the country the opportunity to attend Youth Academy programmes. Each term there are approximately 15 specially designed courses for students to choose from. Classes are followed by a graduation ceremony where students are presented with certificates of participation by the President of University of Galway. Special efforts are made to engage students from underrepresented groups in HE. The programme has made strong efforts to engage young people who may not have a history of third-level education in their family such as children from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds. Twenty five percent of places are made available, free of charge, to students from DEIS schools and medical card holders, with thanks to funding from Merit Medical. The Youth Academy links in with Home School Liaison teachers in DEIS schools in Galway to encourage participation. Relationships have been established with the travelling community to attract children from this community to apply for the programme. The Youth Academy also engages with Galway City Partnership and the University of Sanctuary at University Galway to encourage students living in direct provision centres to apply. Since the programme was established in 2012, over 8,500 students have participated, with over 2,000 of these places offered on a scholarship basis.

2.14 Academic Writing Centre (AWC)

The Academic Writing Centre is a highly valued student support unit based in the James Hardiman Library. Its core service consists of one-on-one writing tutorials provided to all University of Galway students.

In 2023-24, the AWC operated primarily as a campus service, with additional online appointments being offered to students registered with the Access Centre. In 2023-24, the AWC focused on one-on-one sessions, these included face-to-face, virtual appointment and mentorship sessions.

Other activities carried out in 2023-24 included discipline specific workshops, a mentorship programme for students registered with the Access Centre, a course in Scientific Writing Skills (106 students), a new 6-week module for students of Children Studies, and a mini-course called Writing at the University, and a summer intervention, which included an intensive three day-course as well as an additional 14 appointments.

In 2023-24, the AWC held 290 regular one-on-one sessions, including face-to-face and virtual appointments. An additional 55 appointments were part of the new mentorship programme, which is explained in more detailed below. The total number represents a 4.15% decrease on last year's figure (385). There is, however, a 25% increase in usage of the AWC by students registered with the Disability Support Services: 140 appointments (including the mentorship appointments) compared to 112 last year.

Out of 290 regular appointments, 260 were held in person at the AWC, and 30 were held virtually over Teams. This year, we held significantly fewer virtual appointments than last year (157), as with the return to on-campus learning, this option was offered primarily to students registered with the Disability Support Services, by arrangement with the Access Centre. We felt that it was important to offer this option, without it, as some students would not have been able to avail of the services of the AWC.

2.15 Irish National History Competition

The Irish National History competition invites young historians to contribute elements of their Senior Cycle curricular assessment (Research Study Report), in order to share, showcase and celebrate research and writing efforts beyond the narrow limits of the Leaving Certificate's History grading process. In 2024, the competition received 40 entries from nine different schools. To date, some 32 schools have engaged with the competition, from 19 different counties, with over 190 students submitting essays to the competition since its inception in 2021.

This year's competition welcomed perhaps the most eclectic essay yield to date, touching on organised crime and law & order; on sexism, feminism and female achievement (in and beyond Ireland); war in the wider world as well as Ireland's own military history and The Troubles. Nationalism and independence essays included America, the Bastille, and the Dominican Republic, with other deep dives into various founding documents, international legislation and landmark domestic laws, as well as many more fascinating research topics. The calibre at the finalist end of the competition continues to improve and this year's winner was Anne Grundy, from County Monaghan.

The submitted essays to the competition are judged by an independent academic panel with successful entrants being promoted online via a prize giving ceremony which could result in attending *'EUSTORY Next generation Summits on the Continent'*. EUSTORY is a history-specific organisation encouraging collaboration between more than 20 member states and is funded by German philanthropic corporation Korber-Stiftung. EUSTORY hosted 105 finalists from its member network, including six Irish students (Riga, 2023), and a further four in 2024 (Prague).

2.16 Support for Undergraduate Mathematics and Statistics (SUMS)

The maths support centre SUMS provides informal mathematics and statistics support to 1st and 2nd year students across all colleges and courses as well as to students engaged in Access and Foundation courses.

SUMS helps students with any aspect of Mathematics, Statistics or Mathematics-related subjects. It provides a comfortable, informal environment where students can study at their own pace, with expert tutors on hand to offer individual help, if required. The tutors at SUMS are postgraduates of the School of Mathematics, Statistics and Applied Mathematics.

Students of all levels are welcome. While some may need help with revision of some basic mathematical concepts, others use SUMS services to get feedback to their approaches or to explore ideas themselves or in groups, knowing there is help at hand if needed.

SUMS provides targeted support to students who are currently engaged in Access/Foundation courses or have come through University through Access and Foundation or FETAC entry routes. Feedback from these students has been very positive over the years:

“SUMS is an excellent service that I am incredibly grateful for! All the tutors I've engaged with have been so helpful! Thank you :)”

“I would not have passed Access Maths as well as I did without SUMS and neither would I have been confident this past year (especially with stats) without SUMS.”

“I prefer to go to SUMS than my lectures, because it feels more personalised and I can ask about everything.”

“It was immensely helpful to me last semester and I hope to avail of it this semester too. The tutors always helped in a way that didn't answer the questions I had directly, but rather thought me the relevant material and methods needed to answer such a question. Best academic support feature of the entire college.”

In 2023/24, SUMS recorded 1710 individual visits, and 28% of those visits were made by students registered with the Disability Support Service (DSS), engaged in Access/Foundation courses, or have entered University through the Access and Foundation route. With thanks to the Access centre and DSS for additional funding, we could offer additional support this year. To accommodate for students who are in full or part time employment and for those students who have tutorials or other duties in the afternoons, SUMS offered online support for two hours on Wednesday evenings. Also, in July 2024 SUMS offered online and in-person support for a week to help students preparing for their Autumn exams.

2.17 Financial Aid Fund

The Financial Aid Funds are operated by Professional Services providing financial supports to students experiencing short or long-term financial difficulties while attending higher education.

The Funds are partly supported by the Student Assistance Fund (SAF) with additional funding provided by University of Galway. The Student Assistance Fund is managed by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) on behalf of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS). The University of Galway Financial Aid Funds are overseen by a Steering Group comprising of Professional Services with the Students Union and Academic College representatives.

The Funds are intended to tackle disadvantage by providing financial support to enable students to fully benefit from their third level studies. There are three funds for students to apply for. These are the Means Tested Fund, which is a fund aimed at students whose gross household income was below a threshold level (€46,790 in 2023 /2024), the HEAR/Access fund which supports HEAR undergraduates, Access school leavers and Access mature students. Students can apply for one of these two funds. The third fund, that is open to all students, is the Hardship and Emergency Fund, which aids students who have found themselves in an unexpectedly difficult financial situation.

From the figures last year, there were **122** lone parents in recipient of financial aid fund payments.

For the academic year 23/24 the following number of FAF payments were made:

Means Tested Fund	696
Emergency Hardship Fund	260
HEAR /Access Fund	594



2.18 Access to post-primary Teaching (APT) Project

The Access to Post-primary Teaching (APT) Project (PIs: Dr. Elaine Keane and Dr. Manuela Heinz, School of Education) is a joint University of Galway and St. Angela's College, Sligo initiative (2017-2023) funded under the *Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH): Strand 1 (Equity of Access to Initial Teacher Education)*. Some project activities have also been funded by Galway University Foundation.



The University of Galway strand aims to support the access, retention and success of student teachers from lower socio-economic groups who entered higher education through a pre-entry Access programme, or the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR). APT at the University of Galway, which operates in partnership with the Access and Career Development Centres, has supported 47 student teachers to date on the Professional Master of Education (PME) programme through the provision of bursaries, and academic and pastoral supports. Through the APT student teachers' Year 2 Practitioner Research projects and annual schools' events, the project has also supported the career and higher education planning, including in relation to the possibility of teaching as a career, of over 2,000 senior cycle students in DEIS schools.

Other project activities include an annual Schools' event through which more than 1,500 post-primary students in DEIS schools have been supported with regard to higher education access and teaching as a potential future career, and annual peer mentoring and careers' events. The research strand of the APT project has involved in-depth semi-structured interviews and questionnaires with APT student teachers, about their motivations for teaching, and their schooling, PME, and early career experiences. The PIs have published widely from APT project data and their edited volume on *Diversifying the Teaching Profession* was published by Routledge in 2023.

A highlight of the 2023/2024 academic year for the APT project was hosting the *Second International Teacher Diversity Research Symposium*. Building on our first symposium held in 2019, this event was attended by more than 100 policymakers, teacher diversity researchers, academics, and access practitioners. Dr. Rebecca Wood (Senior Lecturer in Inclusive Education, University of Glasgow, Scotland) provided the keynote address entitled "What Can we Learn from Autistic Teachers?". The symposium also featured 14 research presentations from members of the international and national teacher diversity research community. The day ended with discussion groups and a panel session entitled "Where to From Here? Moving Teacher Diversity Research Forward". Panel members included Kate Weedy (HEA), Professor Clea Schmidt (University of Manitoba, Canada), Annie Asgard (Oide & Primary School Teacher), Dr. Rory McDaid (Marino Institute of Education), and Leesa Flynn (Primary School Teacher).

2.19 Cell Explorers (CE)



Cell Explorers is driven by the belief that science should be accessible to everyone and has consistently been working with local, national and international partners to achieve this aim. More specifically, the GROWS (Giving Real Opportunities to Widen Participation in STEM) Project offers a chance to broaden participation in STEM. Discover the project's development story [here!](#)

Medtronic

Funded by the Medtronic Foundation, the GROWS project focuses on bringing science to underserved students, aiming to increase the involvement of young people from marginalized communities such as Irish Travellers, refugees, or others at risk for poverty or social exclusion. The project has wide-reaching impact by working within DEIS schools and youth groups to reach many young people who normally do not have access to STEM outreach activities.

The Cell Explorers team is collaborating with a variety of community partners—including the University of Galway's Universities of Sanctuary and Access Centre as well as Foróige, National Youth Council Ireland, TULSA, and Kinderbüro at the University of Vienna to deliver STEM initiatives across Ireland: the Fantastic DNA workshop and the 2 GROWS activities: The Cell Explorers Science Club and the Cell Explorers Escape Room.

Science Club, Escape Room, and STEM experiential visits

GROWS project activities are designed to be engaging and require no foreknowledge or interest in STEM. The Science Club for youth groups is a 5-week collaboration between young people and local scientists. It is built to promote autonomy, empowerment, and confidence through mentorship of young people. The Escape Room is an educational escape room where players work together in teams to find clues, solve puzzles, and find patient zero before the clock runs out! This year, we have been working on offering both activities through our national network of teams (Escape Room) and through a collaboration with youth group leaders (Science Club).

We have engaged with activities organised by the Access Centre, including delivering Fantastic DNA sessions to 2 classes during Irish Traveller ethnicity week in February 2024 and hosting a Science Club for the Uni4U programme in April 2024.



To expand its impact, GROWS offers experiential visits to young people and their families. These visits provide additional activities for the young people to contribute building their science identity through positive experiences. Last year, 16 families (58 people) in underserved communities visited the Galway Science and Technology Festival 2023 and 35 young people from four Irish Traveller youth groups attended the Engineering week family day in February 2024. Many barriers to attending were addressed by providing transportation, tickets for events, and lunch – in



addition to fun and engaging experiences on the day and a science goodie bag! Another type of visit is the “Night in the Galway Atlantaquaria”, where young people from Science Clubs across Galway were led through private tours of the aquarium that included hands-on experiments and lots of fun stories about marine life. We have also run several science communication workshops via our collaborators to enhance our volunteer's ability to provide inclusive science outreach.

From September 2023 to August 2024, we have reached 936 young people and 70 youth workers and teachers through Cell Explorers activities specifically focused on widening participation in STEM through GROWS activities. Overall, the University of Galway Cell Explorers team has engaged over 3400 members of the public in the last academic year 2023-24.

2.20 Performance Funding

Widening Access and Participation for Care-Experienced Students

Background and Establishment of Educational Support Role

In August 2023, the role of Educational Support Worker for Care-Experienced Students (ESWCE) was introduced to address the unique challenges faced by care-experienced students in accessing higher education. These students often face disruptions during their primary and secondary schooling due to trauma and instability, such as frequent placement changes. Many also transition to independence at 18, without family or community support, while navigating significant financial difficulties. The role's primary focus is to encourage care-experienced students to apply to university and ensure they receive the necessary support to succeed in their studies.

Outreach—School Links

The initiative began with outreach to DEIS schools in Galway, Connemara, Mayo, Roscommon, and Clare. Information about pre-entry supports and pathways to higher education for care-experienced students was shared with 26 schools. These schools were also offered individual meetings with career guidance counsellors or care-experienced students interested in further information. Additionally, care-experienced students in 3rd and 6th year were offered free participation in the Uni4U+ Online Easter Revision Course for additional educational support.

Partnerships for Success

Collaboration with key stakeholders, such as Aftercare Lead William McNamara and TU sector lead Dr. Patrick McGarty, helped expand the dedicated personal support programme throughout the university sector, which is in place for the academic year 2024-25. The ESWCE delivered presentations to Aftercare teams in Galway and Mayo, as well as Children in Care teams in Galway and Roscommon. Information about supports available at the University of Galway for care-experienced students, such as bursaries, financial aid and prioritised accommodation, was disseminated to Aftercare teams nationwide. Aftercare workers from various counties, including Cavan, Clare, Cork, Galway, Limerick, and Sligo, engaged with the ESWCE for guidance on connecting prospective care-experienced students with university support services.

Strategic discussions with TUSLA's Educational Support Division aimed to raise awareness of care experience in schools, while the ESWCE's involvement with the Aftercare West Steering Committee provided crucial information on educational pathways. Collaboration with key stakeholders, such as Aftercare Lead William McNamara and TU sector lead Dr. Patrick McGarty, the ESWCE helped expand the dedicated personal support programme throughout the university sector, which is in place for the academic year 2024-25.

Partnerships with organisations like Empowering People In Care (EPIC), No 4 Youth Service, and the Irish Foster Care Association further strengthened the support network for care-experienced students. Over the course of the year, 20 prospective students were referred for support, and numerous current students were linked in for support.

Post-entry Support for Care-Experienced Students

In the academic year 2023/24, 54 care-experienced students at the University of Galway sought support. Key barriers they face in higher education include accommodation, finances, support, belonging, and skill-building. To address these challenges, the following programme of support was implemented:

- **Accommodation:** 10 on-campus accommodation rooms were reserved for incoming care-experienced students.
- **Finances:** 26 students in Aftercare received a €1,000 bursary funded by Bank of Ireland and the University of Galway's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion office, additionally 45 care-experienced students received aid through the Financial Aid Fund.
- **Support:** A dedicated contact point for care-experienced students was established for advocacy, check-ins, and liaison with academic staff, Aftercare workers, and community organisations. Students were also linked to campus services and specialised support, such as social work and mental health services.
- **Belonging:** Initiatives such as Care Day celebrations, a peer support WhatsApp group, and staff training delivered by Kinship Care Ireland and EPIC helped create a sense of community.
- **Skill-Building:** Budgeting and financial counselling, career development support, and tailored services from success coaches were offered.

Despite progress, care-experienced students remain underrepresented in higher education, facing significant barriers, such as socio-economic disadvantage, homelessness, and mental health issues, further emphasising the need for holistic, targeted support.

The outreach efforts, strategic partnerships, and support programmes implemented demonstrate the essential role of dedicated interventions in improving outcomes for this group. To foster long-term change, these initiatives must continue to expand, ensuring care-experienced students are supported and empowered to succeed in higher education, enriching the sector as a whole.

Disability Outreach

The Disability Outreach Coordinator visits DEIS schools in Galway, Mayo, Roscommon and Clare, providing information on the DARE scheme and various supports at the University. In 23/24 the following activities took place:

1:1 Student Meetings were provided to DARE students in schools. Students were provided with CAO dates and types of documentation and information required for applying to the scheme. This proved to be a success in schools and both teachers and students found this of benefit in preparing and evaluating documentation for submission to the CAO.

Career Guidance Support: Visiting schools resulted in a direct line of communication between the Career Guidance teacher and Disability Outreach Coordinator. From January to March, this work consisted of supporting the Career Guidance Teachers in completing CAO and DARE applications for students. In addition to career events held in schools and colleges across the county, external organisations such as MS Ireland, Clare Children and Adult Services, Conamara Láir, Ard Resource Centres in Galway and Westside Resource Centre also ran events which included representatives from the University of Galway.

Parents Talks: Parent talks were held in Ennis and Kilkee in Clare and in Roscommon.

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University of Galway Widening Participation Committee members

Chair: John Hannon

John Hannon is Director of Student Services in the University of Galway. The role of the Director is to provide leadership in the integration of the student service functions and for the provision of high quality and comprehensive wellbeing services. Working closely with the Dean of Students, his role helps ensure appropriate working partnerships are in place between colleagues, students, and external stakeholders to support student engagement and success.

Dr Daniel Savery

Daniel Savery is Widening Participation Officer based in the Access Centre at University of Galway. Within this role he has responsibility for developing and expanding opportunities for underrepresented students to progress to and participate in University, as well as driving the Widening Participation agenda in the University. Daniel holds a doctorate in Social and Political Theory from University of Galway and has a particular interest in barriers to access and participation in Higher Education.

Imelda Byrne

Imelda Byrne is Head of the Access Centre at University of Galway, which incorporates Access Programmes, Disability Support Service, Mature Students Office and a range of other programmes aimed at increasing access and participation for students from underrepresented groups. Within this role she provides strategic leadership and management for the University's approach to access and inclusion for students from the most underrepresented groups in society. With over 20 years' experience of working in Access, she has extensive experience of supporting underrepresented students in University of Galway.

Nuala McGuinn

Nuala McGuinn is Director at the Centre for Adult Learning and Professional Development at University of Galway. Within this role she has responsibility for the development and expansion of the University's range of part-time courses with particular emphasis on innovative models of course delivery, expansion of professional development courses in industry, development and implementation of online programmes and ongoing research and analysis of the training needs of the region which University of Galway serves. As a steering group member of the WP Committee, she has a particular interest in developing and supporting initiatives for widening access to and increasing participation in Higher Education by adult learners.

Dr Maura Farrell

Maura Farrell is an Associate Professor in the School of Geography, Archaeology and Irish Studies at the University of Galway. Maura's teaching reflects her research specialism which revolves around Rural and Agricultural Geography and her interests focus around processes of social, cultural and economic change for rural inhabitants. Dr Farrell is the Principal Investigator on the Irish National Rural Network Project and the Horizon 2020, RURALIZATION Project. Maura is a widely published academic and extremely active in community engagement outside university life.

Josephine Walsh

Josephine Walsh is Head of Student Engagement Projects in Student Services and was previously Head of the Career Development Centre in University of Galway. She is a qualified secondary teacher, guidance counsellor and is a graduate of the University of Warwick MA in Career Education, Information, Guidance in Higher Education. In her current role, Josephine works on a range a projects to enhance the student experience, including communications, the provision of universal student supports and first year orientation programmes.

Dr Paul Flynn

Paul Flynn, PhD is a Lecturer in Education at the School of Education, University of Galway. A Fellow of ISDDE and Working Group Leader on Education for EU COST Action 18213, focused on modelling Youth NEET interventions, Paul specialises in the application of Design-Based Research in non-formal, placed based, community educational settings and has secured €6m of competitive national and international funding as a Principal Investigator.

Mary Liddy

Mary Liddy is Deputy Admissions Officer (Undergraduate) in the Admissions Office at University of Galway. In addition to her membership of the Widening Participation Committee, Mary is a member of several institutional and national committees, working groups and steering groups developed to further the widening participation and equality, diversity and inclusion agendas in higher education. These include: University of Galway's University of Sanctuary Steering Committee and the Policy and Advocacy sub-group; the University's Financial Aid Steering Group; the university's Health Psychology Advisory Panel; the intervarsity EU Qualifications Working Group; the university's Respect Charter working group; and the IUA's Access Steering Group.

Dr John Walsh

John Walsh is Vice-Dean (Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & People) in the College of Arts, Social Sciences and Celtic Studies and Associate Professor of Irish in the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures. His areas of expertise are Irish language policy, minority language media, multilingualism, language and sexuality and language and socioeconomic development. John's degrees were awarded by University College Dublin and Dublin City University, and he worked as a journalist before joining academia.

Dr Maureen Kelly

Maureen Kelly PhD, MICGP, FRCGP, M Med Ed. is a medical doctor, Senior Lecturer in the Discipline of General Practice, School of Medicine, and lead of the undergraduate General Practice teaching programme. From 2017-Dec 2021, she served as Vice Dean for Civic Engagement, in the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, and spear headed the first multi-professional civic engagement committee and programme of work.

She teaches at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and has a special interest in medical education, teaching and assessing communication skills, social inclusion, civic engagement and selection of medical students. She has over 80 publications. She leads several projects embedded in the community and is particularly committed to widening diversity in the student population in health professions education. She is committed to the concept of capacity building in academic General Practice (GP). She sits on the national Executive of the Association of University Departments of General Practice, Ireland. She supervises research at masters, doctoral and specialist GP training levels.

Cliona Ní Neill

Cliona Ní Néill is a native of Galway City. After graduating from University of Galway in 1985, she began teaching in the Presentation Secondary School Galway as an NQT. Appointed as Deputy Principal there in 2002 and as Principal in 2006, she led the amalgamation process and establishment of Our Lady's College Galway in 2016. As Principal of OLCG, she was significantly involved in the establishment of Galway's newest secondary school which opened its doors as Coláiste Muire Máthair in September 2021. She is currently one of the Senior Management Team in CMMG which has over 750 students and 40 nationalities.

Dr Deirdre Curran

Dr Deirdre Curran is Vice Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the College of Business Public Policy and Law. She also represents the College as a Steering Committee member for the University of Sanctuary initiative aimed at making University of Galway an accessible campus for international protection applicants, and members of our travelling community.

Raimey Boyle

Raimey Boyle is Vice-President for Education in the University of Galway Students' Union. Raimey is currently studying the MA in Public Policy and has also been a class rep, CÉIM Leader, ATS mentor, Psych Soc Vice Auditor, and the SU Postgrad Taught Officer while attending University of Galway.

Izzy Tiernan

Izzy Tiernan is Vice-President for Welfare and Equality in the University of Galway Students' Union. Izzy is currently studying Human Rights and has been extremely involved in politics and activism from a young age, as Secretary for Fridays for Future Waterford and as an ambassador for a non-profit organisation called The Shona Project that empowers young girls.

Jane Ennis

Jane Ennis works as the Student Success Manager in the Office of the Dean of Students, where she is responsible for the coordination and implementation of the University of Galway's first Student Success Strategy. Prior to her current role, Jane worked with the University's Access Centre, both on its Access programmes and with the Disability Support Service. Recent projects have focused on student wellbeing, academic skills development, inclusive practice, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

Owen Ward

Owen Ward is Programme Manager for Race Equality in the Office of the Vice President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. He is currently leading on the development, implementation & monitoring of University of Galway's Race Equality Framework & Action Plan. Owen previously occupied the position of University of Galway's first Traveller Education Officer and was the first Irish Traveller to be elected to a University governing authority in Ireland.

Dr Katarzyna Whysall

Katarzyna Whysall is Vice Dean for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences. She specialises in the therapeutic potential of microRNAs and oxidised microRNAs against muscle loss during ageing and disease, such as cachexia and ALS. She is the recipient of a 2018 Starting Laureate research grant, and in 2020 received funding in the IRC-HRB-SFI co-funded Rapid Response Call to research microRNA-based approaches to improving long-term patient recovery and reducing post-COVID-19 disability.

Dr Elaine Keane

Elaine Keane is Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor) in Sociology of Education & Research Methods in the School of Education. She is Co-Principal Investigator of the Access to Post-primary Teaching (APT) Project (2017-2023), funded by the HEA, and was Co-Principal Investigator of the Irish Research Council funded Diversity in Initial Teacher Education (DITE) national project (exploring the socio-demographic profiles, career motivations, and experiences with diversity of applicants and entrants to ITE programmes in Ireland). She has published widely on the effectiveness of Widening Participation initiatives.

Dr Muriel Grenon

Muriel Grenon is a Lecturer in Biochemistry and the Founding Director of the Cell EXPLORERS science outreach programme (www.cellexplorers.ie) in the School of Biological & Chemical Sciences. Both her extensive research and teaching experiences have been essential to the creation and the success of the Cell EXPLORERS informal education programme linking research, third level education and primary schools. Her areas of expertise are biology, Science outreach & education and public engagement in science. Her research interests are informal science education, hands on learning and the use of educational science outreach as a University teaching tool.

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5.

Appendix 1: University of Galway's Widening Participation Committee Terms of Reference

Sub-Committee of Equality Diversity and Inclusion Committee Campus Committee

Background

The University has made a strategic decision to widen participation and support lifelong learning. University of Galway's strategic plan also details specific actions associated with this goal including the following:

Open University of Galway

Flagship Actions for 2025

Access and Inclusion

- We will implement a capital development programme that is student-centred, community-focused and disability-conscious, to enhance access and engagement with our campus and facilities
- We will adopt the Principles of Universal Design in our learning and working environment to increase accessibility, accommodate different approaches to learning and enable students to fulfil their potential
- We will further develop our pathways for accessing education, building on our designation as a University of Sanctuary, to deliver a portfolio of supports for all communities to access higher education
- We will create an Open Scholarly Community in which the process, content and outcomes of research are ethically managed and openly accessible, and promote the use and production of Open Educational Resources

Excellent University of Galway

- We will support and enhance student transition and progression by developing and implementing a Student Success Strategy, and by investing in new processes and systems, through the Student Digital Pathways programme, that meet student needs and future-proof our university

(University of Galway Strategic Plan 2020-2025).

Purpose of Widening Participation Committee

The Widening Participation (WP) Committee will promote, advise and monitor the University's strategic plans on widening access and participation for the identified learner cohorts.

The University has committed to the above flagship actions by 2025. The Access Centre (AC) and the Centre for Adult Learning and Professional Development (CALPD) will contribute to these goals, however further progress is dependent on the leadership provided by a strategically focussed WP committee to embed the goals of widening access and participation into all aspects of the University's work.

The University of Galway WP Committee will identify issues and propose actions pertaining to the University's policies and practices vis-a-vis under-represented student cohorts from pre-entry to successful completion, for e.g.

- school leavers from socio-economically dis-advantaged backgrounds
- students with disabilities
- Mature Students
- Travellers
- adults beginning their higher education
- those studying on a flexible, part-time basis
- people who wish to continue learning and pursue intellectual enrichment and fulfilment.

The WP Committee will report at least once per year to the University Management Team (UMT) and EDI Committees and input into the HEA compact and National Access planning processes.

Proposed Terms of Reference

1. To review the University's academic and administrative policies with a view to identifying barriers to participation, recommend the actions necessary to address same, and establish a process to monitor progress in this regard;
2. To identify good practice, strategies and activities, which enable under-represented students to participate and progress, and recommend policies that will increase understanding and active promotion of University of Galway in areas of Social Inclusion, Equality and Diversity;
3. To develop and oversee a plan to improve the visibility and enhance the reputation of the University as an inclusive educational environment and to train widening participation advisors;
4. To consider quality and programme review reports, with a view to making recommendations that will ensure that the University's widening participation agenda is fully integrated;
5. To consider teaching and learning methodology, and make recommendations, which enable and facilitate the participation of under-represented students, and establish a process to monitor progress in this regard;
6. To consider the participation, retention and progression rates for under-represented students in the University and linking with work of the Student Experience Committee to make recommendations accordingly, and establish a process to monitor progress in this regard;
7. To provide a view on the advisory and support services for under-represented students, and make recommendations for alignment and integration with the generic student services;
8. To monitor and report on the progress of recommendations made.

Celebrating 25 years of Access Programmes



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