



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHE
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY

Inclusive Learning in the College of *Business, Public Policy and Law*

A partnership model for
progressing inclusion and
belonging in higher education

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Disclaimer

All facts and opinions expressed in this research report are those of the authors and not necessarily those of either the University of Galway or the College of Business, Public Policy and Law.

Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary	3
2. Why this research is important	9
3. What did we do and who was involved?	3
Data Collection	4
4. Survey overview	7
a. Pre-Covid survey overview	20
b. Mid-Covid survey overview	2
c. Overview of student responses by group	23
5. What did students say?	27
a. Overview	28
i. Large class sizes	30
ii. Group work	3
b. Teaching staff	33
c. Other students	35
d. Social events	36
e. Gender	38
f. Caring responsibilities	40
g. Race	42
i. Getting to know other students	42
ii. Cultural issues	44
iii. Racism	46
iv. Structural issues	47
v. Teaching staff	48
vi. Social events	49
h. Disability	50
i. Accessibility	52
ii. Reasonable accommodation	52
iii. Inclusive pedagogy	54
i. Age	56
j. Sexual orientation and gender identity	57
k. Socio-economic status	6
l. Other Issues	64
m. The impact of Covid-19 and the move to remote learning	65
i. Social isolation	65
ii. Resources and practicalities	68
iii. Workload	69
iii. Group-specific issues	7
(a) Students with disabilities	7
(b) Carers	72
6. Recommendations	75
7. Bibliography	78
8. Appendix	8

List of Figures

Figure 1: Overview of survey response numbers	18
Figure 2: Breakdown of admissible survey responses	19
Figure 3: Second Year students – Survey 3 (pre-Covid) compared with Survey 5 (mid-Covid)	22
Figure 4: Final Year students – Survey 4 (pre-Covid) compared with Survey 6 (mid-Covid)	22
Figure 5: Impact of Covid-19 on inclusion in the learning environment	22
Figure 6: Impact of Covid-19 on different student groups (learning environment less inclusive)	26

List of Abbreviations

AHSSBL	Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, Business and Law
CBPPL	College of Business, Public Policy and Law
DSS	Disability Support Services
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institute
IUA	Irish Universities Association
LENS	Learning Educational Needs Statement
SBE	J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics
Shannon College	Shannon College of Hotel Management
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UMT	University Management Team

1

Executive Summary





This report is the Final Report of the *Inclusive Learning in the College of Business, Public Policy and Law* project.

Supported in particular by the University of Galway Student Project Fund, the project set out to enhance inclusive teaching and learning practice in the College of Business, Public Policy and Law (CBPPL) for undergraduate students, particularly those from diverse backgrounds. The report complements the previous report, *Inclusive Learning at NUI Galway: Centring the Student Voice* (Wijeratne, Buckley and Quinlivan, 2021), which was supported by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, and which addressed the experiences of postgraduate students at the university.

In order to improve inclusion, we first had to understand the barriers to inclusion and participation experienced by undergraduate students in CBPPL. International research demonstrates the prevalence of exclusionary practices in higher education which impact not only on the student experience, but on retention and completion rates. It follows that identifying and addressing barriers to participation should not only improve the learning experience of all students, but impact positively on retention, progression and performance.

Student diversity is a strategic priority at University of Galway, and recent years have seen a notable increase in student diversity. However, in line with the university's values of Respect, Openness and Belonging, the focus of this research is not on the numbers of students from non-traditional backgrounds participating in the CBPPL's programmes, but on their sense of inclusion at all levels within the College. For this reason, we adopted a participatory approach to our research, with significant student involvement in project design, delivery and evaluation. Drawing on action research methodology, the goal was to centre the student voice – to hear directly from our students, and to learn from their lived experiences, in order to bring about pedagogical change. For example, student contributions informed the development of a set of practical tips for inclusive teaching (see Appendix 1), which was used to inform staff training.

CBPPL has three constituent schools: the School of Law; the J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics (SBE); and Shannon College of Hotel Management (Shannon College). CBPPL therefore falls within the broad remit of AHSSBL (arts, humanities, social sciences, business and law), but includes also a professional course and a satellite campus.

The research engaged directly with undergraduate students in all three schools, using online surveys, interviews and focus groups. The research period ran from October 2018 to March 2021, and the findings therefore address student experiences both prior to and during the Covid-19 pandemic. Six

online surveys were conducted with second and final year undergraduate students, over three academic years. The surveys received a total of 1,471 student responses, of which 1,352 were deemed admissible. The survey findings are not intended to be representative but rather to provide a snapshot of the views of some students at particular points in time. We then used a mixture of individual interviews and focus groups to explore the experiences of particular cohorts in more detail, focusing on international and intercultural students, students with disabilities, students of different genders, students with caring responsibilities, and LGBT+ students. In total, we conducted 23 individual interviews and three focus groups, with a further 16 participants.

Pre-Covid survey responses were in many respects positive. A significant majority of students agreed that they felt included in their learning environment, and that teaching staff were inclusive. However, they were less inclined to agree that other students were inclusive or that they felt included in social events in their College, School or Discipline.

The results for the final two surveys, both conducted mid-pandemic and during the period of remote learning, were surprisingly different from each other, but only Survey 5 differed significantly from the pre-Covid surveys. This may reflect the emergency nature of the shift to online teaching and associated initial difficulties. It may also or alternatively be due to the differing needs of the student cohorts involved, or simply to greater acclimatisation to remote learning on the part of staff and students. In Survey 5 (second year students), nearly three quarters of respondents considered that Covid-19 had had the effect of making their learning environment less inclusive. The percentage was lower in Survey 6 (final year students), although a good majority of respondents still felt that the pandemic had made their learning environment less inclusive. Generally, the final year students showed a lower level of Covid-related impact than the second year students.

Looking at the experiences of different student groups, it is difficult to identify consistent themes across all six surveys. It must also be noted that, apart from gender, surveys did not feature high numbers of students from the identified marginalised groups. That said, two important and consistent themes may be highlighted. First, in the three surveys where they were identified, students with caring responsibilities consistently highlighted issues with inclusion. Second, students with disabilities were consistently more likely to find social events un-inclusive, and several surveys suggested they were also more likely to find other students un-inclusive. The experiences of international and intercultural students were less clear-cut, perhaps due to small response numbers for this category. Overall, the surveys did not suggest that racism was a major difficulty for these students, though some students certainly had negative experiences in this regard (discussed further in the qualitative analysis). The experiences of LGBT+ students were similarly varied.

There were many positive comments on the learning environment in the university, with many students stating that they found it inclusive, engaging and accessible. However, some students highlighted that much depended on the particular learning context, as not all learning environments were equally welcoming. Key issues that were very commonly identified as exclusionary related to large class sizes and group work. Many students expressed strong appreciation of the efforts of teaching staff, and individual named staff were often mentioned as positive exemplars of inclusive practice. However, some students noted that not all staff were inclusive, and a significant number considered that other students did not always behave in an inclusive way, either in class or out of it. Overall, students found social events and societies very positive and welcoming, and many expressed

strong appreciation of attempts to involve them in disciplinary events and celebrations. However, some students (particularly those with caring responsibilities) felt that their personal situation meant that they lost out on the social aspect of College.

In relation to group concerns, a few students raised issues related to gender, though these comments were not widespread. However, some students identified an undercurrent of sexism and unconscious bias in the classroom. Students who were carers raised two main issues: the need for flexibility in relation to deadlines and other elements of course participation, and the need to schedule classes and events at accessible times. A third issue, raised by some students, related to childcare.

Although race was not widely addressed in the survey comments, a number of issues were raised consistently, albeit by a minority of students. The interviews and focus groups reinforced these themes. One issue was how difficult it could be for international students to get to know other students, particularly in larger classes, leading to loneliness and isolation. A number of students also highlighted instances of culture shock, leading both to difficulties in adjusting to the social environment, and practical issues in the teaching and learning context. Some students identified instances of racism by other students, staff and guest speakers, though these comments were not widespread. Some students highlighted structural concerns, such as the lack of Black, Brown or minority ethnic staff in their discipline. The lack of racial diversity in some undergraduate programmes was also noted. Some students considered that teaching staff were not always inclusive of international students, either singling them out, failing to include them, or failing to recognise language issues or additional barriers to learning that international students might face. In terms of social events, students regarded celebrations of cultural events such as Diwali or Chinese New Year as very inclusive. However, student clubs and societies were not always perceived as racially inclusive.

Many students with disabilities highlighted the help they received from learning support services as hugely beneficial. Particular praise was accorded to the Disability Support Service (DSS), the Library, the Student Counselling service, and the Assistive Technology service. Unsurprisingly, many students with disabilities raised concerns regarding accessibility. This included both physical accessibility to learning spaces and accessibility of learning resources. Students requiring reasonable accommodations to support their learning reported varying experiences. Many reported positive experiences with individual staff, however, others complained that teaching staff did not always comply with LENS¹ reports. Students with disabilities repeatedly highlighted that an inclusive disability pedagogy goes beyond accessibility and the provision of reasonable accommodation.

¹ A Learning Educational Needs Statement (LENS) outlines the learning supports, including reasonable accommodations, required for a student with disabilities.

LGBT+ students identified a number of issues affecting their inclusion in the learning environment. Most commonly, these related to inclusive language, visibility and representation. One of the most common points raised related to pronouns. Multiple students highlighted the importance of teaching staff using correct pronouns, or inviting students to indicate their pronouns in teaching contexts. Some homophobia was also noted, though it did not seem to be widespread.

A number of students identified ways in which the learning environment could exclude those who were socially or economically disadvantaged. A key issue was that staff did not always appear to be aware that students might need to work, or might be in financially straitened circumstances. This had practical consequences in relation to teaching and learning. Some students also identified the impact of socio-economic class, both on educational discourse and on inclusion in learning activities.

Students had different views on the impact of the pandemic, but a significant majority identified negative effects on their learning. These may be described under several broad headings: social isolation, motivation, anxiety, resources and workload. In addition, some group-specific issues were raised in relation to remote learning, for example in relation to students with disabilities or students with caring responsibilities.

While recognising that we have raised many issues in this research, we conclude the report by making a number of recommendations with a view to addressing the barriers to participation and to ensuring that University of Galway constantly evolves to ensure that it is inclusive for all. These recommendations are set out thematically, looking at general issues, policy suggestions, and responses to systemic issues raised in the research.

This report is drawn from more detailed research publications (published and forthcoming).







2

Why this
research is
important

All students are entitled to feel they belong and are welcome in the Higher Educational Institute (HEI) they study in. Research highlights that a sense of belonging impacts positively on their motivation, academic self-confidence and academic attainment (Kelly et al 2021). Exclusionary practices impact not only the student experience, their sense of belonging, but also retention and completion rates (NESET Report (2013). Improving the student learning experience and the removal of barriers to participation should accordingly impact positively on student retention, progression and performance. While we use the term 'inclusive learning' in this report, it is clear from the literature that this is a contested term and that its implementation has always been problematic (Armstrong et al., 2011). That noted, we have relied on the definition of inclusion in education espoused by Ainscow et al. (2006 and 2020). In this understanding, inclusion is a process, an ongoing search to find ways to respond to diversity. It is about the identification and the removal of barriers, with the goal of improving the presence, participation and achievement of all students. Inclusion therefore requires us to pay particular attention to those at risk of marginalisation, exclusion or underachievement. The primary focus of this research was to identify the barriers experienced by undergraduate students in the University of Galway and recommendations for change based on the barriers identified. While the focus of this research is on barriers to participation, it is of note that the Bologna Process promotes the idea of a diverse student body, one that on entering and graduating from HEIs reflects the diversity of the population (Bucharest Communiqué, 2012).



It is evident that the student body in Irish HEIs is changing, though whether it fully reflects the diversity of the population less certain. The changing demographics of the student body, both locally and nationally, are positive, but there is a corresponding need for HEIs to respond to that change. While there have been notable increases in the number of students from diverse backgrounds, this increase is not uniform. This is evidenced by the ongoing low numbers of members of the Traveller/Mincéir community (HEA 2021), suggesting that further actions to ensure the presence of this community are necessary. In contrast, the number of students with disabilities registering with support services in HEIs has increased by 226 over the last 11 years (AHEAD, 2021). In response to similar increases in the UK, Vickerman and Blundell (2010) questioned whether the numbers of students with disabilities had actually risen or whether students were just more comfortable disclosing their disabilities. Whatever the case, what is evident is that disability support services are experiencing an exceptional increase in the use of their services, requiring a more sustainable model of supports provision for students with disabilities. There are also data indicating an increase in international students (IUA) and students from non-traditional backgrounds, including mature students and students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (HEA 2017).

However, while we can evidence some of the changing demographics, there are also significant data gaps. Perhaps the most glaring is the lack of student data regarding Race or Ethnicity. In 2020, a joint Royal Irish Academy and British Council report noted that a vital first step for Ireland is the collection of HEI staff data that can be disaggregated by ethnicity. In 2021 the Higher Education Authority (HEA) conducted a national survey of HEI staff (Kempny and Michael 2021), with the goal of developing a picture of race equality among staff in HEIs. This research indicated that 11% of respondents considered themselves to be from a minority ethnic group. While this research is to be welcomed, it also highlights the lack of corresponding student data on minority ethnic groups in Ireland. While recognising that there are challenges or concerns associated with the collection of ethnicity data, that data does help to evidence the experience of under-represented groups (Intersectionality Working Group 2020). There is also anecdotal evidence to suggest an increase in transgender/non-binary students, however as most HEI records do not capture gender identities other than male and female, it is not possible to be definitive. Moreover, Brady et al (2019) stress the urgent need to collect data related to the educational attainment and progress of children who have been in care, in order to inform policy and practice on this issue. It is evident that there are significant data gaps and it is hard to propose solutions without that information; this report therefore reiterates the recommendation in Wijeratne, Buckley and Quinlivan (2021) on the need to gather student diversity data, including attainment and retention data.

This research focused on barriers to participation as well as the identification of good practice. It is evident from the literature that exclusionary practices and barriers are widespread in education. Research demonstrates the prevalence of exclusionary practices in higher education in relation to students from diverse backgrounds, including race, ethnicity, gender, LGBT+ status and disability (Bishop and Rhind, 2011; Collett 2007; Morgado et al, 2016; Buckley and Quinlivan, 2023; Wijeratne, Buckley and Quinlivan, 2021). Nationally, there is a wealth of information addressing barriers to



participation at different educational levels, though this research is often specific to a particular group of students. For example, a number of reports have addressed barriers to participation in higher education for students with disabilities. Those barriers can vary from the stigmatising impact of being labelled and the attitudes of students and staff, to the inaccessibility of learning materials and the impact of that on a student's studies (Buckley and Quinlivan, 2023; Padden & Tongue, 2018; Spassani et al, 2017; Hanafin and Shevlin, 2007). In respect of students from Black, Brown and minority ethnic backgrounds, there is research addressing students in post-primary education in Ireland. That research highlights that many Black, Brown and minority ethnic students perceive that White Irish students get preferential treatment, and that teachers fail to address or lack awareness when addressing racist bullying (Gilligan et al (2010)). The literature indicates that students desire lecturers to intervene in racially hostile situations, yet many fail to do so (Boysen, 2012; Linder et al, 2015). In relation to higher education, there is research indicating a failure to value non-Western qualifications, the impact of which is to impede progress of students from non-Western backgrounds in HEIs: (Ní Dhuinn, 2017; Mc Daid and Nowlan, 2021).

There is ample literature highlighting the demands of parenthood being a significant barrier both to access and retention in education. That research indicates that access to childcare is particularly problematic and impacts on all parents' ability to engage in education, though the impact is more significant for lone parents (Millar and Crosse, 2017; Zappone, 2015; Byrne and Murray, 2017; Murphy, et al. 2008; NESF, 2001). The issue of childcare was also identified as a barrier for mature students (Fleming et al, 2010). The data also indicate that the number of mature students choosing to attend higher education is in decline. In 2012/13, 13% of new entrants were mature students; in 2018/2019 that figure had dropped to 7.1%, significantly below the target of 16% in the National Access Plan target. Finally, there are significant data and evidence to highlight the impact of socio-economic status and educational attainment as the HEA's data from 2018/2019 indicate that students from affluent areas are twice as likely to attend HEIs than students from disadvantaged backgrounds; the latter also accounted for only 4% of students in high admission points courses such as medicine. Indeed, the data indicated that only 55 HEI students came from 'extremely disadvantaged' backgrounds (HEA 2021).

The remainder of the report first sets out a short overview of our research methodology. We then present our findings from our various data sources: student surveys, individual interviews and focus groups. Finally, we present the conclusions drawn from these findings and our key recommendations.



3

What did we do and who was involved?



The project drew on action research methodology. Action research uses systematic inquiry to improve personal practices and bring about change in specific contexts. The goal was to enhance inclusion in the university's learning environment by identifying and addressing barriers to educational participation, raising awareness and supporting the development of inclusive pedagogy (Wijeratne et al 2021, Burns 2009, Fischer 2001 and Parkin 2009).² We used a participatory approach, with significant student involvement in the project design, delivery and evaluation. A guiding principle throughout was to centre the student voice. For this reason, we mainly used qualitative methods to explore the perceptions of undergraduate students regarding their teaching and learning experience at University of Galway, with some limited use of semi-quantitative methods. We used online surveys to provide an overall assessment from the broader population of undergraduate students and identify potential issues for exploration. The online surveys were open to all undergraduate students in the College of Business, Public Policy and Law, but included demographic questions to help us to identify issues experienced by particular student groups. We also held individual interviews and focus groups to generate more in-depth information from selected student groups.

Qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups are believed to provide a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative methods, such as questionnaires (Gill et al.,2008). Individual in-depth interviews are widely used by researchers to co-create meaning with interviewees by reconstructing perceptions of events and experiences (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Focus groups are particularly useful for exploring people's knowledge and experiences and can be used to examine not only what people think but how they think and why they think that way (Kitzinger, 1995).

Data collection

Data were gathered in compliance with ethical approval granted by the University of Galway Research Ethics Committee (with appropriate revisions following the advent of Covid-19). This project focused on the College of Business, Public Policy and Law (CBPPL) which has three schools: the School of Law; the J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics (SBE) and Shannon College of Hotel Management (Shannon College).

² For example, student contributions informed the development of a set of practical tips for inclusive teaching (see Appendix 1), which was used to inform staff training.

Students were offered a choice of engagement mechanisms to respect privacy concerns and in the hope of maximising participation. We conducted two online surveys of undergraduate students each year for three consecutive years (October 2018 to March 2021). The data were therefore gathered both prior to and during the Covid-19 pandemic, enabling a comparison between students' experiences of on-campus and remote learning. All registered 2nd year students in CBPPL were surveyed in semester one of each academic year (Surveys 1, 3 and 5). All registered final year students were surveyed in semester two of each academic year (Surveys 2, 4 and 6). Final year students who were invited to complete Surveys 4 and 6 could therefore have been surveyed before, offering an opportunity to monitor changes over time, in light of inclusive teaching supports and training provided as part of the broader inclusive learning project. An overview of the surveys and response numbers is provided in Figure 1.

The surveys explored the students' experience of their learning environment from an inclusion perspective. These included both positive aspects of inclusion and barriers to inclusion. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic an additional question was added to Surveys 5 and 6 to explore the impact of remote learning on student experiences of inclusion and exclusion.

When addressing student diversity at a local level, we focused on four primary groups, based on the priorities then identified by the Office of the Vice President of Equality and Diversity at the University of Galway. These were: gender equality, disability, LGBT+ and cultural diversity.³ Cultural diversity is broadly defined to include race, ethnicity, culture, language, and religion. However, based on student interviews we added carers as a distinct category⁴ and attempted to track socio-economic status through the use of proxies such as SUSI grants. These groups also align with university priorities. The university's flagship goals particularly emphasise the inclusion of students with disabilities for instance, through increased accessibility and the adoption of the principles of Universal Design for Learning.⁵

While the university's flagship goals state that we will 'encourage and welcome a broad international mix of staff and students across our taught and research programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels',⁶ the survey did not ask if students were 'international students' as this term can potentially give rise to confusion. For example, some EU students might assume the question referred to the rate at which fees were paid (EU or non-EU), but others might assume it referred to nationality. We therefore used Irish citizenship and ethnicity as proxies to explore the experiences of international and intercultural students, albeit with significant overlap (e.g. Irish citizens include many Black, Brown and other minority ethnic students). Although the institutional focus has primarily been on the experience of female students, we broadened this to a focus on the impact of gender generally, enabling us to consider the experiences of male students and also intersex and non-binary students

³ More recently, and subsequent to the completion of this research, the university focus has evolved to the following pillars: Race, Gender, Universal Design and Accessibility, Sexuality and Gender Identity, and Data/ Research, with an additional focus on intersectionality. See NUI Galway, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report 2021/22, 57. Available at: https://www.universityofgalway.ie/media/equality/files/EDI-Annual-Report-2021_22.pdf (accessed 15 June 2023).

⁴ A question on caring responsibilities was introduced in Survey 2, following responses to Survey 1. Unfortunately, however, it was omitted in Surveys 3 and 4, before being reinstated in Surveys 5 and 6. However, even without a specific question, many students identified caring responsibilities as a barrier to inclusion.

⁵ Flagship Actions AP01 and AP02, NUI Galway, Implementing our Shared Vision, Shaped by Values: A Guidebook for Embedding our New Strategy 2020-2025 Across the University, 12. Available online at: <https://www.universityofgalway.ie/media/uncategorised/Guidebook-to-Embedding-Shared-Vision,-Shaped-by-Values-in-College-Plans-and-Unit-Strategies.pdf> (accessed 15 June 2023).

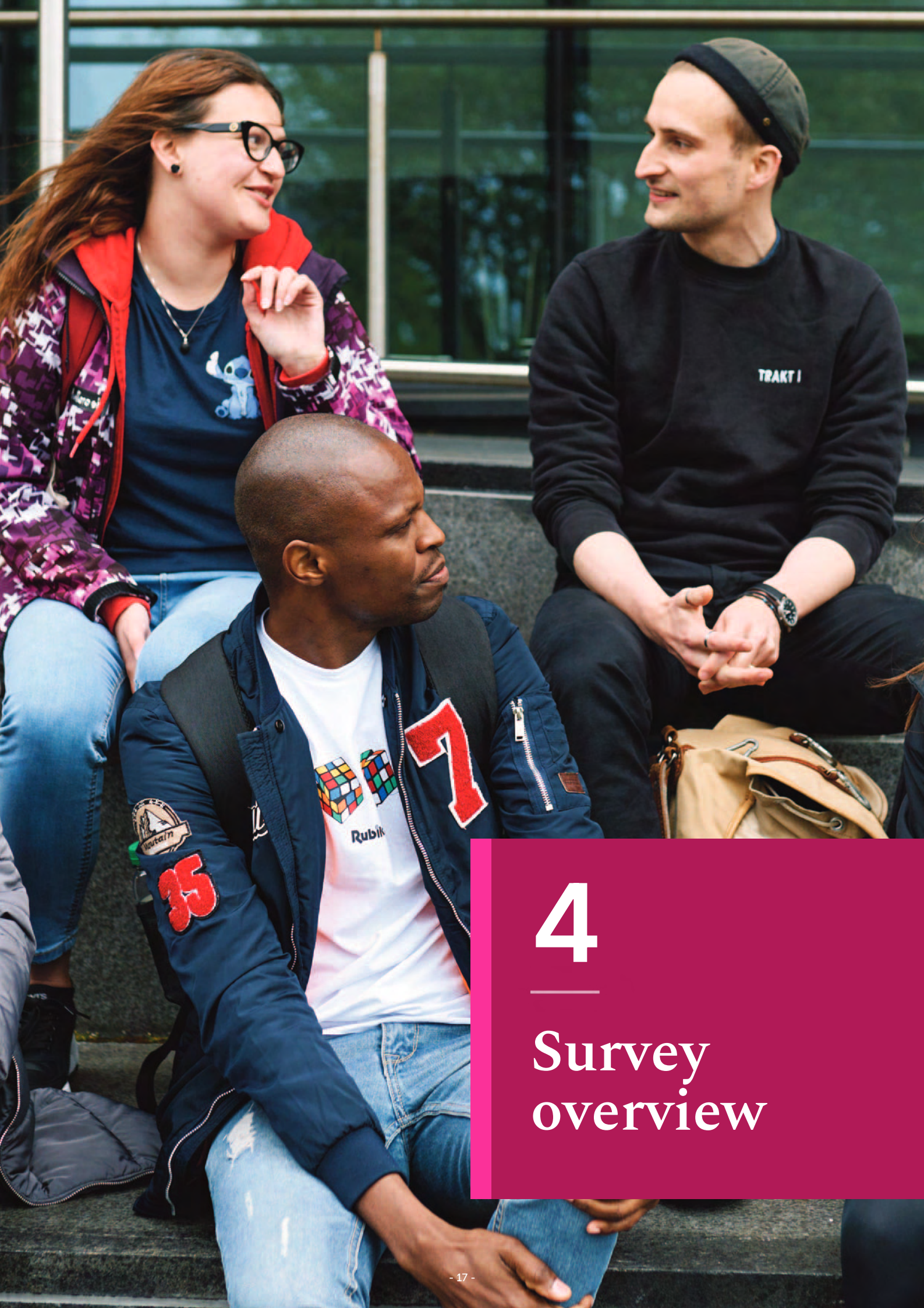
⁶ Flagship Action AP05, *ibid.*

(transgender students were considered under the LGBT+ heading). We also looked at the impact of caring responsibilities, particularly in the gender context.

Focus groups were initially planned for four key student groups: international and intercultural students,⁷ students with disabilities, LGBT+ students and students of different genders, including carers. We also offered the option of individual interviews to students who preferred not to participate in focus groups. Students were invited to volunteer for interviews or focus groups by sending emails and information sheets through module lecturers, programme coordinators, the heads of the participating schools, and classroom visits by the researcher. Information sheets and consent forms were circulated among participant students two weeks prior to the relevant interview or the focus group. Interview and focus group guides were prepared giving careful consideration to our research questions as well as the sensitive nature of the research and potential vulnerabilities of participants. The research part was entirely handled by the independent researcher (not a member of academic staff) to protect the privacy of the participating students. In the event, we had participants for focus groups with three student cohorts, one with students with disabilities, and two with international/intercultural students (16 participants overall). Other students preferred to engage in individual interviews. In total, 23 individual qualitative interviews were held with students from the identified groups. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the focus groups and individual interviews were moved online from March 2020.

Interviews and focus groups were recorded, with the permission of the participants. The recordings were transcribed by an independent transcriber who had pre-signed a 'transcription ethics protocol'. We used thematic methods to analyse our qualitative data (including comments in the online surveys) in a structured manner. Thematic analysis is mainly described as 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Vaismoradi, Turune & Bondas, 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79). The value of thematic analysis lies not only in the knowledge that can originate from it, but also as a mode for presenting research methods as living entities that resist simple classification, and can result in establishing meaning and solid findings (Vaismoradi, Turune & Bondas, 2013; Giorgi, 1992; Holloway & Todres, 2005; Sandelowski, 2003). Key thematic findings are outlined in this report, with some selected quotations from research participants for illustration purposes. To preserve confidentiality, the names of interview and focus group participants have been anonymised. Quotations from the six online surveys are clearly identified as such, and the participants here have not been given anonymised names but rather general descriptors (e.g., 'Female, White (Law) - Survey 2'). This is because some of the survey participants may also have participated in focus groups or individual interviews. The students who participated in the Focus Groups and Interviews have been given proxy names (e.g. 'Diego, Male, International student (SBE) - Interview').

⁷ The term 'intercultural' in this research refers to cultural diversity within Irish society, including ethnic, linguistic or religious diversity. It is therefore not synonymous with race.



4

Survey overview

Students were asked to consider a number of statements regarding the inclusiveness of different aspects of their learning environment and to express their level of agreement or disagreement on a five-point scale ranging from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’. The ‘learning environment’ was broadly defined, and students were advised that it covered all contexts where learning took place. The statements for consideration were as follows:

‘I feel included in my learning environment at NUI Galway.’⁸

‘Teaching staff act in an inclusive way in class and other learning contexts.’

‘Other students act in an inclusive way in class and other learning contexts.’

‘I feel included in social events in the College, School or Discipline.’



As noted above, a question on the impact of the pandemic on the inclusiveness of the learning environment was added in the final two surveys. Students were invited to comment on their response to each question and to give examples of inclusive and exclusionary behaviour.

	Survey 1	Survey 2	Survey 3	Survey 4	Survey 5	Survey 6	Total Responses
UG Student Cohort	Second Year	Final Year	Second Year	Final Year	Second Year	Final Year	
Timing	Pre-Covid	Pre-Covid	Pre-Covid	Pre-Covid	Mid-Covid	Mid-Covid	
Total responses	192	389	258	281	155	196	1471
Admissible responses	192	389	258	233	118	162	1352

Figure 1: Overview of survey response numbers

The six online surveys received a total of 1471 responses. However, some students provided demographic data only and did not answer the substantive survey questions. These responses were therefore excluded from the data analysis. The figures given in this report therefore relate only to those responses that answered at least some of the substantive survey questions (‘admissible responses’). In total, 1352 responses were deemed admissible (Figure 1). The survey response rate varied by School and by survey (Figure 2). The surveys do not claim to be representative or statistically significant but simply provide a snapshot of the perceptions of a range of students at a particular time.

⁸ The University was re-named ‘University of Galway – Ollscoil na Gaillimhe’ with effect from 1 September 2022.

Almost all admissible responses answered all substantive questions and many respondents also took the opportunity to make additional optional comments. However, some respondents preferred not to answer some demographic questions, either leaving them blank or selecting the option 'prefer not to say'. Accordingly, when this analysis refers to a particular group, such as students with disabilities or students with caring responsibilities, it means those respondents who identified positively as being in that group. A breakdown of survey response demographics is provided in Figure 2.⁹ It is not possible to review these in terms of response rates as data are not collected in respect of most categories at institutional level. Where it is gathered, i.e. gender and disability, it may not be accurate as some students with disabilities do not register with DSS (Buckley and Quinlivan 2023) and historically only binary gender options have been collected.

Student demographic	Survey 1 (pre-Covid)	Survey 2 (pre-Covid)	Survey 3 (pre-Covid)	Survey 4 (pre-Covid)	Survey 5 (mid-Covid)	Survey 6 (mid-Covid)	Average
Female	60	60	63	62	67	74	64
Male	38	40	36	37	31	25	35
Transgender or Other gender	0	<1	<1	<1	1	1	<1
White	87	88	89	92	88	91	89
Black, Brown or minority ethnic ¹⁰	13	12	11	7	12	9	11
Irish citizens	84	88	85	91	94	88	88
Other nationalities	15	11	15	8	5	12	11
Students with disabilities	11	8	7	12	11	11	10
Students with caring responsibilities	Not asked	9	Not asked	Not asked	14	10	11 (relevant surveys only)
LGBT+	10	10	10	6	18	12	11
Law	44	34	40	25	48	30	37
SBE	18	46	26	59	42	28	37
Shannon College	37	19	34	16	6	22	22

Figure 2: Breakdown of admissible survey responses

⁹ Percentages in these findings have generally been rounded to the nearest whole number, with numbers rounded up from 0.5. However, some percentages for transgender students in Figure 2 have been given as <1% instead of 0% to indicate that there were responses from students who identified as transgender.

¹⁰ For the purposes of this report, the term 'minority ethnic' includes members of the Irish Traveller/Mincéir community. Although it may be assumed that students who identified as White Irish citizens were members of the Settled community, insufficient data were gathered to make this conclusive.

a Pre-Covid survey overview

In analysing the survey responses, a distinction may be drawn between those surveys conducted prior to Covid-19 (Surveys 1 to 4) and those conducted during the pandemic and remote learning period (Surveys 5 and 6).

Pre-Covid survey responses were in many respects positive. A significant majority of students agreed¹¹ that they felt included in their learning environment.¹² Even more agreed that teaching staff were inclusive.¹³ However, they were less inclined to agree that other students were inclusive¹⁴ or that they felt included in social events in their College, School or Discipline.¹⁵

The percentage of students expressing disagreement was small but persistent. Across surveys, a consistent minority did not feel included in their learning environment,¹⁶ and considered that teaching staff were not inclusive,¹⁷ while a slightly higher proportion felt that other students were not inclusive.¹⁸ A very consistent proportion of students in all surveys felt that social events were not inclusive.¹⁹ However, while many of these figures are low, it must be noted that a significant number of students were unsure if they regarded their learning environment as inclusive.²⁰ This 'unsure' category was smaller in relation to teaching staff²¹ but higher in relation to the behaviour of other students²² and in relation to social events.²³

Overall, therefore, the picture is one where the majority of students felt that their learning environment and key aspects of it were generally inclusive, but a small minority felt that it was not and a larger minority were not confident that it was. The main issues seemed to be in relation to the inclusiveness (or otherwise) of other students, and inclusion in relation to social events.

¹¹ For the purposes of this overview, students were considered to 'agree' with a statement if they agreed with it either 'strongly' or 'somewhat'. They were considered to 'disagree' with a statement if they disagreed with it either 'strongly' or 'somewhat'. Students were considered 'unsure' if they neither agreed nor disagreed.

¹² Range across surveys: 75-83%.

¹³ Range across surveys: 80-91%.

¹⁴ Range across surveys: 59-66%.

¹⁵ Range across surveys: 64-75%.

¹⁶ Range across surveys: 6-8%.

¹⁷ Range across surveys: 3-7%.

¹⁸ Range across surveys: 10-15%.

¹⁹ Around 12% in all four surveys.

²⁰ Range across surveys: 12-17%.

²¹ Range across surveys: 6-13%.

²² Range across surveys: 19-28%.

²³ Range across surveys: 14-23%.

b Mid-Covid survey overview

The results for the final two surveys, both conducted mid-pandemic and during the period of remote learning, were surprisingly different from each other, but only Survey 5 differed significantly from the pre-Covid surveys. This may be due to the differing needs of the student cohorts involved,²⁴ or simply to greater acclimatisation to remote learning on the part of staff and students.

In Survey 5 (November/ December 2020), far fewer students felt their learning environment was inclusive compared to previous surveys,²⁵ and far more disagreed that it was inclusive.²⁶ The number of 'unsure' students had also risen slightly.²⁷ Students were also less likely to regard teaching staff as inclusive,²⁸ and the proportion who regarded other students as un-inclusive had also risen somewhat,²⁹ even though student contact and interaction was reduced during remote learning. The proportion of students who considered social events to be inclusive had also fallen significantly;³⁰ however, the real issue here may be that there were few/ no social events, rather than that they were exclusionary. Overall, nearly three quarters of students in this survey considered that Covid-19 had had the effect of making their learning environment less inclusive.³¹

The picture was somewhat different in Survey 6 (February/ March 2021), and the results were more aligned with the pre-Covid findings. A high proportion of students in this survey considered their learning environment to be inclusive while a small proportion did not (albeit slightly higher than the pre-Covid figures).³² Most of these students felt that teaching staff were inclusive,³³ though a lower proportion felt that other students were.³⁴ A surprisingly high proportion of students felt that social events were inclusive;³⁵ possibly, students may have been describing their overall experience, rather than the particular academic year, when few events were held. Overall, however, most students felt that the pandemic had made their learning environment less inclusive.³⁶ Generally, the final year students showed a lower level of Covid-related impact than the second year students. This may be because the final year students had stronger support networks (as they had been in the university longer), or because they had longer to grow accustomed to remote learning before answering their survey, or because they were more focused on their final assessment and would have had less time for socialising in any event. Figures 3 and 4 compare the responses for each group with the preceding responses for that cohort. Figure 5 compares the impact of Covid-19 for the two groups.

²⁴ Survey 5 related to second year students whereas Survey 6 related to final year students.

²⁵ 54% of students agreed that their learning environment was inclusive.

²⁶ 26% of students disagreed that their learning environment was inclusive.

²⁷ 20% of students were unsure if their learning environment was inclusive.

²⁸ 64% of students agreed that teaching staff were inclusive while 14% disagreed and 20% were unsure.

²⁹ 53% of students agreed that other students were inclusive, while 18% disagreed and 28% were unsure.

³⁰ 49% of students agreed that social events were inclusive, while 29% disagreed and 20% were unsure.

³¹ 74% of students said that Covid-19 had made their learning environment less inclusive, while only 5% said it had made it more inclusive and 21% said it had not affected the inclusiveness of their learning environment.

³² 75% of students agreed that their learning environment was inclusive while 10% disagreed and 15% were unsure.

³³ 80% of students agreed that teaching staff were inclusive while 7% disagreed and 13% were unsure.

³⁴ 61% of students agreed that other students were inclusive while 15% disagreed and 25% were unsure.

³⁵ 64% of students agreed that social events were inclusive while 15% disagreed and 20% were unsure.

³⁶ 64% of students felt that Covid-19 had made their learning environment less inclusive, while 14% felt it had made it more inclusive and 21% said it had not affected the inclusiveness of their learning environment.

'Learning environment is inclusive'

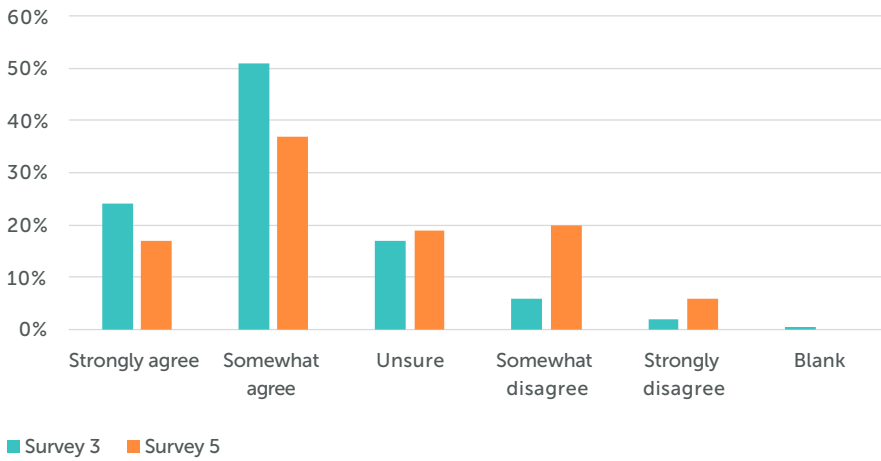


Figure 3: Second Year students – Survey 3 (pre-Covid) compared with Survey 5 (mid-Covid)

'Learning environment is inclusive'

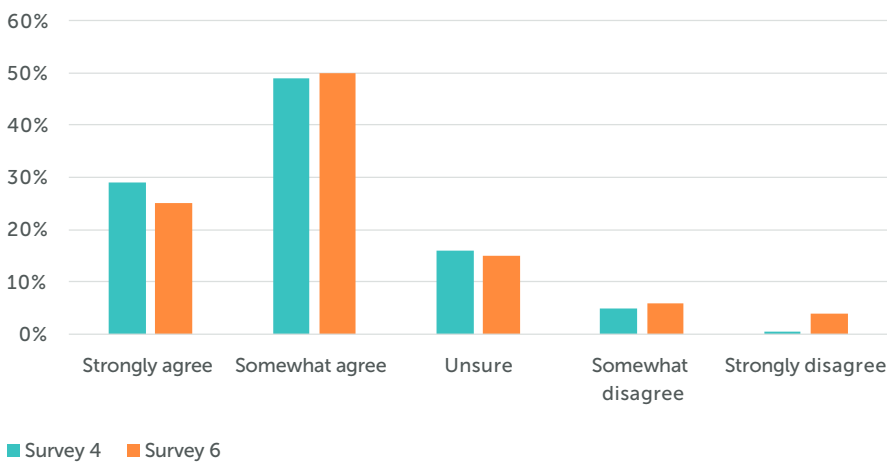


Figure 4: Final Year students – Survey 4 (pre-Covid) compared with Survey 6 (mid-Covid)

Impact of Covid-19 on the learning environment

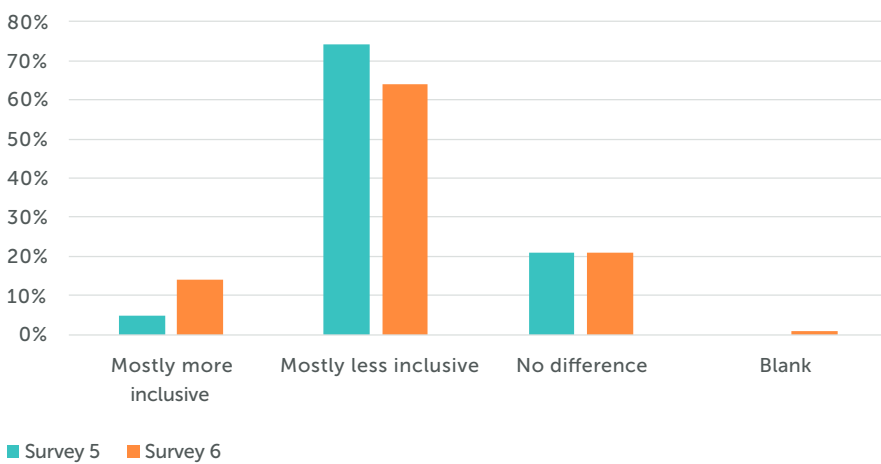


Figure 5: Impact of Covid-19 on inclusion in the learning environment

c Overview of student responses by group

Looking at the experiences of different student groups, it is difficult to identify consistent themes across all six surveys. It must also be noted that the surveys did not feature high numbers of students from most of the identified marginalised groups (see Figure 2). Students with disabilities, students with caring responsibilities, students of other nationalities, LGBT+ students, and Black, Brown and minority ethnic students averaged about 10-11% of responses across all surveys. As overall survey response rates varied significantly (Figure 1), it follows that actual numbers of students from particular marginalised groups were sometimes quite low in relation to a particular survey, and not all students who responded to the survey answered all questions within that survey. Comparisons with the much larger majority group must therefore be treated with considerable caution, and while 'snapshot' figures are given here, it must be emphasised again that these are not regarded as representative. Figures given relate to the number of students from a particular group who responded to a particular question.

That said, two important and consistent themes may be highlighted. First, in the three surveys where a demographic question was asked,³⁷ students with caring responsibilities consistently highlighted issues with inclusion. In particular, students with caring responsibilities were more likely to find other students un-inclusive, and were very significantly more likely to consider social events un-inclusive.³⁸ Following the move to remote learning, students with caring responsibilities were also more likely to consider the learning environment un-inclusive, though their views on the impact of the pandemic differed as between Surveys 5 and 6.³⁹ This is explored further in the qualitative discussion. It may be noted that students with caring responsibilities were predominantly but not exclusively female.⁴⁰

Second, students with disabilities were consistently more likely to find social events un-inclusive,⁴¹ and several surveys suggested they were also more likely to find other students un-inclusive.⁴² Following the move to remote learning, they were also considerably more likely to find the learning environment un-inclusive, even though they were less likely to say that Covid had had a negative impact on the inclusiveness of their learning environment.⁴³ Again, this is explored further in the qualitative discussion.

³⁷ As noted previously, a question on caring responsibilities was introduced in Survey 2, following responses to Survey 1. Unfortunately, however, it was omitted in Surveys 3 and 4, before being reinstated in Surveys 5 and 6.

³⁸ From comments discussed later in the thematic analysis, a key issue related to the scheduling of events in the evening.

³⁹ Students with caring responsibilities in Survey 5 were less likely than those with no caring responsibilities to say Covid-19 had a negative impact on the inclusiveness of their learning environment (65% compared with 74% of those with no caring responsibilities) and more likely to say it made no difference (29% compared with 21%). However, those in Survey 6 were more likely to say Covid-19 had a negative impact (69% compared with 62% of those with no caring responsibilities).

⁴⁰ 73% of all students with caring responsibilities identified as female, 23% identified as male, and the remainder (2 persons) were transgender or preferred not to say.

⁴¹ All surveys except Survey 2.

⁴² Surveys 1, 4, 5 and 6.

⁴³ Students with disabilities in Survey 5 were also more likely to say Covid-19 had had no real effect on the inclusiveness of their learning environment (19%, compared with 11% of students without disabilities). By contrast, students with disabilities in Survey 6 were more likely to say that Covid had made their learning environment more inclusive (22%, compared with 13% of students without disabilities) while students without disabilities were more likely to say it had had no effect (23%, compared with 11% of students with disabilities).

The experiences of international and intercultural students were less clear-cut. In general, and perhaps surprisingly, students who identified as White or as Irish citizens were more likely to consider other students un-inclusive than students who were Black, Brown or minority ethnic,⁴⁴ or who had other nationalities.⁴⁵ White students and Irish citizens were also more likely to regard social events as un-inclusive.⁴⁶ There were also several surveys where White students and/or Irish citizens were more likely to consider the learning environment and/or the teaching staff un-inclusive than Black, Brown or minority ethnic students or students of other nationalities.⁴⁷ In only one survey were Black, Brown and minority ethnic students more likely to consider teaching staff un-inclusive.⁴⁸ Even allowing for the small numbers in the Black, Brown or minority ethnic category and the 'other nationalities' category, this consistency does suggest that racism was not a major difficulty for these students, though some students certainly had negative experiences in this regard (discussed further in the qualitative analysis).

Results in relation to Covid-19 were inconsistent. In Survey 5, White students were more likely to say that the pandemic had made their learning environment less inclusive,⁴⁹ as were Irish citizens.⁵⁰ Black, Brown and minority ethnic students were more likely to say it had made it more inclusive, though the particularly small number of students in this category should be noted.⁵¹ However, in Survey 6, Black, Brown and minority ethnic students were more likely to say that the pandemic had made their learning environment less inclusive,⁵² as were non-nationals.⁵³ This may be because international students have fewer local sources of support, however this would not apply to all Black, Brown or minority ethnic students, many of whom are Irish. White students were more likely to say the pandemic had made their learning environment more inclusive⁵⁴ while Irish citizens were more likely than non-nationals to say that the pandemic had not impacted on their learning environment.⁵⁵ The contradictory findings may simply reflect the comparatively low number of admissible responses in these two surveys.

The experiences of LGBT+ students were similarly varied. In some surveys they were more likely to find other students un-inclusive than non-LGBT+ students,⁵⁶ while in others they were more likely to regard social events as un-inclusive.⁵⁷ LGBT+ students were also more likely than non-LGBT+ students to say that Covid-19 had not affected the inclusiveness of their learning environment, though the difference was marginal in Survey 6.

⁴⁴ Surveys 1, 3 and 4.

⁴⁵ Surveys 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

⁴⁶ Surveys 4, 5 and 6.

⁴⁷ Surveys 4, 5 and 6.

⁴⁸ Survey 1.

⁴⁹ 75% of White students compared with 64% of Black, Brown and minority ethnic students.

⁵⁰ 74% of students who were Irish citizens compared with 67% of students who were not Irish citizens.

⁵¹ 14% of Black, Brown and minority ethnic students compared with 4% of White students; however, only two Black, Brown and minority ethnic students responded to this question, so very little can be read into this.

⁵² 73% of Black, Brown and minority ethnic students compared with 63% of White students.

⁵³ 80% of students who were not Irish citizens, compared with 61% of those who were Irish citizens.

⁵⁴ 15% of White students compared with 7% of Black, Brown and minority ethnic students.

⁵⁵ 23% of students who were Irish citizens compared with 5% of students who were not Irish citizens.

⁵⁶ Surveys 1, 3 and 6.

⁵⁷ Surveys 2, 3 and 4.

As noted previously, students with caring responsibilities were predominantly female. However, the issues identified by carers did not translate into exclusion by female students generally. Both male and female students identified particular issues in different surveys. In two surveys, female students were more likely to find the learning environment less inclusive than males,⁵⁸ in one they were more likely to find other students un-inclusive,⁵⁹ and in one they were more likely to find teaching staff un-inclusive.⁶⁰ However, in another survey male students were more likely to find teaching staff un-inclusive,⁶¹ and in general the differences were only marginal. The most notable difference was in Survey 5, where male students were significantly more likely to say they found the learning environment un-inclusive.⁶² There seems to be no obvious reason for this. Possibly male students had less effective support networks or found online communication more difficult, though this is not supported by the findings in Survey 6, where female students were less likely to find the learning environment inclusive.⁶³ On the other hand, female students in Survey 6 were less likely than males to say that Covid made the learning environment less inclusive⁶⁴ and more likely to consider that Covid made it more inclusive.⁶⁵

Finally, insofar as there were differences across participating Schools, Law students were more likely to find other students un-inclusive⁶⁶ and to identify inclusion issues with social events.⁶⁷ Shannon College students were least likely to identify inclusion issues, though it should be noted that they were also the most likely, in Survey 6, to say that Covid had made their learning environment less inclusive.⁶⁸ Law students were the most likely in that Survey to say Covid-19 made their learning environment more inclusive,⁶⁹ while SBE students were most likely to say it had had no effect.⁷⁰

⁵⁸ Surveys 2 and 6.

⁵⁹ Survey 2.

⁶⁰ Survey 6.

⁶¹ Survey 1

⁶² 38% of male students compared with 20% of female students.

⁶³ 12% vs 5%),

⁶⁴ 62% of female students compared with 68% of male students.

⁶⁵ 16% of female students compared with 10% of male students.

⁶⁶ Surveys 1, 4 and 6.

⁶⁷ Surveys 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

⁶⁸ 80% of Shannon College students compared with 60% of SBE students and 54% of Law students.

⁶⁹ 21% of Law students compared with 13% of SBE students and 9% of Shannon College students.

⁷⁰ 27% of SBE students compared with 21% of Law students and 11% of Shannon College students.

Covid - learning environment less inclusive

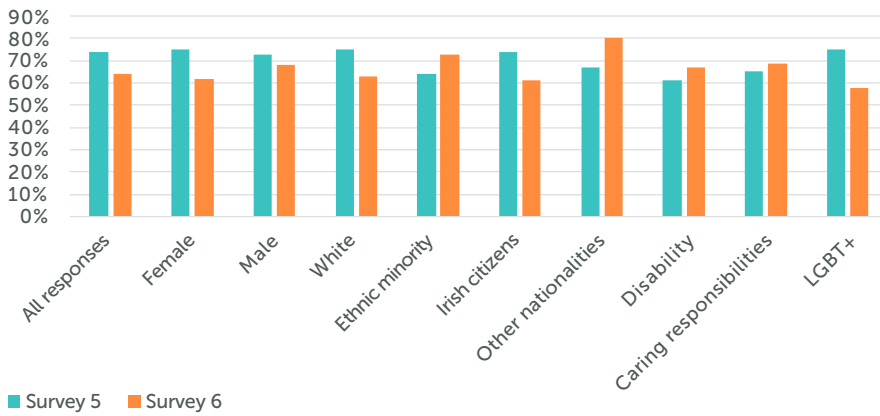


Figure 6: Impact of Covid-19 on different student groups (learning environment less inclusive)





5

What did
students
say?

a Overview

There were many positive comments on the learning environment in the university, with many students stating that they found it inclusive, engaging and accessible.



I think one of NUIG's best qualities is its inclusiveness. Everyone is looked at equally and is treated with respect.

– Male, White, LGBT+ (Law) – Survey 1

It's accessible to practically anybody.

– Gender unspecified, White Irish Traveller (Law) – Survey 1

Students particularly highlighted tutorials as inclusive, as they were more participatory than lectures and students were able to discuss issues in small groups. However, discussion opportunities in lectures were also appreciated, and students found it inclusive when lecturers encouraged participation. Team work and group projects were also valued, as were peer-learning opportunities and programmes (CÉIM, PAL and Seas Suas were particularly mentioned). Many students noted that online learning technologies enhanced inclusion, for example, anonymous polling tools such as Kahoot and Mentimeter. These enabled shy students to engage in class debates and stimulated interest. Students appreciated when learning resources were made available on Blackboard (the university's virtual learning environment), as this made it easier to locate readings and materials, and supported students who might not be able to attend in person.

Other responses were more equivocal.



The environment is neither inclusive or exclusive it's neutral.

- Male, Race unspecified (Law) – Survey 2

Yeah, no I definitely had a very positive overall experience but that doesn't mean that there wasn't I think, elements in the learning experience that definitely could be improved.

- Maeve, Female, Disability (Law) – Interview

Inclusion also varied over time, for example, first year students might feel less included as they were in a new environment where they knew few people.

I did feel really excluded in first year.

- Louise, Female, Carer (SBE) – Interview



Some students highlighted that much depended on the particular learning context, as not all learning environments were equally welcoming.



Some lectures are extremely comfortable to answer in and we don't feel weird about asking questions or responding aloud. And then vice versa in others (*sic*).

- Female, Mixed race (Law) – Survey 1

Lecturers do try to encourage us all to participate, but we can be discouraged when lecturers criticise us for not knowing the correct answer

- Gender unspecified, White (Law) – Survey 1

Some students felt that teaching staff often tried to encourage participation, but that students themselves were reluctant to engage.



I find that it is more Irish students tend not to engage with lecturers. Lecturers do try to engage with students. Maybe a different approach needs to be taken to get students to interact.

- Male, White (SBE) – Survey 2

A few students considered that it was 'usually up to an individual to try and feel included'⁷¹. Inclusion was therefore contingent on the degree of effort a particular student was willing to make.

i. Large Class Sizes

Some students expressed more negative views about the learning environment. Particular examples of exclusionary practice included a lack of transparency in selecting students for opportunities, and the domination of class discussions by particular students. This was not always managed effectively by teaching staff.

The most notable theme however was the impact of large class sizes. Students who were taught in very large classes highlighted that they were unable to participate effectively and were unable to get to know their peers. This undermined both direct engagement with learning and social engagement more generally.

In the larger classes like [named subject] - there is no occasion to ask questions and it is strictly lecture lecturing and student listening/ note taking.

- Female, Mixed race (Law) – Survey 1

I find it inclusive, but it's such a big college, it's hard to get to know your classmates.

- Female, White (Law) – Survey 2

large lecture classes make it tougher to learn, pay attention and interact.

- Male, White (SBE) – Survey 2



⁷¹ Female, White (Law) – Survey 2

In first year, if I am being honest, I found it very hard in the first semester. I was actually thinking of dropping out. It wasn't because I didn't like Galway it was because of big class sizes which I found overwhelming.

- Justine, Female, Intercultural student (SBE) – Interview



The dislike of large group teaching was a direct corollary of the appreciation of smaller classes and tutorials, noted above. Students noted that class size negatively limited student-teacher interaction and undermined lecturers' attempts to promote engagement:



Their version of inclusive is asking questions in a class that is too big to provide participation.

- Female, White (SBE) – Survey 2

The 'dynamic' between staff and students was therefore described as 'quite distant'.⁷²

ii. Group Work

Students raised concerns around group work. Randomly allocated groups were a particular concern for two reasons: they increased stress for students with anxiety; self-selecting groups had an exclusionary impact on students without a well established friendship group. These feelings were not however universal and indeed, some students identified group work as contributing to inclusive learning.

I think this works good because it includes us more, the people that wouldn't have that many friends.

- Deirdre, Female, Mature student (SBE) – Interview



⁷² Survey 2, Female, White (Law)



Actually I like how it works here. But I think that there should be more occasions to work in groups because when I go to a class I don't know anyone, so I sit there and I'm like, okay, I don't know anyone. So, there's no occasion to talk with people. The first occasion to talk is when I'm working with them in a group project.

- Diego, Male, International student (SBE) - Interview

However, that student also felt that Irish students did not trust international students to write up group projects.

So, I chat with my friend, the Irish, and was like 'Okay, I will write it.' And I told him 'I can write it if you want.' He was like 'Do you really want to write?' 'If you want, I can help you.' And he told me he preferred to write all because he preferred. I think he don't trust me because my main language is Spanish and not English. Probably he will write it better than me.

- Diego, Male, International student (SBE) - Interview



Overall, group work was an issue for many students, with particular concerns expressed by some students in relation to effective time management.



I wouldn't have the time, it would be hard for meeting for groups, it is really hard to get a schedule that fits for the groups because I've so many other things to have to get into the hours that I have free from lectures, like appointments for the kids and different things. So, it's really hard to do group work.

- Louise, Female, Carer (SBE) - Interview

b Teaching staff

Many students expressed strong appreciation of the efforts of teaching staff, and individual staff were often mentioned as positive exemplars of inclusive practice.



I think lecturers do an excellent job of inclusion and trying to engage students in lectures.

- Male, White, LGBT+ (Law) – Survey 1

In Shannon staff are very involved and care about our learning.

- Female, White (Shannon College) – Survey 1

Any lecturers I have approached are eager to help.

- Female, White, Disability, LGBT+ (Law) – Survey 2

However, these helpful attitudes were not universal.

Depends on the lecturer some are great others not so much.

- Female, White (SBE) – Survey 4

... I always found that like there was some lecturers who made my learning so, so, so, easy. And like just made it so accessible. And then there was obviously, I'd encountered a few lecturers like modules and stuff that just really, really were challenging and challenged my ability to learn.

- Maeve, Female, Disability (Law) – Interview



Students highlighted that lecturers played an important role in facilitating class discussions, often on contentious topics, and in many cases did this well and in an inclusive way. However, some respondents noted that students themselves were not always willing to engage in such discussions. Respondents also highlighted that negative responses by lecturers could discourage participation and engagement.



I feel sometimes lecturers can be judgemental towards students who give their opinion or answer on a topic that may be wrong. It discourages class participation when a lecturer frowns on a student's answer.

- Female, White (Law) – Survey 2

I do find lecturers very informative but I summoned the courage to ask a question after a lecture the other day, something I never do but the way it was explained back was the exact reason I never ask questions.

- Female, White (SBE) – Survey 3

Students also noted the importance of lecturers having regular contact hours and communicating these to students. Pastoral support was also valued, and students noted that difficulties in accessing this sometimes arose.

Teachers are generally engaging in the classroom but regularly are not in for their office hours and communicate and advise very little outside of the classroom.

- Female, White, LGBT+ (Law) – Survey 1



c Other students

A significant number of respondents noted that other students did not always behave in an inclusive way, either in class or out of it. This ranged from simple comments that 'students in general aren't that friendly to one another (sic)'⁷³ and noting the existence of cliques, to highlighting the effect that particular students could have on the classroom dynamic.



An atmosphere of judgement and fear is created in the class.

- Female, White, LGBT+ (Law) – Survey 1

I find that some students can be disruptive, by interrupting lectures during a class discussion, and talking continually about their own agenda which is irrelevant to the topic under review. This leaves some students fearful to speak up. It can be seen as a form of indirect bullying. As the disruptive person is unchallenged.

- Male, White (Law) – Survey 1

... lectures tend to be filled with over 100 students. When a student does speak out, they are often met with laughter and whispering for no reason. This discourages other students for future opportunities. I see students who speak in front of such an immature class as very brave. I don't speak because of this.

- Gender unspecified, White (SBE) – Survey 2

Often times in classes in which opinions are offered and discussed there can be a sense of competition. Other students can be quick to point out flaws in logic or misunderstandings in less than constructive means.

- Male, White (Law) – Survey 2

⁷³ Survey 2, Female, White (Law)

d Social events

Views on the inclusiveness of social events and events in the discipline also varied. Overall, students found social events and societies very positive and welcoming, and many expressed strong appreciation of attempts to involve them in disciplinary events and celebrations. Students commonly cited social events as examples of inclusive practice that had a very positive impact on their learning environment. Examples of inclusion included:

Emails inviting students to talks and different things.

- Female, White (Law) – Survey 1

Choir night, badminton competitions, Gym nights, etc.

- Female, Asian (Shannon College) – Survey 1

Christmas carols and treats in December where everyone gathered in the Atrium and sang songs together.

- Female 1, White (Shannon College) – Survey 2

...mindfulness sessions, events, meet and greet at start of the year.

- Female 2, White (Shannon College) – Survey 2



For many students, clubs and societies were a great opportunity to meet people:



But I do think they're kind of an integral part of college like, in terms of getting people maybe who that bit shy or that bit you know, finding the transition to university that bit much more of a struggle or difficult you know they're quite a safe space, they're normally very welcoming. I have found in my experience that they're all very welcoming.

- Claire, Female, Carer, LGBT+ (Law) – Interview

Actually, now that I am talking about societies, I have met some first years through the society who joined in hopes of meeting people from the college as well. That would be the only place where I have met incoming NUIG students or met people who aren't in my course or in my friend group. So, societies, surprisingly, play a big role this year, in the presence of COVID keeping people socialised.



- Fara, Female, International student (Law) – Interview

However, the impact of student cliquishness was again noted:



I think that there's a strong clique element to college societies. I've tried a few but they've felt very exclusive so I just haven't bothered with them.

- Male, White, LGBT+ (Law) – Survey 1

Some students also felt that their personal situation meant that they lost out on the social aspect of College. One interviewee with caring responsibilities stated:

... being a little bit older than some of the students you don't really get to go to any of the social side of things so you don't really get – you're not really able to get involved in the social side of college and you kind of miss out on the whole – that whole side, which is pretty important too.



- Louise, Female, Carer (SBE) – Interview

e Gender

A few students raised issues related to gender, though these comments were not widespread. Most of the comments related to the learning environment, particularly lectures, which some students regarded as male-dominated.

Lectures dominated by male speakers even though there are more females in the room than male... The same 5 boys speak in every law lecture. I can go to all 7 law lectures of a week and not one undergraduate female would feel welcome to speak up or share their opinion.

- Female 1,⁷⁴ White, LGBT+ (Law) – Survey 1



Some students went further and identified an undercurrent of sexism and unconscious bias.



Lecturers only say if “he” for hypothetical situations with a judge or lawyer.

- Female, White, LGBT+ (Law) – Survey 4

There is a sense of the “good old boys club” and a lot of underlying misogyny in my experience.

- Female 2, White, LGBT+ (Law) – Survey 1

I have found on one or two occasions some lectures (*sic*) to be slightly sexist and see more opportunities for boys.

- Female, White (SBE) – Survey 2

More structural issues were also identified. For example, one Shannon College student argued that the required uniform for female students was inappropriate:

Making the girls wear heels is sexist in my opinion and Black flats should be allowed to give the girls a choice.

- Male, White, LGBT+ (Shannon College) – Survey 3



⁷⁴ Where two respondents to the same survey have the same descriptors (eg Female, White, LGBT+) and are quoted in the same subsection, they are distinguished numerically, e.g. 'Female 1' and 'Female 2'.

Another student felt there were insufficient female and international lecturers.⁷⁵ Most students, however, did not identify particular barriers related to gender, and a few noted positive examples of gender-related inclusion in the learning environment.



When forming groups for an assignment, the lecturer took on board feedback from the previous semester's survey from girls who felt uncomfortable in all male groups - and requested that every group formed have at least two girls (if they wished).

- Female, White (SBE) - Survey 1

From a structural perspective, the importance of small group settings such as tutorials could also have a specific gender relevance:

In tutorials and small group learning such as seminars, girls are given a chance and encouraged to speak.

- Female 1, White, LGBT+ (Law) - Survey 1



Only one student raised issues related to possible gender-based violence, noting that two friends who had been assaulted were forced to attend class regularly with the perpetrator.⁷⁶ Without knowing the full facts, it is difficult to comment on this, but the student expressed concern and frustration at a perceived lack of institutional support.

⁷⁵ Male, White (SBE) - Survey 2.

⁷⁶ Female, White (Law) - Survey 2. The nature of the assaults was unclear but one of the victims was identified as female.

f Caring responsibilities

Students who were carers raised two main issues.⁷⁷ One related to the need for flexibility in relation to deadlines and other elements of course participation. The other related to the need to schedule classes and disciplinary events at accessible times. A third issue, raised by some students, related to childcare.

In relation to flexibility, students highlighted that some teaching staff could be very rigid, and unwilling to make any allowances or accommodations, or even to acknowledge the impact of caring responsibilities. Some lecturers did not even seem to be aware that students might have caring responsibilities and might face particular difficulties. On occasion consideration was not given to the necessity for students to have adequate time to address sudden changes in scheduling, particularly where students had caring responsibilities.



... I find some lecturers are not aware that students may have caring responsibilities or come from lower income households where they don't have access to resources that many other students do.

- Female, White, Carer, 100% grant of maintenance (School unspecified) – Survey 6

When faced with potentially having to hand in an assignment late because my child was ill with chicken pox, I was told that an exception would be made “this time”, but usually late submissions require a doctor's cert. This was despite the fact that my assignment was submitted in plenty of time online.

- Female, White (Law) – Survey 1

Well it's hard to arrange childcare when you're get the timetable so close to when the timetable is coming out you know about maybe a week or two before you're to start so then you have to try and arrange childcare because you might have an – if you have to be in by 9.00 you have to get a babysitter to drop the kids to school or if you're not finished until 6.00 that's really hard too, you have to get somebody to pick the kids up from a crèche until you get home.

- Louise, Female, Carer (SBE) – Interview

⁷⁷ As noted previously, a demographic question on caring responsibilities was asked in Surveys 2, 5 and 6, but not in Surveys 1, 3 and 4. However, open responses to those surveys often identified caring responsibilities as a factor affecting inclusion.

One particularly stark example related to a student who had a tutorial from 7-8pm; as she was breastfeeding at the time, she asked to be moved to an earlier tutorial group but was not facilitated.

Other students cited examples of flexibility and empathy from teaching staff as positive examples of inclusion, which were much appreciated. For example, some staff allowed students who were parents to bring children into class, on occasions when they were unable to access childcare.

In relation to scheduling, students repeatedly highlighted that time slots in the late afternoon and evening were not accessible for parents.



Events frequently happen after 6pm which makes it near impossible for single parents to attend.

- Female, White, Carer (Law) – Survey 6

I've a big interest in law and I would have picked law all the time but the way the timetable is now, it goes on from 4-6pm. But I have to be [home] for 6pm. So, the latest I can leave the college is 5. So, I couldn't pick that subject because of the time it was on.

- Deirdre, Female, Mature student (SBE) – Interview

While the University has a crèche for staff and students, it was not really accessible to students. One student explained how she applied for a place in the crèche, however, it was almost three years before she was offered a place, when she was almost finished her degree. She found arranging childcare very difficult and commented:

No. I couldn't find any, it was really hard maybe as well in first year and second year it was much harder because I couldn't find any full time crèches and it was a mixture, one kid had a place and another kid didn't have a place, and yeah it was, it's like you can't even find places, there was no places for them in the NUI crèche.

- Louise, Female, Carer (SBE) – Interview



g Race

Although race was not widely addressed in the survey comments, a number of issues were consistently raised, albeit by a minority of students. The interviews and focus groups reinforced these themes. It may be noted at the outset that very few survey respondents identified as members of the Irish Traveller/ Mincéir community (on average, one respondent per survey), and these respondents generally said very little in response to the open questions in the survey. No members of this community participated in the interviews or focus groups. This may indicate an under-representation of this group in the student body of the examined schools but the lack of information on the experience of students who are Travellers represents a significant limitation of this research.

i. Getting to know other students

One difficulty was how difficult it could be for international students to get to know other students, particularly in larger classes, and how often they were excluded in practice. Typical comments included:

...it is quite difficult for international students to get to know our classmates and to become friends.

- Female, Race unspecified (SBE) – Survey 6

Irish students aren't very inclusive with non-English mother tongue students

- Male, White (Shannon College) – Survey 1

It's just sometimes I don't know how to join them yeah, because yeah, some native and they speak very quickly and like the use some native words ... so, it's hard for us to join them.

- Ju – Female, International student, LGBT+ (Shannon College) – Interview



Although orientation sessions were provided, international students noted that these were too short to be effective, or to provide opportunities to meet peers. International students therefore often ended up associating with others from their home countries, rather than having a truly 'international' experience.



Also, I was hoping that day, in the introduction day, maybe made us talk to each other to meet new people. But it was not like that, he was like 'Okay, now you can go and eat something.' And in my case I'm alone, I'm with no friend here. So, that day I felt alone because I didn't know...

- Diego, Male, International student (SBE) – Interview

... they have the orientation week and I do think it is a good initiative from the university side, but it was hard for me to be able to make friends, because I am the outsider. So, they, most, everyone, it's Ireland, most of them are Irish peoples, so they felt comfortable talking to each other. They had topics that they could relate to and be like, and then start a conversation. For me, I found it really hard, because, it may be because of my own fault, because I'm kind of an introverted person, so it may have been like that, but it could have been better if the university maybe organised some events for international students and like you come in...

- Roja – Female, International student (SBE) – Interview

A few Irish students considered that exclusion, if it happened, was self-caused.

...certain groups can form that effectively exclude themselves from the everyone else. Primarily in groups around race and sexual orientation...They group and only interact with one another... if those people are feeling excluded by the rest of the student body it is only a result of self exclusion.

- Male, White (Law) – Survey 1

I mean like I'm mixed race black, and literally all my friends are black too, like it's kinda on me.

- Male, Mixed race (Law) – Survey 3



Responses of this kind did not address why students might self-select in this way; for example, whether they felt unwelcome in other student groups.

ii. Cultural issues

A number of students raised the idea of culture shock. One student described the initial weeks in college:



I'm better now actually – I try to join them and I try to talk to them these days but I was when I first here I was like I was really I was crying every time for maybe three weeks I was crying every day, I was really, really going back home and like because everything is new here, I'm from Beijing and here is just like very quiet, very, like I can't get food.

– Ju – Female, International student, LGBT+ (Shannon College) – Interview

This student explained how Irish students offered her lifts to the shops, but she didn't understand the cultural issues in relation to the offer of a lift:

...for Chinese student we don't like to like [inaudible] people say are just very normally to get a lift and for us we are just saying, it's embarrassed, we don't want to like allow them to give us a lift because we think we owe them if they give us a lift. But for our [inaudible] just like it's okay for us, it's very normal. So yeah, it's like a kind of a culture shock.

– Ju – Female, International student, LGBT+ (Shannon College) – Interview



Cultural issues could also impact on inclusion in other ways. Students provided examples of exclusionary practices such as the use of colloquial terms or well-understood Irish concepts or events to explain something, and noted that this was problematic for some students.



Most of the lectures and everything we feel, I feel, I felt welcome into the classroom. Everything. They've been super nice. However sometimes when they quote examples about say something that happened in Galway, which wasn't like, which wasn't very popular, so I wouldn't know that it happened. So throughout that one hour of the lecture or whatever, it's kind of hard for me to understand what they're talking about. ... it happened in one of lectures last year and he kept on speaking about it, but I didn't know what was happening in the class.

- Roja - Female, International student (SBE) - Interview

I remember the first day I had been to kitchen, because we have to practice class and I told her I have no idea what is mozzarella. And they didn't say, mozzarella cheese they just say mozzarella. And I was the head chef that day and the chef and class mate surrounded together and the chef nominated me to answer the question and I just, the chef asked me what is mozzarella and I said maybe a can of vegetable? Because I never had mozzarella in China. So, I say a can of vegetable and everybody was really shocked and turned around and looked at me, I was a little bit embarrassed because I didn't do too much homework at the time.

- Tao, Male, International student, LGBT+ (Shannon College) - Interview

The students themselves often identified solutions to the issues raised. For example, one student suggested that an easy solution would be to hand out a list of vocabulary to international students or to students who wanted that information.

Other responses emphasised that staff and other students were often understanding and took positive steps to be inclusive.



Irish students totally understand when they need to speak slowly, when we need to adapt because of the timezone etc.

– Female, Race unspecified (SBE) – Survey 6

So far, it's been really good. The college has gone out of the way to try to have us adapt. We got mentors on the first day we came. We did this sort of international, intercultural club after class where we got a chance to mingle with other cultures and stuff like that. And also... Yeah, even the lecturers, they have been super nice, assisting us in any way possible, helping us to find our way around. It's been good so far.

– Chantal, Female, International student (Shannon College) – Interview

iii. Racism

Racism, as such, was raised by a number of students, though again the comments were not widespread. However, some students identified racism by other students, staff and guest speakers. A typical comment was:

I personally have never felt alienated by other students, but I have overheard some students say things that are disrespectful about international students or students of color, which is disappointing (*sic*).

– Female, White (SBE) – Survey 5



Interestingly, a few students identified a specific prejudice against English persons, and one noted that he had been subject to prejudice because he was English. This student felt that, because he was White, the disadvantage and distress he experienced tended to be overlooked.



As a student of an English background, I sometimes feel as though my concerns about discrimination are pushed to the wayside because of the colour of my skin. I feel as though the college doesn't recognise (*sic*) ethnic/sectarian discrimination on the same level as other forms of it. If the college was truly inclusive, they would recognise that other forms of discrimination (anti-English, anti-Protestant, anti-Eastern European, for example) exist and are casually tolerated in Irish society... Due to my accent and surname, I am subject to jokes, being made fun of and occasionally outright hatred. The latter is not common but the former is a daily occurrence and makes me feel ashamed to be from a different ethnic background as the majority.

- Male 1, White (Law) – Survey 1

Members of my own student union have openly tweeted they dislike English people.

- Male 2, White (Law) – Survey 6

iv. Structural issues

Some students highlighted structural concerns, such as the lack of Black, Brown or minority ethnic staff in their discipline. The lack of racial diversity in some undergraduate programmes was also noted.

I haven't seen any black lectures (*sic*).

- Female, Black (SBE) – Survey 4

I couldn't say that I've observed exclusionary practices per se, but I have observed that there is a notable lack of diversity in my course. Gender balance is good, but I would guess that about 90% or even more of my course... are white and Irish.

- Female, White (Law) – Survey 4



v. Teaching staff

Some students considered that teaching staff were not always inclusive of international students, either singling them out, failing to include them, or failing to recognise language issues or additional barriers to learning that international students might face.

Erasmus students left out.

- Female, White (SBE) – Survey 4

A lecturer told an international student who asked what [abbreviation] meant to google it – felt this very unfair.

- Female, White (SBE) – Survey 6



Some students noted that lecturers did not always use students' given names. While noting that might be difficult for staff to remember names they were unfamiliar with, the effect could be exclusionary.



The lecturers is over Shannon College is really friendly and the first day you enter this college and our tutors will try to remember your name. ... But use our English name because it is more convenient, there are too many international students, they cannot remember all.

- Tao, Male, International student, LGBT+ (Shannon College) – Interview

However, others highlighted that many teaching staff made particular efforts to include international students. Examples of inclusive teaching practice included:

Lecturers speaking about different cultures with respect.

- Female, White (School unknown) – Survey 6,

...when the teachers take time to ask where we come from and what time it is when we start the course.

- Female, Race unspecified (SBE) – Survey 6



Students also highlighted that teaching staff frequently took steps to ensure that international students were included in group work arrangements. This was not always appreciated by Irish students.

Lecturers frequently add international students into group projects which I find good practice as it opens up domestic students to new ideas and cultures and should be done more often. However, I feel that international students should be in more 2nd year modules with people as sometimes group project marks can be decreased by people who do not have English as their first language and in final year every mark is crucial.

- Male, White (SBE) – Survey 2



vi. Social events

In terms of social events, students regarded celebrations of cultural events such as Diwali or Chinese New Year as very inclusive. However, student clubs and societies were not always perceived as racially inclusive.



I never found that Societies were inclusive of students other than young Irish students, with the exception of the international student society

- Female, White (SBE) – Survey 2

h Disability

Many students with disabilities highlighted the help they received from learning support services as hugely beneficial. Particular praise was accorded to the Disability Support Service (DSS), the Library, the Student Counselling service, and the Assistive Technology service.

In terms of physical accessibility, students particularly appreciated the availability of separate library study spaces for students with disabilities. This reduced noise and disruption and also provided an element of moral support and community.



The library was great, especially the disability part of the library because it's only, it's a small room and I think people are more mindful and quiet.

– Anna, Female, Disability (SBE) – Focus Group

...I got access to the disability library which is probably one of the things that I have benefitted the most from... In the main library hall is so big like I wouldn't have really brought out my blood sugar and stuff like that. So, it was nice to be in an environment I suppose where other people are in similar situations to you.

– Maeve, Female, Disability (Law) – Interview

I went to the disability service and I got access to educational psychologist and I got a Dyslexia test by her. And then that's I suppose started my next journey. I was diagnosed with Dyslexia and it quite like a relief I suppose because then I got access to so many different tools and I got like read and write and Grammarly and I got my scripts are now marked with the SDL marking scheme and stuff. And it was just a huge sigh of relief and like readings were no longer taking me hours and hours and I was like, because I had them read out to me and just things like that were really, really helpful. So, I suppose they're all the positives which are quite a lot.

– Maeve, Female, Disability (Law) – Interview

However, students also noted that insufficient resourcing often undermined the supports available.

It kinda comes off as semi-supportive. There are not enough resources allocated to disabled students, especially those with physical disabilities.

– Other gender, Mixed race, Disability (Law) – Survey 5



The support from learning support services was not always mirrored at local level. Sometimes, a problem arose because staff were not very well informed:



... unfortunately a lot of people, even people who say that they are very knowledgeable about certain things have absolutely no idea what they're talking about. And they can have very, I suppose hurtful and like exclusionary attitudes.

– David, Male, Disability (Law) – Focus Group

This student noted that he received a 'very defensive' response when he sought help from his School Office. He commented:

So, it very much sort of made me feel bad for trying to seek out help or guidance. I mean more so just felt bad, made me feel bad for being me.

– David, Male, Disability (Law) – Focus Group



Regrettably, even very senior members of university management sometimes displayed an unsupportive or unthinking attitude. For example, one student noted:



When I asked about how the anonymous making scheme would be implemented for students who used AT I was told by [named very senior person] that it was "not an important issue".

– Female, White, Disability (Law) – Survey 2

i. Accessibility

Unsurprisingly, many students with disabilities raised concerns regarding accessibility. This included both physical accessibility to learning spaces and accessibility of learning resources. Some students highlighted that key learning resources and materials were not always accessible.

Access to lecture notes - sometimes lecturers have a policy about not putting online to combat people not attending or believe handwritten notes are more effective etc. - that is understandable but it ignores that some people may not have the ability to take written notes quickly and will have a negative impact on their performance in the class.

- Gender unspecified, White, Disability (Law) – Survey 2



Another commented:

Probably my most negative experiences have been with certain lectures and modules... I had one in particular I just found that like the way in which it was taught was like entirely inaccessible... Like there was no lecture slides put up online, there was no outlines put up and...I found that really difficult because I was trying to sit in the lecture, listen... So, because I would listen, always listen to my lectures, I'd never write in them because I just can't keep up.... I felt quite like put into a corner that like it was kind of my fault that I wasn't able to learn how they envisage people to learn.

- Maeve, Female, Disability (Law) – Interview



ii. Reasonable accommodation

Students requiring reasonable accommodations to support their learning reported varying experiences. Many reported positive experiences with individual staff:



I have anxiety and I have a LENS report. My lecturers have been very helpful in arranging extensions and in one case an exam deferral for this.

– Female, White, Disability (Law) – Survey 2

However, other students complained that teaching staff did not always comply with LENS reports, or regarded it as unusual and praiseworthy if they did. For instance, one student cited 'Lens reports being considered and students with them getting the attention they need' as an example of inclusive practice,⁷⁹ rather than compliance with a legal obligation.

There was a lack of clarity around procedures for LENS reports, insofar as students were not always aware that they could ask for one, or know where they should send it to obtain the required accommodations. For example, when asked if she had communicated her LENS report to her lecturers, a student replied, 'No, I didn't know that was a thing'.⁸⁰ Another said, 'I've actually never done any exam with the accommodations... Because I was never given them'.⁸¹

Confidentiality was also a concern. One student explained that she had not sought a LENS report as she did not wish her lecturers to know her personal circumstances.⁸² It is not clear if this concern related to the fear of being stigmatised, though this was evident in other student responses. For example, another student repeatedly highlighted the fear of being identified as 'different' if her special exam arrangements became known to her peers, or if they noticed her special support technologies. On the other hand, she also noted that such arrangements could build community:

In one sense I did find it nice when I first went to the exams that I was in a room full of people who I could relate with and like then I've seen people in my course that oh, I didn't know like they were registered as well and they, I don't know, might have a disability too. So, in one sense it is nice because you are still with people in your course who are registered.

– Evelyn, Female, Disability (SBE) – Interview



⁷⁸ A Learning Educational Needs Statement (LENS) outlines the learning supports, including reasonable accommodations, required for a student with disabilities.

⁷⁹ Female, White, Disability (Law) – Survey 4.

⁸⁰ Niamh, Female, Disability (Law) – Focus Group.

⁸¹ David, Male, Disability (Law) – Focus Group.

⁸² Valentina, Female, Disability (Law) – Interview.

Some students highlighted that the implementation of reasonable accommodations was not always effective or meaningful. For example, a student who needed a reader during an exam explained that she did not feel she could simply put up her hand and ask for one, as invigilators instructed, in an exam venue with other people.⁸³

iii. Inclusive pedagogy

Students with disabilities repeatedly highlighted that an inclusive disability pedagogy goes beyond accessibility and the provision of reasonable accommodation. For example, students noted that being called on to answer questions or participate in class discussions could be very difficult for those with social anxiety. A graphic example was given by one student:

So, the disability is, I'm being registered for anxiety, so sometimes when the classes are so big – say if I wear something that's bright and the teacher picks us out, that's a very, very stressful situation. And it could be – I remember my other friend, she has anxiety as well, the teacher said, the girl in the white coat, and she panicked completely. And the teacher said, next time don't fall asleep. She has social anxiety; she can't speak in front of people."

– Valentina, Female, International Student, Disability (Law) – Interview



Students also identified issues with group work as particularly likely to exclude students with anxiety:



Having to get into “self-forming” groups for assignments can lead to added anxiety or isolation for students who have something like an ASD or who are experiencing social anxiety.

– Male, White, Disability (SBE) – Survey 1

Particular difficulties arose with large classes. Students in general emphasised how isolating these could be; however, students with disabilities also highlighted particular barriers to learning; for example, that it was harder to follow what was happening.

⁸³ Caoimhe, Female, Disability (Shannon College) – Interview.



Sometimes with the size of the lectures, the sheer size of it, with dyslexia and with that amount of people, keeping track of what's going on in class, or keeping track of what's happening with the lecture can be really difficult [maybe]....I think it's just the sheer number of people, they just go back to what it is. And for people like me, it's really difficult to keep up, as in, take notes while trying to keep track of what's been said, while putting up with whatever's going on around.

- Lorenzo – Male, International student, Disability (SBE) – Interview

Inadequate breaks between classes were also an issue, leading to difficulties with concentration, or practical issues such as bathroom breaks.

This year I'm having some difficulties with double classes without a break mid way through but the lectures have gave us opportunity to contact them about this.

- Female, White, Disability (Law) – Survey 3



i Age

A few mature students identified concerns with exclusion in the learning environment. These comments were not widespread and ranged from simply noting that mature students were 'in the minority',⁸⁴ to noting exclusionary practices, or that social events were mostly geared towards younger students. The main issues identified related to other students, rather than teaching staff. One student commented:

As a mature student in a group that is young students I feel that one is left out of the loop in a sense that students seem to have a problem relating to older students. That might be normal but at the same time when they leave College and go into the work place they will have to related to people of all ages.

- Female, White (Law) – Survey 1



This may have contributed to difficulties in the broader social context, with some students noting that they felt isolated.



As a mature international student, it took me a long time to find my footing in the social arena of college.

- Female, White, (SBE) – Survey 2

Another student noted as an example of exclusion:

Students sniggering about mature students asking questions.

- Gender unspecified, White (SBE) – Survey 2



⁸⁴ Survey 2, Female, White, Mature (Law)

j Sexual orientation and gender identity

LGBT+ students identified a number of issues affecting their inclusion in the learning environment. Most commonly, these related to inclusive language, visibility and representation. Students highlighted the importance of LGBT-inclusive teaching examples:



Just small things like consideration that not everyone in the class might be straight, like giving two girls as an example of a couple, or using gender neutral pronouns.

- Female, White, LGBT+ (Law) – Survey 1

Visibility and representation helped students to feel welcome in the classroom, and helped to ensure that curricula were perceived as relevant.

[Named lecturer] in [named subject]... was very inclusive of trans people and always used correct pronouns, as well as speaking about LGBT people openly and respectfully, in a way I haven't felt acknowledged in my studies so far.

- Female, White, LGBT+ (Law) – Survey 6



Some lecturers went out of their way to make inclusive gestures, which were much appreciated:



I'm a drag queen, I remember in first year my [subject] lecturer, [NAME] found out and set up a folder on Blackboard for everyone to add their drag names with the best one getting a prize. That experience really stuck with me and showed me how inclusive both the teaching staff and fellow students are!

- Male, White, LGBT+ (Law) – Survey 4

One of the most common points raised related to pronouns. Multiple students highlighted the importance of teaching staff using correct pronouns, or inviting students to indicate their pronouns in teaching contexts.



I heard from my friend in another module that the lecturer asked the students to include their preferred pronouns in their name on Zoom and I thought that was great.

– Female, White, Heterosexual (SBE) – Survey 6

Staff indications of their own pronouns (e.g. in email signatures) were also regarded as inclusive, as they signified acceptance and normalised pronoun indications by students. Staff references to 'he, she or they' in teaching contexts were also commended. A similar approach by some student societies was noted as significant, for example, a particular student society 'asking people their preferred pronouns regardless of what they looked like' was cited as an example of inclusion.⁸⁵ There were some more negative experiences, e.g. one student noted that a lecturer had argued that 'they/them don't function linguistically as personal pronouns'.⁸⁶ However, the student concerned regarded this as an aberration in an otherwise inclusive disciplinary context.

A particular concern was that social attitudes were not necessarily consistent. This made 'coming out' risky, both in personal and educational contexts.

... I think the way in which I belong to it anyway is... not as accepted yet I think as other aspects of the LGBT community... I think we're still at that stage where right now, I'm okay with who I am and even though I wish I could share it fully with a lot of people, we're still at that point in time where right now it's just easier not to... NUIG is a very progressive university, there is a lot of acceptance, there's a lot of leeway to be the person you want to be, there's a lot of you know alternative styles out there that people are accepting of but at the same time there are those who aren't there to support that... so I think on one hand where there is acceptance there is also, there's still a long way to go.

– Claire, Female, LGBT+, Carer (Law) – Interview



⁸⁵ Female, White, Heterosexual (SBE) – Survey 5.

⁸⁶ Transgender, Mixed race, LGBT+ (Law) – Survey 5.

Some homophobia was also noted, though it did not seem to be widely prevalent. Most of the comments identifying this issue arose in Survey 6.



Overheard transphobic comments before a lecture.

- Female, White, LGBT+ (SBE) – Survey 6

... though there are certain students in law who have made negative comments about the LGBT+ community (which I am part of) and the non-Irish (which I also am).

- Female, White, Disability, LGBT+ (Law) – Survey 6

Certain people in the class use quite derogatory language and suggest that other students are beneath them, in particular LGBT students, female students and other minorities.

- Female, White, LGBT+ (Law) – Survey 6

I think people have a long way to come... in their attitudes and maybe what they're taught and things but especially students, you know often you'll hear people make comments, not directed at you but you might overhear the conversation they're having in general where they might use you know comments and terminology where they might say, you know things like, 'Oh you know that's so gay', or things like that and they use it in a derogatory format and though it's not directed at you, you're still witnessing that that attitude and that perspective is out there. So, despite the fact that it is not directed at you..., the fact that they use the terminology and perhaps your identify as a derogatory comment or as a way to you know to criticise something or you know make little of something, can have an impact and it can make you feel that you're still not accepted on the same level as you know anyone who is in compliance with the you know heteronormative society in which we still live.

- Claire, Female, LGBT+, Carer (Law) – Interview

From a systemic perspective, both positives and negatives were noted. One student noted difficulties in changing their name on the university system,⁸⁷ even though the university has a policy on this. However, the same student commented, as an example of inclusion:



Lecturer's reading the name I sign off with in emails and using it is nice.

- Transgender, Mixed Race, LGBT+ (Law) – Survey 5

On the positive side, another student highlighted:

Anytime I have been asked my gender identity there have been multiple options meaning that as many people as possible are represented. This has also been the case with ethnicity and sexual orientation.

- Female, White, LGBT+ (Law) – Survey 5



⁸⁷ Survey 5, Transgender, Mixed Race, Irish citizen, LGBT+ (Law)

k Socio-economic status

Some students identified ways in which the learning environment could exclude those who were socially or economically disadvantaged. A key issue was that staff did not appear to be aware that students might need to work, or might be in financially straitened circumstances.



Staff are not understanding of students from lower income families who are feeling great financial strain and often work 30 hour weeks... Lecturers often say they do not care/want to know if you work outside of college.

- Female, White, (SBE) – Survey 6

Lecturers not considering external factors such as work and jobs.

- Male, White (SBE) – Survey 6

This in turn had practical consequences; for example, 'Scheduling lectures after 5pm... excluded those who may have to work to support themselves through college (i.e. people from a lower socio-economic class)'.⁸⁸ Students from disadvantaged backgrounds could also be materially disadvantaged:

... I find some lecturers are not aware that students may... come from lower income households where they don't have access to resources that many other students do.

- Female, White, 100% Maintenance Grant (Law) – Survey 6



Some students also identified the impact of socio-economic class on educational discourse.



... stereotypes may be given in my learning environment with regards to students solely only coming from middle-class backgrounds. I find this statement very exclusionary.

- Female, White (Law) – Survey 4

⁸⁸ Survey 4, Female, White, Mature student, Special Rate of Maintenance grant (Law)



Sometimes the way some of the lecturers speak about things can be very much from a white, Irish, middle-class perspective. I think a few lecturers have said things that were a bit snobby or insensitive in lectures that didn't personally relate to me but may have lead others to feel excluded.

- Female, White (Law) – Survey 2

In addition, one student noted that other students commented on where she was from in a negative way, she stated she was 'not from a very prosperous place and I've had a few people say it to me and not in a nice way'.⁸⁹ This student identified a class bias, primarily from fellow students:

I've heard people say that I was a scumbag, I've heard people say that I was rough, I've heard people say that the people I know are not good people, you know. If you to school with somebody and you walk past and you say hello, you obviously say hello back, it's what we're taught in this college, be courteous.

- Kathy, Female, Irish (Shannon College) – Interview



Socio-economic status also arose in the context of the pandemic. While understanding the uncertainty of Covid-19, students were critical of some of the institutional messaging during this period and the impact it had on people with lower socio-economic status. This particularly applied to the issue of accommodation:

⁸⁹ Kathy, Female, Irish (Shannon College) – Interview



... during the summer... an email was sent out... telling us to get accommodation, not even recommending it, they told us to get accommodation for the academic year 2021... and... that we would have classes on campus. ... I did, my best friend did and we moved down to Galway at the start of September thinking you know we'd be starting college ..., the indicative schedules came out ... and she was told according to that that she would have one hour on campus, one hour on campus and for someone like her, she has to take out a loan to come to college, ... she was coming into second year still paying off the loan from first year,... both her parents were on the COVID payment during you know the Level 5 lockdown... so for her to come to college is quite a substantial financial burden on her and her family... so she moved in Monday morning at 9.00 a.m. she found out at 9.00 p.m., 12 hours later, she had one hour, and the next morning she packed up and went home because she couldn't justify the financial burden on her family for the want of being on campus one hour a week, she couldn't do it. ... she was in tears, she was devastated, because she can't justify putting that burden on her family for the want of one hour.

- Claire, Female, LGBT+, Carer (Law) - Interview

I Other issues

A number of students raised issues affecting students who were based in rural locations and/ or who commuted to the university. These included a failure to acknowledge the burden of commuting times and the impact of inadequate public transport, which could significantly impact on students' learning experience.



I think that people who commute to college are often forgotten about. I commute to college. It usually takes an hour and a half to get to and from college. One of the things that I have noticed is that tutorials are on late and I end up missing the last bus home so therefore I don't get home until really late.

- Female, White (Law) – Survey 1

Majority of the activities go on later in the evening which are not easy to access if you are commuting.

- Female, White (SBE) – Survey 1

Students also noted the exclusionary impact of particular students with what were described as reactionary views. These could cause considerable offence and were regarded as disruptive. It was not clear whether teaching staff had intervened in this context.⁹⁰

A further issue that was raised related to the cost of accommodation, even though this research took place immediately prior to the recent noticeable increase in the cost of living and accommodation shortage.

But... so, food is not that expensive. I have to go to Aldi, so I can walk back. But living... the accommodation is very expensive. It's very, very expensive.

- Diego, Male, International student (SBE) – Interview



⁹⁰ Comments withheld due to concerns with potential identifiability.

Experiential learning is an integral component of many programmes and consideration needs to be given to the conditions that are students are working in. Some students raised issues regarding safety while on placement. There were concerns raised about the safety of accommodation and in another incident a student discussed an assault and a serious incident of racial harassment while on placement. Both students reported their concerns to the relevant persons in the school, neither student felt adequately supported. The students did not feel they could push matters further as this would impact on their own placements and future placements for the school.

m The impact of Covid-19 and the move to remote learning

Students had different views on the impact of the pandemic, but a significant majority identified negative effects on their learning. These may be described under several broad headings: social isolation, motivation, anxiety, resources and workload. In addition, some group-specific issues were raised, for example in relation to students with disabilities.

i. Social isolation

Students repeatedly emphasised the impact of social isolation and the loss of personal interaction and connection. They missed interacting with their friends, and in some cases felt particularly isolated because they did not know many other students in their class, for various reasons.

It is more difficult to engage with our programme and class. There are some people in our year whom we have never met before. This can make it difficult to make new friends and engage with current friends as there are no on-campus meetings or lectures able to take place. It can feel excluding at times working from home all day behind a laptop screen without normal lifestyle in college on campus or even lunch breaks with classmates.

- Female, White (SBE) – Survey 6

Covid has made it a lot more difficult to create new connections and have lost touch with a lot of my classmates especially after doing an Erasmus last year.

- Female, White (School unknown) – Survey 6





So, well we all know that we have this COVID, which makes it harder. So, it's a totally different environment... I found it pretty lonely, because I am just opening up the class and when I am sitting there even our cameras are turned off and of course they are, because there are like 300 students, you know? ... So that's a really bad thing for me, because I just have the feeling that I am watching a YouTube video, or I'm just, I'm just really, I don't feel that I am a participant of the class. I just feel like I'm an observer, or I'm just watching it and this doesn't 'Ah you get me' so that's not the same feeling that I expected to get after my studies... So that's the first point that was kind of disappointing for me.

- Florentina, Female, International student (Law) - Interview

Students also missed interacting with teaching staff, and being able to ask questions and discuss issues informally with both lecturers and their peers. This impacted negatively on their learning.

Learning online is proving extremely difficult. No social interaction, not making any friends, no escape from the laptop/ home. I find it difficult engaging through a screen - best way of learning for me is asking questions in class with the lecturer etc. It's really hard not having the personal aspect to it.

- Female, White (Law) - Survey 6





I found that as well, some of them, it's quite hard to kind of pin point where the importance is whereas when you're in a lecture you can kind of gauge by how a lecture presents it or how their body language and stuff which is probably important. And then I also find I would benefit a lot from other students asking questions in live lectures where like I wouldn't have even got to that stage of my learning and they'd ask a question and I'd almost always feel that when I'm in an exam it's those questions that come back to me because they were like when I was in the lecture, it's your reaction to them. I was like oh yeah, that's brilliant. So, things like that, it's hard.

– Maeve, Female, Disability (Law) – Interview

The lack of interaction and connection also made it harder to engage with learning. Students commented that online learning was 'very draining',⁹¹ and that it was significantly harder to get or stay motivated. This was compounded by uncertainty about teaching and assessment arrangements, which caused 'great worry and anxiety'.⁹² Group work was also more difficult, as it was harder to do effectively online. Students reported feeling 'more stressed'⁹³ and experiencing negative effects on their mental health.

So, I do think there's a lot more, the workload is more intense and I think it is a lot more difficult when you are kind of in your bedroom or wherever you're choosing to study or carry out your college day, you know it's not two or three lectures a day, you're in front of a computer for you know 10 hours a day and it's your bedroom's not your bedroom anymore, it's your lecture hall and it's your office and it's – I think that's going to have a big impact on people and I think the workload is being increased not just by the actual amount of work being given but by the nature of how they have to carry out the work...

– Claire, Female, Carer, LGBT+ (Law) – Interview



⁹¹ Survey 5, Female, White, Irish citizen (SBE)

⁹² Survey 5, Male, White, Not an Irish citizen (Law)

⁹³ Survey 6, Female, White, Irish citizen (SBE)

ii. Resources and practicalities

Students also raised issues regarding access to learning resources and supports, and practical aspects of learning. These included issues such as time zone management, inability to access library resources, and lack of quiet study space. A significant number of students identified issues with inadequate broadband and internet connectivity, that made it difficult for them to access learning resources or participate in online learning. This applied particularly but not solely to students living in rural areas.



With online learning, assumption is made that all students have constant access to laptop/internet connection

– Female 1, White (Law) – Survey 5

Internet connectivity issues means I miss out on a lot of my live lectures, I don't have access to the library, rarely have a significant period of quiet and undisturbed study and the list goes on of the disadvantages

– Female 2, White (Law) – Survey 5

Studying in my bedroom. Borrowing my mother's personal laptop because my laptop does not have a working microphone. Sharing laptop with my brother sometime. Overall quite awkward. Perform much better in in-house exams. Do not like my bedroom as an examination hall! Dropped five percent average this year and learning environment has certainly played a part.

– Female, White (SBE) – Survey 6

Despite these difficulties, many students found the use of technology very beneficial. For example, many students expressed extremely positive views about the availability of lecture recordings.

Lecturers recording their lectures has been hugely helpful re: managing my family and college commitments.

– Female, White, Mature student (Law) – Survey 6





My learning environment has improved following online learning - I'm more determined than previous years to keep up with online materials and since everything is recorded I can take the time to type my notes at my own pace which was previously more difficult with live lectures.

- White, Female (Law) – Survey 6

iii. Workload

Some students felt that their workload was significantly less manageable for online learning. The online format led to additional types of learning materials, such as lecture podcasts, which were helpful but very time-consuming to listen to. A few students noted that additional class materials could be due to teaching staff trying to ensure they did not 'lose out' from the lack of on campus classes, but the increased workload increased stress levels and reduced clarity about what was most important.

... especially because it is online, I just think it is so overwhelming online. It feels like there is double the workload to do.

- Fara, Female, International student (Law) – Interview



I must say the workload is very big... I have seven modules and it is hard to balance them all. All the modules come with essential reading which can be a bit too big. Also, access to the library was an issue for some of the essential reading. Access to the books, that was an issue. So yeah, it has been in a challenge in that regard just the sheer volume of reading to do. I accept that we would have a lot of reading in law, but the sheer volume has been very big when the books haven't always been available.

- Liam, Male, Carer, LGBT+ (Law) – Interview

Students did however identify some benefits to remote learning. These included greater time for study and family, as there was no need to commute.



Living at home allows me to concentrate more and be more productive.

- Female, White (Shannon College) – Survey 5

Online learning also supported some students to engage more:

It is a lot easier to ask questions through a text box during a lecture rather than speak up in front of the whole class.

- Female, White (Law) – Survey 5



attending and engaging in more lectures as a result of online learning.

- Female, White (School unspecified) – Survey 6

... we are given a lot more resources. ... For example... [named subject] especially has been done so well, in the sense that we get all these videos, step-by-step that really in detail explain each topic and they help you how to do it. And then you get different questions on that, and how to apply it. And then you have got your live class, in which you can actually discuss it. So, in the live class you are not so much learning it, you are actually just discussing what you have already learned. So, I find that really helps to kind of cement the way that, cement what you are actually learning through your videos and the questions that you practice. I find that it is very, very effective...

- Fionn, Male, Mature Student, Carer (Law) – Interview

iv. Group-specific issues

While many of the issues raised were of general applicability, specific points were raised by some groups, including students with disabilities, students with caring responsibilities, and students facing infrastructural challenges (particularly those in rural areas).

(a) Students with disabilities

Some students with disabilities had difficulties with remote learning and participation in online classes.

This is tougher now to say when the modules are held online (due to my hearing difficulties which can cause a problem when a lecturer's microphone is low quality).... As mentioned earlier, I have a difficulty with hearing which is made worse when I have to try and hear what is being said to me over technologies, especially when I have no visual aid to help me. I have has a lecturer dismiss my concerns over this; I also have a lecturer whose microphone is a very low quality one and make the lectures very hard to understand and focus in. I try not to let these things get to my head though.



– Female, White, Disability (Law) – Survey 6

...The lack of subtitles during online lectures is concerning, considering I believe it's a feature that can be enabled?...

– Transgender, Mixed race, Disability (Law) – Survey 5

Some students with disabilities did however identify some benefits to remote learning, and felt it was more inclusive in their particular case. Much depended on the nature of the individual student's disability. The availability of recorded lectures was particularly useful for students who had previously struggled to keep up in class, although some students noted that not all lecturers made recordings available.



As mentioned previously, while although learning during COVID19 has been particularly challenging I think the fashion in which it has unfolded has removed most barriers I would have faced in a normal college year. The pre recorded lectures and podcasts has allowed me to listen and learn at my own pace, take proper notes while doing so and have a full understanding of a topic when finished. Typically, in a normal lecture i would not be able to take proper notes as I could not keep up and where I did need to I would then be lost and unfocused in lectures. I would rarely have an idea of what went on in lectures after and I would need to immediately study it again at least 2 times before grasping it. The recorded lectures have also allowed me to concentrate on my health more, whereas in normal years I would attended lectures even where I was not well, as the fear/stress of being so far behind was to much.

- Female, White, Disability (Law) – Survey 6

Overall, therefore, students with disabilities identified both advantages and disadvantages to remote learning, which were specific to their particular situations.

(b) Carers

As noted previously, some students found learning more accessible because they no longer had to commute and could access classes remotely. This was particularly important for some students with caring responsibilities.

Well, the online obviously makes that a lot easier because last year I was commuting up and down and it used to take me about an hour and fifteen minutes each way. So, at least here I have a home office, so I am able to work. But my wife has multiple sclerosis, remitting and relapsing form of multiple sclerosis. So, she is on a full-time disability because of that. So, I guess the online thing has probably facilitated responsibilities here much easier. Because I suppose because she doesn't drive. She can't drive now because of that and a couple of other things. So, I suppose just being able to do work and cook dinner and do a few other things. It is making it a lot easier.



- Fionn, Male, Mature Student, Carer (Law) – Interview



Lecturers recording their lectures has been hugely helpful re: managing my family and college commitments.

– Female, White, Mature student, Carer (Law) – Survey 6

I know a lot of people who are still holding down you know full time jobs like they're working during the week and then having to come home and do all their college work in the evening which I know is a choice they make but you know whether they need the financial aspect of it or not you know so obviously I think a lot of lecturers, people need to record things, the lectures need to be recorded, I don't understand why you wouldn't for the want of just pressing a button and it gets uploaded automatically. I think that's something that would really lighten the burden for a lot of students if they knew without having to worry about it that their lectures would be recorded and they could access them later on.

– Claire, Female, LGBT+, Carer (Law) – Interview

However, the picture as a whole was mixed. For example, some students with caring responsibilities suffered negative economic effects in relation to employment, which impacted on their ability to study or access learning resources.

Because of Covid I lost my job and could no longer afford to live in Galway this year. I now care for my younger sister as she is doing school work at home and I no longer have access to the library and many student facilities.

– Female, White, Carer (Law) – Survey 6





6

Recommendations





Many of the following recommendations echo those made in our previous report on the experiences of postgraduate students. This reflects the fact that many issues apply across the range of student experiences. However, some recommendations are specific to undergraduate students.

General

- 1 Student inclusion should not be project based: it is too dependent on the duration of the project and on individual commitment and interest. Ideally, student inclusion should be an express goal of the University Management Team (UMT) generally and the specific responsibility of a member or members of UMT.

Education

- 2 Programmes or modules on the University values, discrimination, consent, cultural awareness and active bystander training should be included in the induction for all students.
- 3 Ongoing training and information should be provided to staff on their legal responsibilities under relevant legislation, particularly the Equal Status Acts 2000-2018, the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2021, and the European Union (Accessibility of Websites and Mobile Application of Public Sector Bodies) Regulations 2020.
- 4 Ongoing training should be provided to staff on inclusive pedagogy, including Universal Design for Learning and decolonising the curriculum, but also addressing issues such as engaging large groups and managing group work to enhance inclusion.
- 5 Ongoing training and information for staff and students on transgender issues, racism, homophobia, gender bias and cultural awareness.

Policies

- 6 The university should develop, implement and train staff and students in an anti-racism policy.
- 7 The university should introduce a policy to gather student diversity data, to ensure more systemic and longitudinal data gathering.

- a Data gathered should include attainment and retention data for different cohorts of students, based on diversity characteristics.
 - b Cognisant of GDPR requirements, and with a view to supportive interventions where required, academic staff or units should be able to assess class or discipline attainment data in real time, from a diversity perspective.
 - c Regular culture surveys should be deployed to assess the sense of belonging of students – tracking this along diversity characteristics.
 - d Responsive actions should be taken in relation to survey findings.
- 8 A reasonable accommodation policy for students should be developed to ensure compliance with the Equal Status Acts 2000-2018.

Systemic

- 9 *Accessibility* – There has been an exceptional growth in the number of students with disabilities attending HEIs. To ensure the university is inclusive of all students including students with disabilities, we recommend:
- a Campus accessibility must be a priority.
 - b Learning materials need to be accessible to all students: this includes the provision of materials in multiple formats, if needed.
 - c Compliance with the European Union (Accessibility of Websites and Mobile Application of Public Sector Bodies) Regulations 2020 must be prioritised.
 - d The up-take of training on inclusive teaching practices and pedagogy should be encouraged by the introduction of unit-level KPIs on UDL training and Ally for LMS.
- 10 *Scheduling* – Lectures and events should generally be scheduled during core hours to facilitate students who are carers or commuters, or who have evening employment. Continuous assessments should be scheduled to avoid school mid-term breaks.
- 11 *Class sizes* – consideration should be given to reducing large class sizes where possible, or to ameliorating their isolating effects by increasing the number of small-group teaching contexts, such as tutorials and peer-learning opportunities.
- 12 *Cultural and social events* – schools and disciplines should schedule regular cultural and social events to foster inclusion and a sense of belonging in the learning environment, and help to address student isolation.
- 13 *Increased resourcing for key support services* – additional resourcing for key supports such as DSS, the Student Counselling Service and the Assistive Technology service should form a key part of the university's strategy for enhancing inclusion.

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Appendix

The following suggestions were made at a training workshop on inclusive teaching in October 2018, which was organised as part of the *Inclusive Learning in the College of Business, Public Policy and Law* project. Most of the suggestions came directly from student participants, with additional suggestions on Universal Design for Learning made by our trainers from AHEAD. We are very grateful to all participants for their constructive and practical suggestions.

Practical tips for inclusive teaching

- Add an 'inclusion statement' to your course outline
- At the start of teaching, invite students to come and speak to you if they have particular needs.
- Announce your office hours aloud in class for the benefit of students with visual impairments - don't just put them on your door.
- Be aware that students who wish to speak to you after class may have visual impairments and may be unable to see when you are free.
- Don't ban laptops in class, they may be vital for students with disabilities.
- Try to design your course materials accessibly – e.g. doc format, which can be read by assistive technology. If some materials are not accessible, can you arrange for an accessible version (ideally well in advance)?
- For overheads, be aware that if you insert or use images, they are not accessible to students with visual impairments. Describe the images as you go through your presentation, or use captions.
- If using video clips, can you use a version with captions?
- Use accessible fonts and font sizes in your course documentation (e.g. arial, font size 12) and do not justify text. A special font called Dyslexie, which is designed especially for people with dyslexia, can be downloaded for free online (<https://www.dyslexiefont.com/>).
- If possible, make your slides and lecture notes available well in advance of class.
- Be aware that some students may miss classes for good reason (e.g. disability, illness, childcare needs etc). If additional materials are given out in class, make them available online as well as soon as possible after class, to enable students who missed them to catch up.
- Give clear instructions for tasks and assignments (e.g. an essay template).
- If possible, consider using a variety of assessment methods, or offering students a choice of assessment methods (e.g. presentations, essays, videos, podcasts).

- Some students may need an alternative type of assessment for reasons associated with disability or pregnancy. Familiarise yourself with the University's policies on Alternative Assessments for Students with Disabilities and on Supports for Students Experiencing Pregnancy, Maternity and Paternity (available at <http://www.nuigalway.ie/student-services/policies/>).
- Review your reading lists – are the authors predominantly white or male? Could you make your reading list more diverse? It is very important to students to have academic role models. NB this is not suggesting tokenism. We are all subject to unconscious bias and inclined to prefer what is familiar to us. Ask yourself, is there really no one else writing well on this topic?
- Avoid expressions such as 'ladies and gentlemen', which exclude non-binary students – a more inclusive expression might be 'folks'.
- If you are notified that a student has changed their name, ensure that all class lists, tutorial lists etc are updated immediately. Transitioning can be an extremely sensitive time.
- Do not 'out' a Trans student to others.
- Do not 'dead name' a Trans student (i.e. call them by their birth name).
- If you are notified that a student prefers particular pronouns (he, she, they), use these.
- If assigning group work or projects, it may be helpful to put the students into groups yourself, to ensure that no one is left out. It may also be a good idea to ensure as far as possible that students are not in a 'minority' in the group, e.g. have at least two female students, or two international students.
- Be aware that some students may have been harassed or sexually harassed by others, and that students may be in class with people who have harassed or sexually harassed them. If a student approaches you about this (e.g. asks to change project groups as a result), be supportive. Make sure students are aware of the student code of conduct and the policies on bullying and sexual harassment (all available at <http://www.nuigalway.ie/student-services/policies/>). Also be aware of other supports available to students (e.g. counselling) and be prepared to provide details.
- For class discussions, be aware of who is contributing, and who is not contributing. Many students do not like being 'picked on', but equally it is important that everyone knows they are welcome to contribute. You might say something like 'I haven't heard from anyone in this side of the class', without identifying particular individuals. Alternatively, you might agree at the start of the course that anyone who doesn't want to answer a question can just say 'pass' and you will move on immediately.
- Remember that some students may not speak English as their first language, so try to speak reasonably slowly and clearly and to avoid or explain slang expressions and technical terms.





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