

Students with Disabilities Engaged with Support Services in Higher Education in Ireland 2019/20



creating inclusive environments in education
and employment for people with disabilities

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**Research: Christine Hynes (data collection/design)
Yazeed Kelly (data analysis)**

Edited by Dara Ryder

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East Hall
UCD
Carysfort Avenue
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Co. Dublin**

**Tel: (01) 7164396
Email: ahead@ahead.ie**

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Contents

Foreword	1
Introduction	5
AHEAD's Strategy	6
Survey Method	7
Findings	9
Participation Rates of Students with Disabilities	9
Undergraduate and Postgraduate	13
New Entrant Undergraduates with Disabilities	15
New Entrant Disclosure Rates – HEA Data Comparison	16
New Registrations	16
Mature Students	17
International Students	17
Nature of Disability	18
New Entrant Disability Breakdown	21
Undergraduate Disability Breakdown	22
Postgraduate Disability Breakdown	23
Fields of Study	25
Fields of Study Breakdown by Disability	28

Exam Accommodations	50
Exam Accommodations by Category of Disability	50
Exam Accommodation by Type	51
Extra Time Breakdown	52
Alternative Venue Breakdown	53
Inside Services	55
On the Ground - Opinion	57
Selected Comments	60
Summary	63
Recommendations	66
Bibliography	70
Appendices	72
Appendix 1 - Number of students with disabilities studying within each responding higher education institution	72
Appendix 2 - Fields of Study	73
Appendix 3 - Inside the Service Comments	78
Appendix 4 - On the Ground Comments to Question 1	79

Foreword

By Dara Ryder, CEO, AHEAD



It is my pleasure to introduce the results of the AHEAD Survey on the number of students with disabilities engaging with support services in higher education in Ireland for the academic period 2019/20. It has been an extremely challenging year all round with the arrival of the COVID-19 virus to Ireland in February, 2020. The impact of government imposed restrictions, to curb the spread of this deadly virus in participating institutions, resulted in an immediate response to shift the continuation of the delivery of learning for the remainder of the academic year, off-campus, largely remotely via online technology. Bear in mind when reading this report that this survey period covers an academic year that was completed part on-campus and part remotely.

AHEAD is very interested to learn and understand how this transition to off campus was managed and maintained and in particular with regard to the provision of supports to students with disabilities. The current on-campus model of provision of supports, is according to AHEAD, not a sustainable model and is, in reality, one that is no longer fit for purpose. This imposed transition, I believe, has created a golden opportunity to explore how participating institutions delivered on the provision of supports to students with disabilities located as they were, off campus and in a variety of accommodation/home settings. It is an ideal time to reflect on its merits.

AHEAD has been recommending for some time now that a more sustainable model of supports provision to students with disabilities in higher education is now required and that such a model should be underpinned by the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The Covid19 experience has exposed the need for flexible approaches to the learning environment. The UDL framework is one in which adaptability and flexibility are core components to the development of inclusive learning environments. AHEAD hopes that this challenging and strangest of academic years will shine a light that will generate valuable insight into new approaches to learning moving forward and begin the long overdue process of overhauling the existing model of support provision to students with disabilities.

As one contributor put it:

“...All components of service delivery will need to be redesigned in response to the emerging situation and in light of institute guidelines.”

(Comment from contributor - listed in full at back of Report).

In the academic year 2019/20 students with disabilities engaging with support services represented 6.3% of the total student population, a minor increase from the previous survey (6.2%). Taking a look at the trend over a period of time, there remains a consistent trajectory in the number of students with disabilities in higher education since surveys commenced (93/94). The last eleven years alone has seen a reported 77% rise in the student population of participating institutions of higher education (from AHEAD survey 08/09 to 19/20) but an over 226% rise in the number of students with disabilities engaging with support services (4,853 (08/09) - 15,846 (19/20) in the same period. All staff working on access to higher education should be commended for the great strides made in recent years in terms of increased access. Nonetheless, the impact of this huge increase in the numbers of students with disabilities on the system of support provision to this cohort needs close examination as this support model struggles to keep up with the increase in demand.

This general trend of growing at a significantly higher rate than the general student population does not hold for all students with disabilities and, in particular, for students with sensory disabilities, that is students who are listed under the Deaf/Hard of hearing or Blind/Visually impaired categories. In the academic period 19/20 students with sensory disabilities collectively represented 4% of the population of students with disabilities, while eleven years ago it stood at 7% (AHEAD Survey, 08/09). AHEAD has raised and publicised (2015) this issue in the past and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) has identified both categories as target groups to promote their advancement in education. AHEAD would welcome an opportunity for all levels of the education system to come together to examine the specific issues affecting the progression of these cohorts to higher education.

AHEAD has equally raised the issue of undertaking part-time vs full-time courses by people with disabilities. The HEA's review of the fund for students with disabilities and its subsequent agreement in 2020 to extend the fund to cover part-time courses was welcomed by AHEAD. In 2019/20 there was a marginal decrease in the number of students studying full time and a marginal increase in the numbers of those studying part-time. However, the rate of participation of students with disabilities studying part-time as a percentage of the student population undertaking part-time studies remain relatively low at just 1.3%. The hope is that the opening up of access of the fund to this cohort of students will, in time, have a positive impact in terms of participation and progression.

At the time of writing and with no clear date in sight to be permitted to return to Campus, AHEAD believes that the learning to be had from the experiences of remote learning from participating institutions, staff and students alike, will be an invaluable resource to inform the delivery of learning as we look to and plan for the future. AHEAD recommends Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a good framework for institutions of higher education that will better meet the needs of the increasing level of diversity in our further and higher education systems.

This survey is made possible only with the support of the staff in the participating institutions and the HEA's support for AHEAD's core activities. On behalf of AHEAD I offer our thanks and appreciation to you all. I encourage the dissemination of the survey findings and its insights and revelations contained therein.

226%

**rise in the number of students
with disabilities engaging
with support services over the
last 11 years**

Introduction

AHEAD is an independent, non-profit organisation whose mission is to create inclusive environments in education and employment for people with disabilities. This annual research report on the participation rates of students with disabilities engaging with support services in higher education is part of AHEAD's efforts to achieve this goal.

This research is made possible by the substantial work of the staff in the participating higher education institutions who supply statistics yearly, and also through the consistent support provided by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) as part of their commitment to further the promotion of equal opportunity in higher education (HEA, 2015). This research also plays an important role in aiding the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science to respond to the needs of students with disabilities and plan the national approach to supporting access and participation for this cohort.

This report provides an accurate measure of the number of students with disabilities registered with disability support/access services in higher education in Ireland in a given academic year. It forms part of a series of now-annual research reports conducted by AHEAD on this topic which first began in 1993. The survey findings support the work of AHEAD along with key stakeholders by providing an accurate picture of engagement with disability support services, and amongst other useful information, a detailed breakdown of the population of students with disabilities, their chosen fields of study and their engagement with different modes of study.

AHEAD's Strategy

AHEAD is focused on building inclusive learning environments in higher education that embed flexibility and equality into learning and assessment practices across the sector. AHEAD seeks to achieve its mission by pursuing three core strategic themes (AHEAD strategic Plan 19/22):

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

Survey Method

The AHEAD survey on the participation rates of students with disabilities in higher education in Ireland for the academic period 2019/20 was carried out with the support of participating institutions of higher education and, in particular, with the support of Disability/Access Officers therein. A survey questionnaire was sent out to the disability/access office in each of the higher education institutions involved.

Participating institutions were selected on the basis that they are funded by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and are included in the HEA's annual statistics on the general student population in higher education in Ireland, with one exception—the National College of Ireland. The National College of Ireland, although funded by the Department of Education and Skills, is included in the AHEAD survey because it hosts a large student population and is therefore deemed too significant to omit.

AHEAD compares the results of its annual survey on the participation rates of student with disabilities in higher education with that of the HEA's statistics for the same corresponding period. 25 institutions were approached to partake in the survey. The 23 institutions which responded are listed next:



University College Cork (UCC)



Technical University Dublin (TuD)



University College Dublin (UCD)



Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT)



National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG)



Cork Institute of Technology (CIT)



Trinity College Dublin (TCD)



Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT)



Maynooth University (MU)



Institute of Technology Carlow (ITC)



Dublin City University (DCU)



Institute of Technology Sligo (ITS)



University of Limerick (UL)



Institute of Technology, Tralee (ITTRA)



Mary Immaculate College (MIC)



Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT)



Marino Institute of Education (MIE)



Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT)



National College of Art and Design (NCAD)



National College of Ireland (NCI)



Royal College of Surgeons Ireland (RCSI)



Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT)



St. Angela's College (St. Ang.)

Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT) and Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) are not included in this year's findings as survey questionnaires were not returned.

Findings

Please note that when the phrase “students with disabilities” is used in this report, it refers specifically to students with disabilities registered with disability support/access services in higher education, which is the cohort captured and analysed here. AHEAD acknowledges that there is a sizeable cohort of students with disabilities studying in higher education which have not disclosed a disability to their institution in any capacity or registered for support and it is important to note that these students are not captured or represented in the findings which follow.

Participation Rates of Students with Disabilities

Across the 23 responding higher education institutions, there were 15,846 students with disabilities registered with disability support services for the academic year 2019/20, representing 6.3% of the total student population reported in participating institutions (252,614). Relative to 2018/19, this represents a 1% increase in the number of students with disabilities in the responding institutions. The 2018/19 report registered 15,696 students with the disability support services, representing 6.2% of the total student population in participating institutions (253,178) and a 7% increase in the total student population relative to 2017/18 (236,731).

The trend remains, that there is consistent year on year growth, in the numbers of students with disabilities registering with supports services in higher education; an increase of over 220% in the last eleven years (from 4,853, AHEAD Survey, 2008/2009), illustrating the substantial progress made in providing increased access for students with disabilities to higher education in this time, as shown in **Figure 1**.

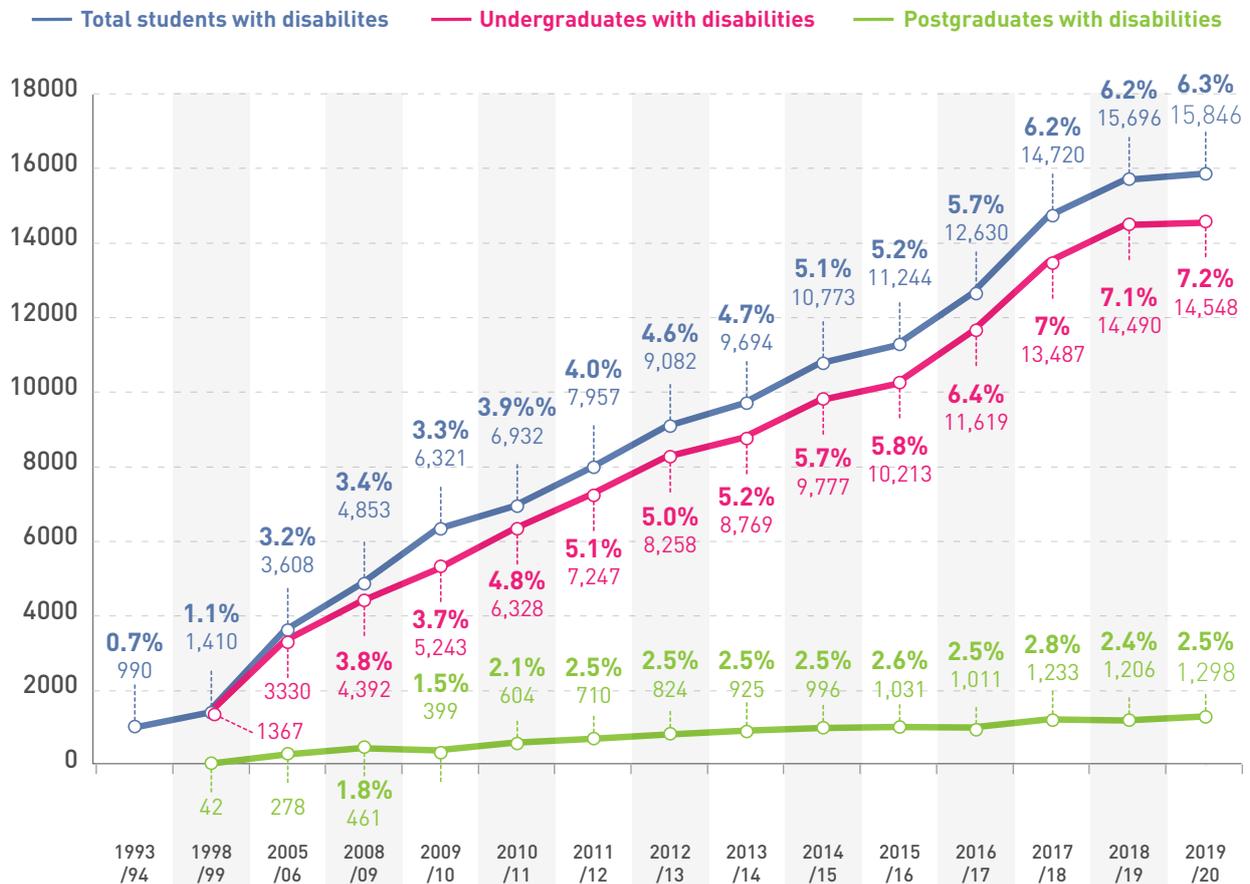


Figure 1. Number of students with disabilities in higher education (and percentage of total student population they represent) since 1993/94

In 2019/2020, the number of students with disabilities in the IT/Other Sector was 4,169 (5.8%), representing an overall decrease of 2,422 (36.7%) students with disabilities from the previous year (at 6,591, 6.2%). The number of students with disabilities in the university sector was 11,677 (6.5%), representing an overall increase of 2,572 (28.2%) from the previous year (at 9,105, 6.2%). The significant change in these sectoral figures year on year can be explained by the merging of Dublin Institute of Technology, Tallaght Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology Blanchardstown, previously listed in the IT/Other sector, to the newly formed Technical University Dublin, now listed in the current report in the University sector.

At an institutional level the participation rates of students with disabilities varies across the responding institutions, where students with disabilities represent anywhere from 3% to 10.5% of each institution's total student population. In 2019/20, St. Angela's College recorded the highest representation of students with disabilities at 10.5% of the total population, followed by The National College of Art and Design at 10.4% and Limerick Institute of Technology at 9.9%. There is a full breakdown of the participation rate of students with disabilities by institution listed in Appendix 1.

15,846

**students with disabilities
registered with disability
support services for the
academic year 2019/20
across the 23 responding
higher education institutions**

Undergraduate and Postgraduate

This section examines the participation of students with disabilities at undergraduate and postgraduate level for 2019/20 of the 23 responding institutions. In the last number of years of AHEAD research there has been a steady increase in the rate of students with disabilities represented at undergraduate level, however, there has been a persistently low representation at a postgraduate level. The 2019/20 data shows that this trend continues.

There were 14,548 undergraduate students with disabilities registered with disability support/access services across the responding institutions, representing 7.2% of the student population at undergraduate level. This reflects a 0.4% (58) increase compared with last year (14,490, 7.1%).

In 2019/20, postgraduate level continued to have a significantly lower participation rate of students with disabilities than at undergraduate level across the responding institutions. 1,298 postgraduate students registered with disability support services, representing 2.5% of the total postgraduate student population, a 7.6% population increase from last year's report (1,206, 2.4%). This trend is consistent with previous surveys (AHEAD 2019, 2018; 2017; 2016; 2015; 2013; 2012; 2011). The scope of this research is not designed to capture the reasons for the persistent low representation of students with disabilities at postgraduate level, however AHEAD acknowledges that there may be a range of variables, both personal and systemic, which influence this finding and which may require further research to determine why this is the case.

Full Time and Part Time

The responding institutions provided a breakdown of the number of students with disabilities registered with support services enrolled in full time and part time undergraduate/postgraduate study in 2019/20. The research found that there were 15,071 students with disabilities in full time study, representing 7.8% of the total student population studying full time programmes. Within the same period, there were just 775 students with disabilities registered with support services that were enrolled in part time studies, representing 1.3% of the total student population studying part time.

Compared with 2018/19, the 2019/20 figures represent a 1% (160) year on year increase in the number of students with disabilities studying full time, and a 1% (10) decrease in those studying part time. Historically, the low participation of students with disabilities in part-time study is a persisting issue which has been highlighted by these annual surveys over a long period of time (AHEAD, 2019; 2017; 2016; 2015; 2013; 2012, 2011).

Figure 2 illustrates the breakdown of students with disabilities (as a percentage of the total student population) studying full and part time courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels as well as the overall combined totals for 2019/20.

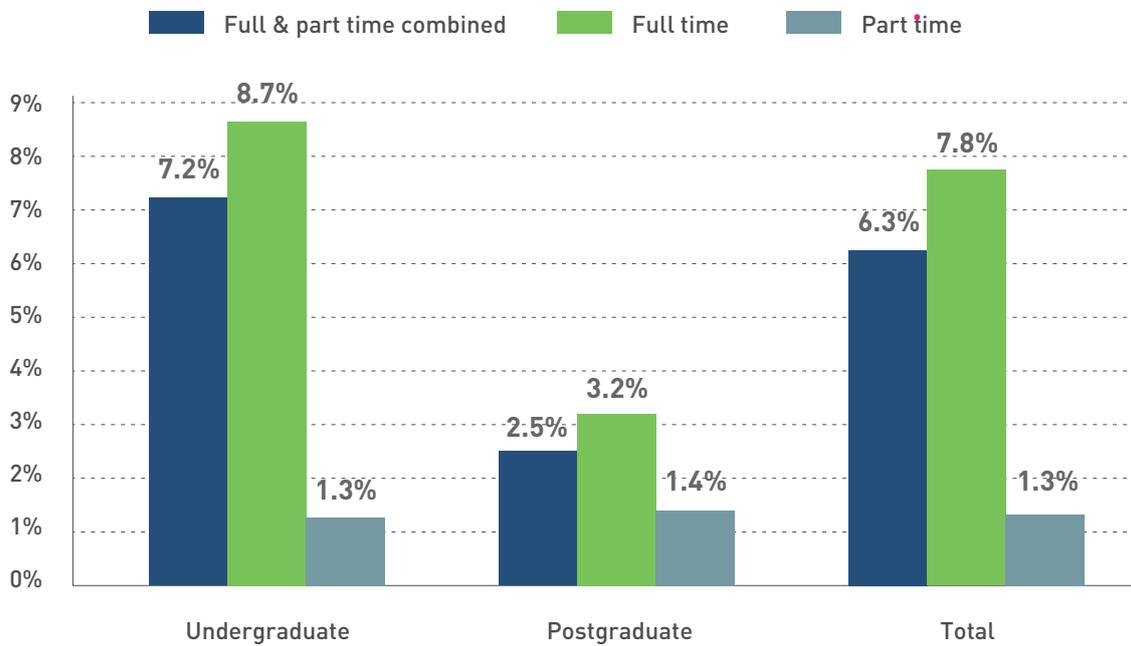


Figure 2. Percentage of students with disabilities in full time and part time education as a percentage of the overall student population 2019/20

New Entrant Undergraduates with Disabilities

The responding institutions reported a total number of 4,076 new entrants (i.e. students entering their first year of studies in third level) with disabilities in 2019/20, representing 7.5% of the total reported new entrant student population (54,119). The year-on-year number of new entrant students with disabilities has increased by 3% (116), up from 3,960 in 2018/19 (AHEAD 2019).

New Entrant Disclosure – HEA Data Comparison

According to data provided to AHEAD by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) on the student population in higher education in Ireland for the academic year 2019/2020, the proportion of first year, full time, new entrants with a disability stands at 12.3%. That is nationally, 12.3% of all first year, full time, new entrant undergraduates disclose a disability through the Equal Access Survey. An interesting comparison can be made with AHEAD Survey findings for the same academic period (2019/2020) to highlight the sizable cohort of non-disclosed students with disabilities in higher education in Ireland. It should be noted when interpreting this comparison that the underlying datasets are not the same and some discrepancies exist between them.

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

Despite the differences in the underlying datasets, the significant variation between the HEA figure of 12.3% (first year, full time new entrant undergraduate students who report a disability in the Equal Access Survey) and the AHEAD figure of 7.5% (first year new entrants registered for disability support in participating institutions), suggests that there is a sizeable cohort of new entrant undergraduate students with a disability who did not disclose and register for support in the academic year 2019/2020.

AHEAD recognises that disclosure of disability is a complex issue and there are likely myriad reasons for non-disclosure which require further investigation, such as no requirements for support, a desire for independence, or reasons related to the perceived stigma which may be felt by some individuals engaging with support services.

New Registrations

New Registrations are students who register with disability services for the first time in their higher education institution during the academic year, including students who are not in their first year of study. This data allows AHEAD to deduce if there are students with disabilities who have gone through at least one or more years of study without receiving designated disability support.

In 2019/20, there were 5,113 new registrations across the disability services in the 23 responding institutions. Of the new registrations, 1,037 were not in their first year of study, making up 20% of all new registrations to the disability services for the academic year 2019/20 and representing 6.5% of the total population of students with disabilities.

Mature Students

In 2019/20, there were 1,547 mature students with disabilities identified across the 23 responding institutions, representing 9.8% of the total population of students with disabilities. This represents a 19.4% (372) decrease in the number of mature students with disabilities in comparison to 2018/19 (at 1,919, 12%).

International Students

In 2019/20, there were 704 international students with disabilities recorded across the 23 responding institutions, which represents 4.4% of the total population of students with disabilities. This is a 19% (112) increase in the number of international students registered with disabilities, in comparison to the 2018/19 survey (at 592, 3.8%).

Nature of Disability

The categories of disability which are utilised as part of this study are based on the categories of disability applied by the Higher Education Authority in the Fund for Students with Disabilities guidelines for higher education institutions, with an addition of the Other category which is added to cater for any additional registrations with the disability service that do not fall under the HEA specified categories (for example those with intellectual disabilities). Students are categorised by their primary disability only, regardless of whether more than one disability is present.

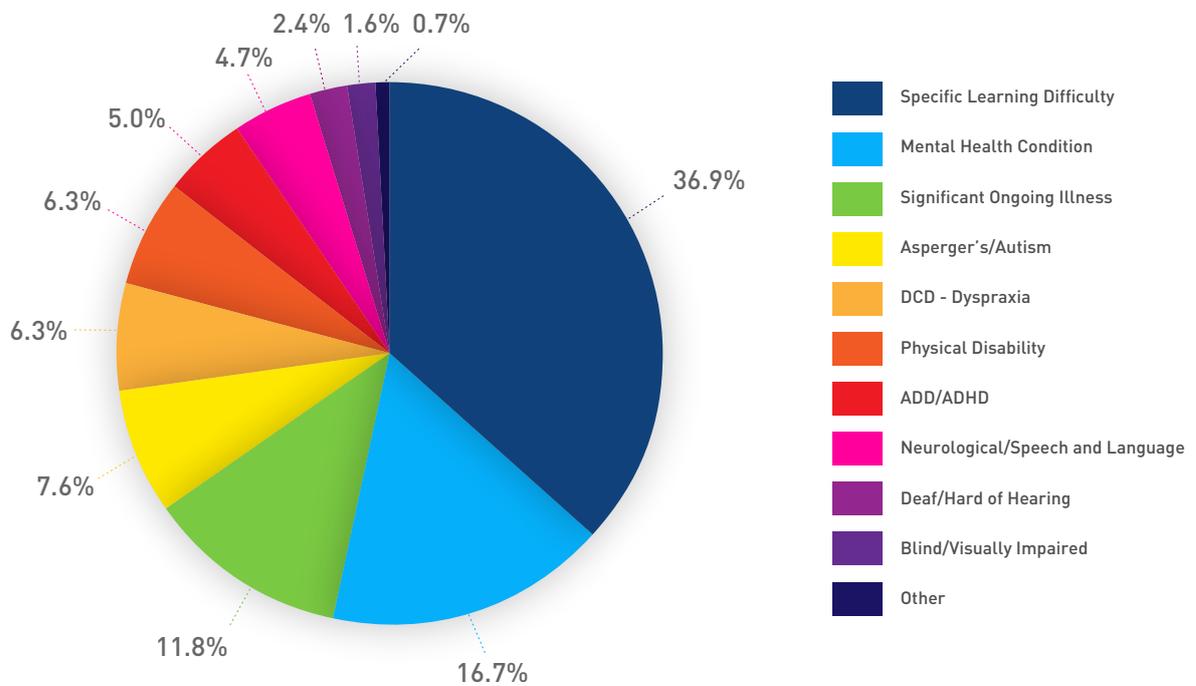


Figure 3. Breakdown of students registered with disability support/access services by category of disability 2019/20

Figure 3 illustrates the breakdown of 15,846 students with disabilities by category of primary disability in the responding institutions in 2019/20. The largest category of disability was Specific Learning Difficulty representing 36.9% (5,848) of all students with disabilities enrolled within that academic year; the second largest was Mental Health Condition at 16.7% (2,639); followed by Significant On-going Illness at 11.8% (1,867). 7.6% (1,206) of students with disabilities were registered in the Asperger's/Autism category, 6.3% (999) in the DCD- Dyspraxia/Dysgraphia category, 6.3% (994) in the Physical Disability, 5% (797) in the ADD/ADHD category, 4.7% (743) in the Neurological/Speech & Language category, 2.4% (379) in the Deaf/Hard of Hearing category, 1.6% (261) in the Blind and Visually Impaired category, and 0.7% (113) in the Other category.

There was some significant year on year changes in the overall percentage breakdown of students with disabilities across the categories of disability and the actual numbers in those categories. In particular, the number of students with disabilities registered under the Asperger's/Autism category rose by 14.3% from 1,055 in 2018/19 to 1206 in 2019/20, and in the Mental Health category the number of students with disabilities rose by 8.1% from 2,441 (16.1%) in 2018/19 to 2,639 (16.7%) in 2019/20. There was a 5.8% increase in the Significant Ongoing Illness category from 1764 (11.6%) in 2018/19 to 1867 (11.8%) and a 5.4% increase in the ADD/ADHD category from 756 (5%) in 2018/19 to 797 (5.1%) in 2019/20. The other categories experienced changes in the order of less than 5%, as shown in **Figure 4**. It should be noted in interpreting this data that the list of institutions who reported data on this question year on year are not identical, but the general trend of reduced numbers in the sensory disability categories in comparison to others should be noted nonetheless.

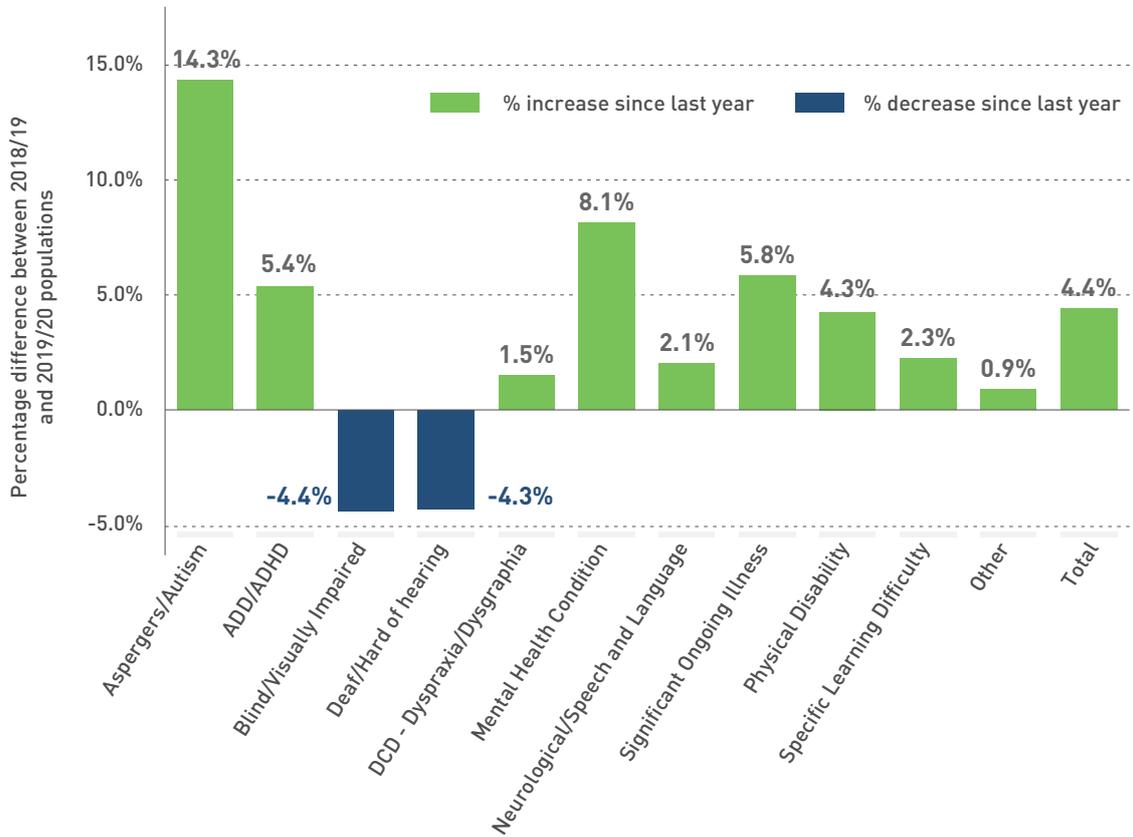


Figure 4 - Percentage difference between 2018/19 and 2019/20 populations by disability category

New Entrant Disability Breakdown

The responding institutions provided the breakdown by disability of 4,076 new entrants with disabilities. Broken down by category, 362 (8.9%) were in the Asperger's/Autism category, 236 (5.8%) in the ADD/ADHD category, 61 (1.5%) in the Blind/Visually Impaired category, 93 (2.3%) in the Deaf/Hard of Hearing category, 291 (7.1%) in the DCD Dyspraxia-Dysgraphia category, 655 (16.1%) in the Mental Health Condition category, 202 (5%) in the Neurological/Speech & Language category, 453 (11.1%) in the Significant On-going Illness category, 264 (6.5%) in the Physical category, 1,427 (35%) in the Specific Learning Difficulty and 32 (0.8%) in the Other category.

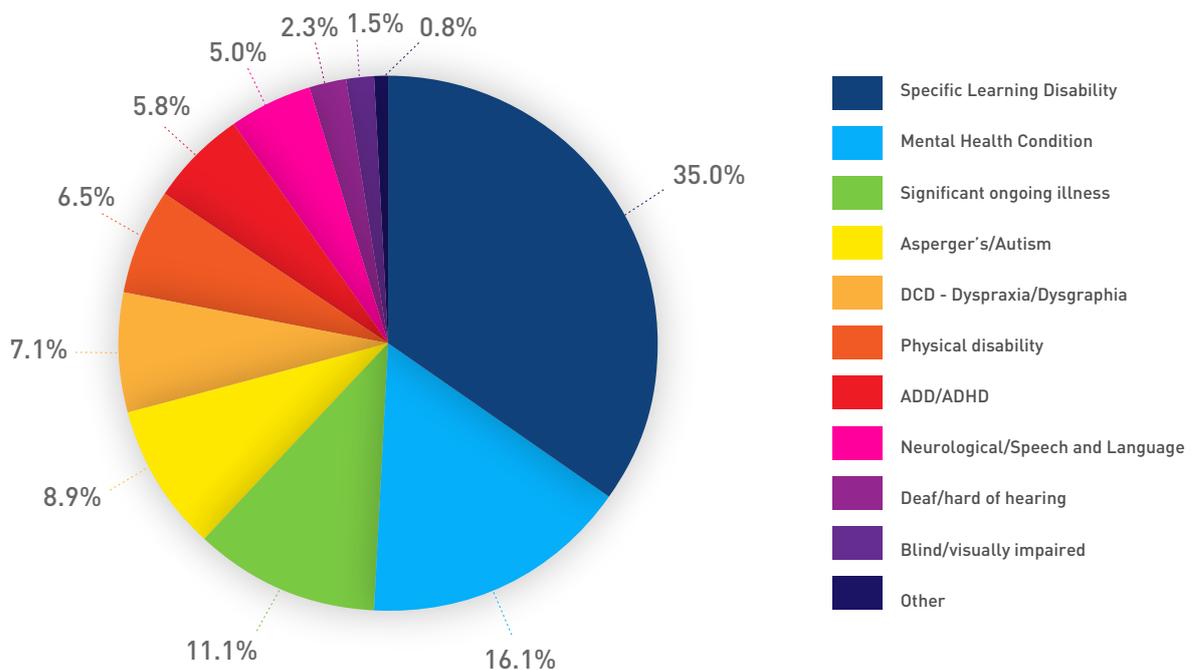


Figure 5. Breakdown of new entrant students by category of disability in 2019/20

Undergraduate Disability Breakdown

The responding institutions recorded 14,548 undergraduate students with disabilities in 2019/20. Of those, 5,364 (36.9%) were registered with Specific Learning Difficulties, the largest cohort of students with disabilities enrolled in undergraduate programmes that year. The next largest group of undergraduate students had a Mental Health Condition at 2,424 (16.7%), followed by Significant On-going Illness at 1,705 (11.7%), Asperger's/Autism at 1,137 (7.8%), DCD/Dyspraxia at 944 (6.5%), Physical Disability at 881 (6.1%), ADD/ADHD at 740 (5.1%), Neurological/Speech and Language Difficulties at 666 (4.6%), Deaf/Hard of Hearing at 351 (2.4%), Blind/Visually Impaired at 227 (1.6%), and the Other category at 109 (0.7%).

Overall, seven out of the eleven categories showed an increase in undergraduate student numbers from last year, while the other four showed a decrease. The three most significant year to year increases in student numbers were: a 13.1% rise in the Asperger's/Autism category (to 1,137 from 1,005 in 2018/19), a 7.2% rise in the Mental Health Condition category (to 2,424 from 2,262 in 2018/19), and a 6.9% rise in the Physical Disability category (to 881 from 824 in 2018/19). The Significant on-going Illness and ADD/ADHD categories showed increases of 6.2% and 4.4% respectively. The remaining four categories showed decreases of 5% or less (ranging from 0.2% to 5%), in comparison with last year. It should be noted in interpreting this data that the list of institutions who reported data on this question year on year are not identical but the general trends are notable.

Postgraduate Disability Breakdown

The responding institutions reported a total of 1,298 students with disabilities registered with disability support/access services that were studying at postgraduate level in 2019/20, a 7.9% increase from the previous year (from 1,203 in 2018/19). Students in the Specific Learning Difficulty Category represented the largest cohort of students with disabilities studying at postgraduate level at 37.3% (484), followed by Mental Health Condition at 16.6% (215) and Significant On-going Illness Category at 12.5% (162). This is reflective of the same three largest categories at undergraduate level. The next largest categories were Physical Disability at 8.7% (113), Neurological/Speech Language at 5.9% (77), Asperger's/Autism at 5.3% (69), ADD/ADHD at 4.4% (57), Blind/Visually Impaired at 2.6% (34), Deaf/Hard of Hearing at 2.2% (28) and DCD-Dyspraxia at 4.2% (55). The category with the lowest percentage at postgraduate level in 2019/20 was the Other category at 0.3% (4).

There were some significant changes noted year on year in the number of post graduate students with disabilities by category, a 44.7% rise in the DCD-Dyspraxia category (to 55 from 38 in 2018/19), a 38% rise in the Asperger's/Autism category (to 69 from 50 in 2018/19), a 21.2% rise in the ADD/ADHD category (to 57 from 47 in 2018/19), a 19.4% rise in the Mental Health Condition category (to 215 from 180 in 2018/19), and an 18.4% rise in the Neurological/Speech Language category (to 77 from 65 in 2018/19). The Specific Learning Difficulty category saw a 4% increase (to 484 from 465 in 2018/19). Only two categories showed decreases: a 12.4% drop in the Physical Disability category (to 113 from 129 in 2018/19) and a 9.7% drop in the Deaf/Hard of Hearing category (to 28 from 31 in 2018/19). Two categories showed no change from last year: Blind/Visually Impaired category (to 34 from 34 in 2018/19) and the Significant On-going Illness category (to 162 from 162 in 2018/19). It should be noted in interpreting this year-on-year data that the list of institutions who reported data on this question year on year are not identical, but the general trends are noteworthy.

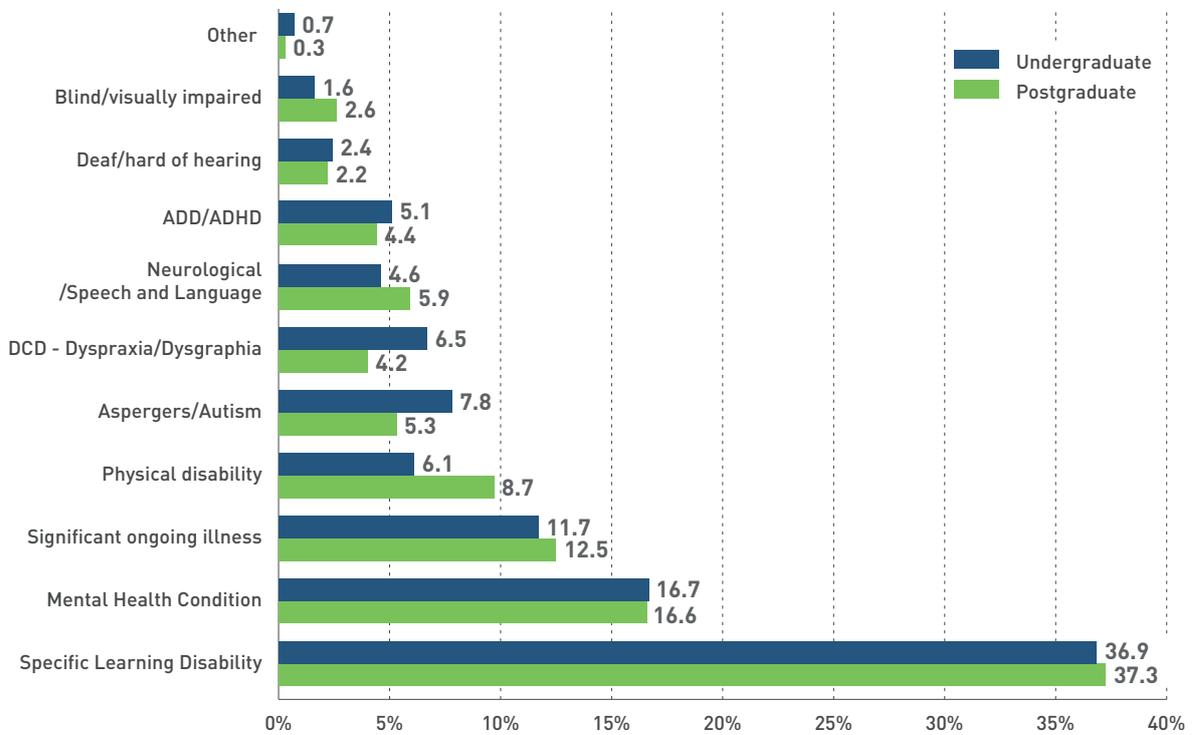


Figure 6. Disability Profile of Undergraduate and Postgraduate students with disabilities in 2019/2020 stats

Fields of Study

The following section breaks down the fields of study of the 15,846 students with disabilities identified in the responding institutions. Each institution was given the subject breakdown in line with the ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) classifications of subjects. **Figure 7** illustrates the comparison of the students with disabilities fields of study in comparison to the general student population across each field of study in 2019/20. The statistics on the breakdown of fields of study of the total student population for comparison were provided by the Higher Education Authority.

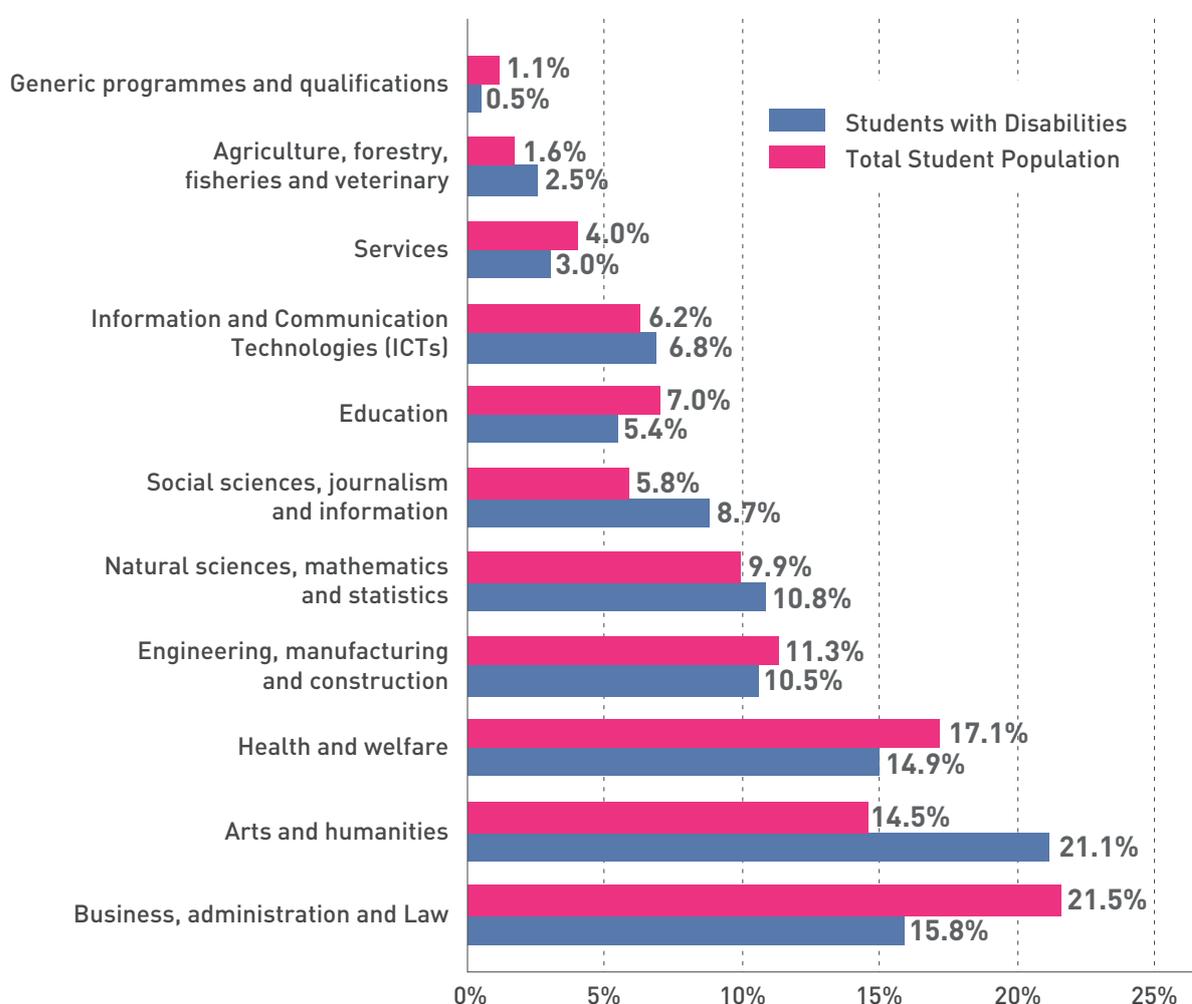


Figure 7. Breakdown of fields of study of students with disabilities compared to the total student population

70%

**of colleges responded
“yes” to whether they
believed that students with
disabilities were adversely
impacted by working
remotely**

The field of “Arts and humanities” had the highest percentage of students with disabilities once again in 2019/20 with 21.1% (3,339) of students with disabilities studying in this field. This was followed by “Business, administration and law” with 15.8% (2,511), “Health and welfare” with 14.9% (2,362), “Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics” with 10.8% (1,707), “Engineering manufacturing and construction” with 10.5% (1,664), “Social sciences, journalism and information” with 8.7% (1,382), “Informatics and communication technologies” with 6.8% (1,077), and “Education” with 5.4% (862). The least common fields of study for students with disabilities were “Services” with 3.0% (469), “Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary” with 2.5% (397), and “Generic” with 0.5% (76).

The largest differences between the percentage-representation of the overall student population studying a field, compared to the percentage-representation of students with disabilities, were in the fields of “Arts and Humanities” and “Business, administration and law”. 21.1% of students with disabilities studied in the field of “Arts and humanities” in comparison to 14.5% of the general student population.

Conversely, 15.8% of students with disabilities studied in the field of “Business, administration and law” in comparison to 21.5% of the general student population.

14.9% of students with disabilities studied in the field of “Health and Welfare” in comparison to 17.1% of the general student population. 5.4% of students with disabilities studied in the field of “Education” in comparison to 7% of the general student population.

The trend of students with disabilities having a higher average representation in the field of ‘Humanities and Arts’ and a lower representation in the field of “Health and Welfare” and “Education” remains consistent over many years of AHEAD’s survey findings (AHEAD, 2020, 2019; 2018; 2017; 2016).

Fields of Study Breakdown by Disability

The 23 responding institutions provided information on the participation of 15,846 students with disabilities, by category of disability and field of study in 2019/20.

The following sub sections examine the fields of study of students in each category of disability, with accompanying tables and two to four findings on the representation of each category of disability in comparison to other students with disabilities and to the general student population in 2019/20. Because of the diverse nature of the conditions in the “Other” category, no analysis is provided here.

The fields of study included in this section are based on the ISCED Classifications. <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-fields-of-education-and-training-2013-detailed-field-descriptions-2015-en.pdf>

ADD/ADHD

Table 1 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the ADD/ADHD Category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all SWDs and for the student population in general.

5.0% of all SWDs are in ADD/ADHD Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total SWD Studying Field	Numbers in ADD/ADHD Category Studying Field	% of Students in ADD/ADHD Category Studying Field	% of SWDs Studying Field in ADD/ADHD Category
Generic programmes and qualifications	1.1%	0.5%	8	1.0%	10.5%
Education	7.0%	5.4%	15	1.9%	1.7%
Arts and humanities	14.5%	21.1%	192	24.1%	5.8%
Social sciences, journalism and information	5.8%	8.7%	82	10.3%	5.9%
Business, administration and law	21.5%	15.8%	138	17.3%	5.5%
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	9.9%	10.8%	82	10.3%	4.8%
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	6.2%	6.8%	57	7.2%	5.3%
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	11.3%	10.5%	94	11.8%	5.6%
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	1.6%	2.5%	16	2.0%	4.0%
Health and welfare	17.1%	14.9%	96	12.0%	4.1%
Services	4.0%	3.0%	17	2.1%	3.6%
Total			797		

- Students in the ADD/ADHD Category were more than three times less likely to study in the field of “Education” when compared to the general student population, and more than two times less likely when compared to other students with disabilities.
- Students in the ADD/ADHD Category were significantly more likely to study both the “Arts and humanities” and “Social sciences, journalism and information” fields when compared to the general student population.

Asperger's/Autism

Table 2 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Asperger's/Autism Category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all SWDs and for the student population in general.

7.6% of all SWDs are in Aspergers/Autism Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total SWD Studying Field	Numbers in Aspergers/Autism Category Studying Field	% of Students in Aspergers/Autism Category Studying Field	% of SWDs Studying Field in Aspergers/Autism Category
Generic programmes and qualifications	1.1%	0.5%	5	0.4%	6.6%
Education	7.0%	5.4%	19	1.6%	2.2%
Arts and humanities	14.5%	21.1%	369	30.6%	11.1%
Social sciences, journalism and information	5.8%	8.7%	68	5.6%	4.9%
Business, administration and law	21.5%	15.8%	145	12.0%	5.8%
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	9.9%	10.8%	186	15.4%	10.9%
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	6.2%	6.8%	234	19.4%	21.7%
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	11.3%	10.5%	105	8.7%	6.3%
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	1.6%	2.5%	13	1.1%	3.3%
Health and welfare	17.1%	14.9%	41	3.4%	1.7%
Services	4.0%	3.0%	21	1.7%	4.5%
Total			1206		

- Students in the Asperger’s/Autism Category were more than four times less likely to study in the field of “Education” when compared to the general student population, and more than three times less likely than other students with disabilities.
- Students in the Asperger’s/Autism Category were almost three times as likely to study in the field of “Information and communication technologies” when compared with the general student population and other students with disabilities.
- Students in the Asperger’s/Autism Category were two times more likely to study in the field of “Arts and humanities” when compared to the general student population and almost half more likely than other students with disabilities.
- Students in the Asperger’s/Autism Category were almost half as likely to study in the field of “Business, administration and law” when compared to the general student population.
- Students in the Asperger’s/Autism Category were significantly less likely to study in the fields of “Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary”, “Health and welfare” and “Services” than both the general student population and other students with disabilities.

Blind/Visually Impaired

Table 3 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Blind/Visually Impaired Category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all SWDs and for the student population in general.

1.6% of all SWDs are in Blind/Visually Impaired Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total SWD Studying Field	Numbers in Blind/Visually Impaired Studying Field	% of Students in Blind/Visually Impaired Category Studying Field	% of SWDs Studying Field in Blind/Visually Impaired Category
Generic programmes and qualifications	1.1%	0.5%	3	1.1%	3.9%
Education	7.0%	5.4%	13	5.0%	1.5%
Arts and humanities	14.5%	21.1%	67	25.7%	2.0%
Social sciences, journalism and information	5.8%	8.7%	29	11.1%	2.1%
Business, administration and law	21.5%	15.8%	47	18.0%	1.9%
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	9.9%	10.8%	19	7.3%	1.1%
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	6.2%	6.8%	22	8.4%	2.0%
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	11.3% ^r	10.5% ^r	14	5.4%	0.8%
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	1.6%	2.5% ^r	2	0.8%	0.5%
Health and welfare	17.1%	14.9%	37	14.2%	1.6%
Services	4.0%	3.0%	8	3.1%	1.7%
Total			261		

- Students in the Visually Impaired Category were significantly more likely to study in the field of “Arts and humanities” than the general student population.
- Students in the Visually Impaired Category were almost twice as likely to study in the field of “Social sciences, journalism and information” than those in the general student population.
- Students in the Visually Impaired Category were approximately half as likely to study in the field of “Engineering, manufacturing and construction” when compared to the general student population and other students with disabilities.

Deaf/Hard of Hearing

Table 4 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Deaf/Hearing Impaired Category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all SWDs and for the student population in general.

2.4% of all SWDs are in Deaf/Hearing Impaired Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total SWD Studying Field	Numbers in Deaf/Hearing Impaired Category Studying Field	% of Students in Deaf/Hearing Impaired Category Studying Field	% of SWDs Studying Field in Deaf/Hearing Impaired Category
Generic programmes and qualifications	1.1%	0.5%	3	0.8%	3.9%
Education	7.0%	5.4%	29	7.7%	3.4%
Arts and humanities	14.5%	21.1%	83	21.9%	2.5%
Social sciences, journalism and information	5.8%	8.7%	24	6.3%	1.7%
Business, administration and law	21.5%	15.8%	62	16.4%	2.5%
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	9.9%	10.8%	34	9.0%	2.0%
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	6.2%	6.8%	21	5.5%	1.9%
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	11.3%	10.5%	34	9.0%	2.0%
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	1.6%	2.5%	12	3.2%	3.0%
Health and welfare	17.1%	14.9%	71	18.7%	3.0%
Services	4.0%	3.0%	6	1.6%	1.3%
Total			379		

- Students in the Deaf/Hard of Hearing Category were significantly more likely to study in the field of “Arts and humanities” when compared to the general student population.
- Students in the Deaf/Hard of Hearing Category were almost twice as likely to study in the field of “Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary” than the general student population.
- Students in the Deaf/Hard of Hearing Category were half as likely to study in the field of “Services” when compared to the general student population and other students with disabilities.

DCD-Dyspraxia

Table 5 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the DCD-Dyspraxia Category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all SWDs and for the student population in general.

6.3% of all SWDs are in DCD - Dyspraxia Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total SWD Studying Field	Numbers in DCD - Dyspraxia Studying Field	% of Students in DCD - Dyspraxia Category Studying Field	% of SWDs Studying Field in DCD - Dyspraxia Category
Generic programmes and qualifications	1.1%	0.5%	0	0.0%	0.0%
Education	7.0%	5.4%	44	4.4%	5.1%
Arts and humanities	14.5%	21.1%	224	22.4%	6.7%
Social sciences, journalism and information	5.8%	8.7%	86	8.6%	6.2%
Business, administration and law	21.5%	15.8%	183	18.3%	7.3%
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	9.9%	10.8%	102	10.2%	6.0%
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	6.2%	6.8%	98	9.8%	9.1%
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	11.3%	10.5%	112	11.2%	6.7%
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	1.6%	2.5%	22	2.2%	5.5%
Health and welfare	17.1%	14.9%	81	8.1%	3.4%
Services	4.0%	3.0%	47	4.7%	10.0%
Total			999		

- Students in the DCD-Dyspraxia Category were significantly less likely to study in the fields of “Education” and “Business, administration and law” than the general student population.
- Students in the DCD-Dyspraxia Category were significantly more likely to study in the field of “Information and communication technologies” than the general student population and other students with disabilities.
- Students in the DCD-Dyspraxia Category were more than half as likely to study in the field of “Health and welfare” compared to the general student population, and almost half as likely than other students with disabilities.

Mental Health Condition

Table 6 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Mental Health Condition Category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all SWDs and for the student population in general.

16.7% of all SWDs are in Mental Health Condition Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total SWD Studying Field	Numbers in Mental Health Condition Category Studying Field	% of Students in Mental Health Condition Category Studying Field	% of SWDs Studying Field in Mental Health Condition Category
Generic programmes and qualifications	1.1%	0.5%	19	0.7%	25.0%
Education	7.0%	5.4%	118	4.5%	13.7%
Arts and humanities	14.5%	21.1%	753	28.5%	22.6%
Social sciences, journalism and information	5.8%	8.7%	273	10.3%	19.8%
Business, administration and law	21.5%	15.8%	372	14.1%	14.8%
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	9.9%	10.8%	355	13.5%	20.8%
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	6.2%	6.8%	109	4.1%	10.1%
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	11.3%	10.5%	118	4.5%	7.1%
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	1.6%	2.5%	52	2.0%	13.1%
Health and welfare	17.1%	14.9%	435	16.5%	18.4%
Services	4.0%	3.0%	35	1.3%	7.5%
Total			2639		

- Students in the Mental Health Condition Category were less than half as likely to study in the field of “Engineering, manufacturing and construction” when compared to the general student population and other students with disabilities.
- Students in the Mental Health Condition Category were almost twice as likely to study in the fields of “Arts and humanities” when compared to the general student population.
- Students in the Mental Health Condition Category were significantly less likely to study in the field of “Business, administration and law” than the general student population and significantly more likely to study in the field of “Social sciences, journalism and information”.
- Students in the Mental Health Condition Category were very significantly less likely to study in the field of “Services” when compared to the general population, and other students with disabilities.

Neurological/Speech and Language

Table 7 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Neurological/Speech and Language Category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all SWDs and for the student population in general.

4.7% of all SWDs are in Neurological/Speech and Language Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total SWD Studying Field	Numbers in Neurological/Speech and Language Studying Field	% of Students in Neurological/Speech and Language Category Studying Field	% of SWDs Studying Field in Neurological/Speech and Language Category
Generic programmes and qualifications	1.1%	0.5%	2	0.3%	2.6%
Education	7.0%	5.4%	50	6.7%	5.8%
Arts and humanities	14.5%	21.1%	158	21.3%	4.7%
Social sciences, journalism and information	5.8%	8.7%	65	8.7%	4.7%
Business, administration and law	21.5%	15.8%	142	19.1%	5.7%
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	9.9%	10.8%	74	10.0%	4.3%
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	6.2%	6.8%	35	4.7%	3.2%
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	11.3%	10.5%	62	8.3%	3.7%
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	1.6%	2.5%	20	2.7%	5.0%
Health and welfare	17.1%	14.9%	113	15.2%	4.8%
Services	4.0%	3.0%	22	3.0%	4.7%
Total			743		

- Students in the Neurological/Speech and Language Category were significantly more likely to study in the fields of “Arts and humanities” and “Social sciences, journalism and information” than the general student population.
- Students in the Neurological/Speech and Language Category were very significantly more likely to study in the field of “Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary” when compared to the general student population.

Significant On-going Illness

Table 8 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Significant On-going Illness Category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all SWDs and for the student population in general.

11.8% of all SWDs are in Significant Ongoing Illness Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total SWD Studying Field	Numbers in Significant Ongoing Illness Category Studying Field	% of Students in Significant Ongoing Illness Category Studying Field	% of SWDs Studying Field in Significant Ongoing Illness Category
Generic programmes and qualifications	1.1%	0.5%	11	0.6%	14.5%
Education	7.0%	5.4%	144	7.7%	16.7%
Arts and humanities	14.5%	21.1%	347	18.6%	10.4%
Social sciences, journalism and information	5.8%	8.7%	172	9.2%	12.4%
Business, administration and law	21.5%	15.8%	304	16.3%	12.1%
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	9.9%	10.8%	230	12.3%	13.5%
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	6.2%	6.8%	94	5.0%	8.7%
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	11.3%	10.5%	132	7.1%	7.9%
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	1.6%	2.5%	34	1.8%	8.6%
Health and welfare	17.1%	14.9%	357	19.1%	15.1%
Services	4.0%	3.0%	42	2.2%	9.0%
Total			1867		

- Students in the Significant On-going Illness Category were significantly more likely to study in the field of “Social sciences, journalism and information” than the general student population.
- Students in the Significant On-going Illness Category were significantly less likely to study in the fields of “Business, administration and law” and “Engineering, manufacturing and construction” than the general student population.
- Students in the Significant On-going Illness Category almost half as likely to study in the field of “Services” when compared to the general student population, and significantly less likely than other students with disabilities.

Physical Disability

Table 9 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Physical Disability Category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all SWDs and for the student population in general.

6.3% of all SWDs are in Physical Disability Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total SWD Studying Field	Numbers in Physical Disability Studying Field	% of Students in Physical Disability Category Studying Field	% of SWDs Studying Field in Physical Disability Category
Generic programmes and qualifications	1.1%	0.5%	2	0.2%	2.6%
Education	7.0%	5.4%	62	6.2%	7.2%
Arts and humanities	14.5%	21.1%	222	22.3%	6.6%
Social sciences, journalism and information	5.8%	8.7%	99	10.0%	7.2%
Business, administration and law	21.5%	15.8%	181	18.2%	7.2%
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	9.9%	10.8%	109	11.0%	6.4%
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	6.2%	6.8%	61	6.1%	5.7%
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	11.3%	10.5%	52	5.2%	3.1%
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	1.6%	2.5%	26	2.6%	6.5%
Health and welfare	17.1%	14.9%	157	15.8%	6.6%
Services	4.0%	3.0%	23	2.3%	4.9%
Total			994		

- Students in the Physical Disability Category were significantly more likely to study in the fields of “Arts and humanities”, “Social sciences, journalism and information” and “Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary”, than the general student population.
- Students in the Physical Disability Category were approximately half as likely to study in the fields of “Engineering, manufacturing and construction” when compared to the general student population and other students with disabilities.
- Students in the Physical Disability Category were significantly more likely to study in the field of ‘Services’ compared to the general student population and to other students with disabilities.

Specific Learning Difficulty

Table 10 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Specific Learning Difficulty Category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all SWDs and for the student population in general.

36.9% of all SWDs are in Specific Learning Difficulty Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total SWD Studying Field	Numbers in Specific Learning Difficulty Category Studying Field	% of Students in Specific Learning Difficulty Category Studying Field	% of SWDs Studying Field in Specific Learning Difficulty Category
Generic programmes and qualifications	1.1%	0.5%	23	0.4%	30.3%
Education	7.0%	5.4%	362	6.2%	42.0%
Arts and humanities	14.5%	21.1%	899	15.4%	26.9%
Social sciences, journalism and information	5.8%	8.7%	468	8.0%	33.9%
Business, administration and law	21.5%	15.8%	923	15.8%	36.8%
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	9.9%	10.8%	506	8.7%	29.6%
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	6.2%	6.8%	340	5.8%	31.6%
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	11.3%	10.5%	933	16.0%	56.1%
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	1.6%	2.5%	194	3.3%	48.9%
Health and welfare	17.1%	14.9%	955	16.3%	40.4%
Services	4.0%	3.0%	245	4.2%	52.2%
Total			5848		

- Students in the Specific Learning Difficulty Category were significantly less likely to study in the field of “Arts and humanities” than other students with disabilities.
- Students in the Specific Learning Difficulty Category were significantly more likely to study in the fields of “Social sciences, journalism and information” and “Business, administration and law” than the general student population.
- Students in the Specific Learning Difficulty Category were very significantly more likely to study in the field of “Engineering, manufacturing and construction” when compared to the general student population and other students with disabilities
- Students in the Specific Learning Difficulty Category were twice as likely to study in the field of “Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary” when compared to the general student population.

Other

Table 11 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Other Category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all SWDs and for the student population in general.

0.7% of all SWDs are in Other Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total SWD Studying Field	Numbers in Other Studying Field	% of Students in Other Category Studying Field	% of SWDs Studying Field in Other Category
Generic programmes and qualifications	1.1%	0.5%	0	0.0%	0.0%
Education	7.0%	5.4%	6	5.3%	0.7%
Arts and humanities	14.5%	21.1%	25	22.1%	0.7%
Social sciences, journalism and information	5.8%	8.7%	16	14.2%	1.2%
Business, administration and law	21.5%	15.8%	14	12.4%	0.6%
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	9.9%	10.8%	10	8.8%	0.6%
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	6.2%	6.8%	6	5.3%	0.6%
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	11.3%	10.5%	8	7.1%	0.5%
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	1.6%	2.5%	6	5.3%	1.5%
Health and welfare	17.1%	14.9%	19	16.8%	0.8%
Services	4.0%	3.0%	3	2.7%	0.6%
Total			113		

Exam Accommodations

The responding institutions provided information on the number of students with disabilities who received exam accommodations in 2019/20 along with a breakdown of this figure by disability and the types of exam accommodations received. The responses identified a total of 13,795 students with disabilities given one or more exam accommodations in 2019/20, representing 87% of the total population (15,846) of students with disabilities in the responding institutions. When compared to survey results of 2018/19 (13,129, 86%) there has been a yearly increase of 5% (666) in the number of students with disabilities receiving one or more exam accommodations.

Exam Accommodations by Category of Disability

In 2019/20, the responding institutions provided a breakdown of exam accommodations by category of disability. The data on exam accommodations indicated that across all categories of disabilities 78% or more of students in each category were in receipt of one or more exam accommodations. The lowest percentage of students in receipt of exam accommodations by category was in the Deaf/Hard of Hearing at 78% (297). Similar to the previous year, the DCD-Dyspraxia category has the highest percentage of students in receipt of one or more exam accommodations with 94% (942). The Specific Learning Difficulty category was the second highest at 93% (5414), while the third highest percentage of students was shared by two categories of disability; the Asperger's/Autism category at 88% (1,066) and the ADD/ADHD category 88% (699).

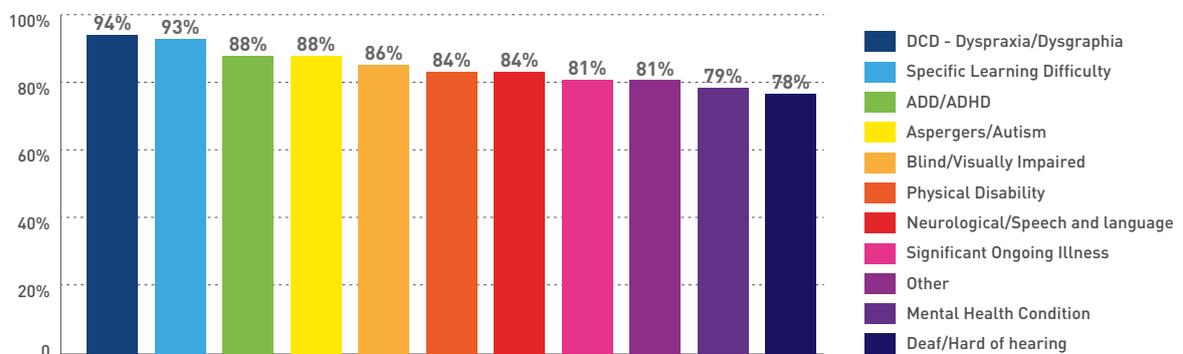


Figure 8. Breakdown of Exam Accommodations received by % of Disability Category 2019/20

Exam Accommodation by Type

The responding institutions provided information on the type of exam accommodations that students with disabilities received in 2019/20. Institutions provided information on the number of the following types of exam accommodations received by students within that academic year; extra time, use of an alternative venue, use of computer, reader - invigilator to help read paper, scribe, enlarged paper, use of sticker or marking tip sheet, exam paper in braille or electronic format. The chart below illustrates the percentage of students with disabilities who received these accommodations across participating institutions. The highest availed of exam accommodation, as found in previous years of this research (AHEAD 2019; 2018; 2017), was extra time with 89% (12,271) of students with disabilities across the responding institutions receiving this accommodation. This was followed by alternative venue which was availed of by 85% (11,763) of students with disabilities in 2019/20. The next most popular type of accommodation was use of a sticker/tip sheet at 32% (4,397) followed by use of a computer with general software at 15% (2,116) and use of a reader at 15% (2,105), the use of computer with assistive technology¹ at 7% (939), the use of a scribe at 5% (689) and the use of exam papers in braille or electronic format at 5% (666), and enlarged paper at 1% (136).

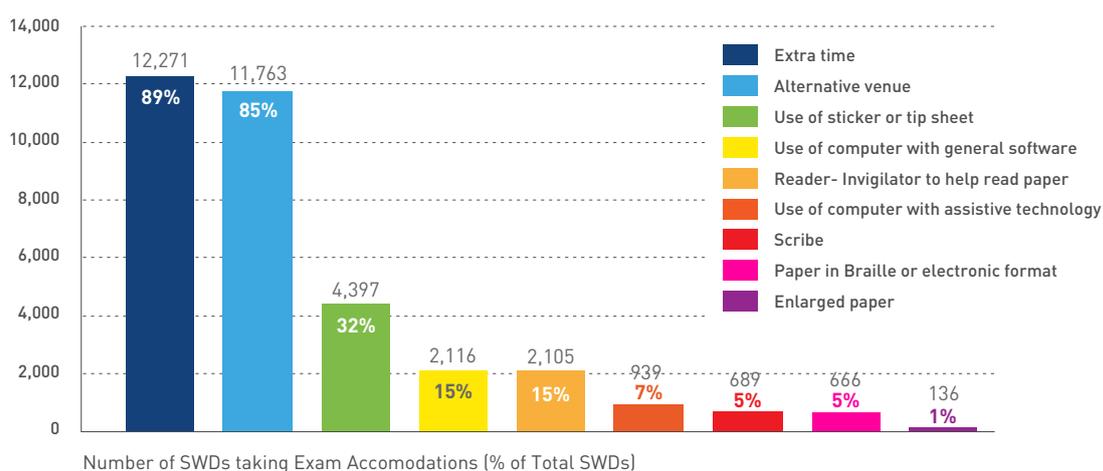


Figure 9. Breakdown of exam accommodations availed of by students with disabilities in 2019/20

1 The accommodation category “use of computer” from previous years has this year been split into two accommodations: “use of computer with assistive technology” and “use of computer with general software”, to better differentiate between different types of accommodation availed of.

Extra Time Breakdown

Of the 13,795 students with disabilities that received one or more exam accommodations in the responding institutions, 12,271 (89%) received extra time for exams. Of those who received extra time as an accommodation, 90% (11,064) received an extra 10 minutes per hour, 4% (478) received 15 minutes extra per hour, and 0.1% (33) received 20 extra minutes per hour, while 6% (696) received more than an extra 20 minutes per hour. **Figure 9** illustrates the breakdown of extra time received by students with disabilities recorded by the responding institutions for 2019/20.

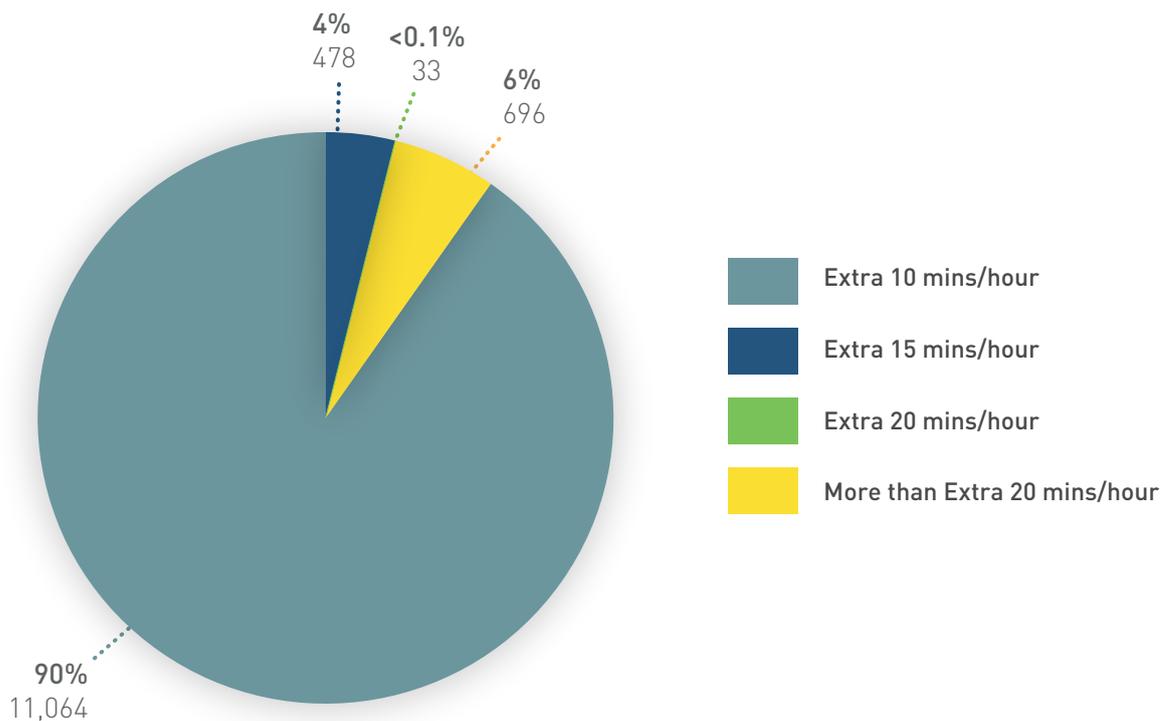


Figure 10. Number of students with disabilities receiving varying amounts of extra time per hour in examinations 2019/20

Alternative Venue Breakdown

The number of students with disabilities who availed of an alternative venue as an exam accommodation in the responding institutions in 2019/20 was 11,763, which represents 85% of the total number of all students that received one or more exam accommodations. Of those who availed of an alternative venue for exams, 14.7% (1,725) used Individual Centres, 19.5% (2,299) used an alternative venue marked as “Other”, and 65.8% (7,739) used Low Distraction Rooms. The breakdown of alternative venue types used in 2019/20 is illustrated in **Figure 10**.

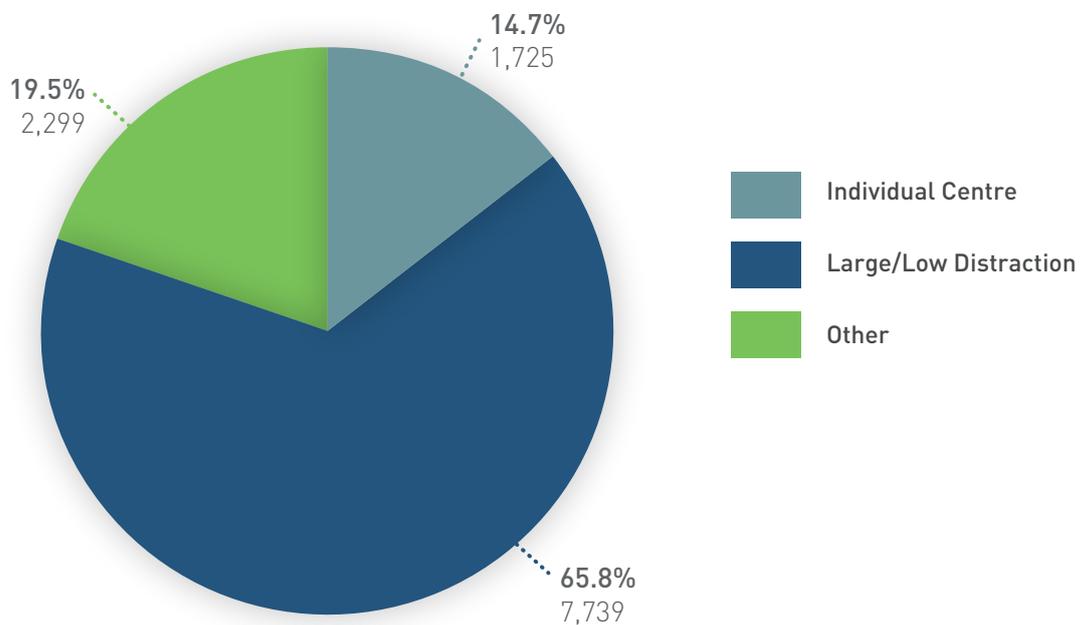


Figure 11. Number of students with disabilities who undertook examinations in different types of alternative venues 2019/20

45%

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

Inside Services

AHEAD asked responding institutions to provide information about the numbers of staff with responsibility for supporting students with disabilities and the number of learning support staff employed by the responding institutions². AHEAD use this data to calculate the number of students per staff member. Across all 23 responding institutions, there were 591 students with disabilities per learning support staff member and 190 students with disabilities per disability support staff member in 2019/20. The total number of students with disabilities per support staff member (disability and learning support combined) was 144.

The number of students with disabilities per disability support staff member in the University Sector was 183 compared to 213 in the IT/Other Sector.

Over an eight year period of AHEAD's research in this area, there has been a 45% increase in the number of students with disabilities per disability support staff member, up from 131 in 2011/12 (AHEAD, 2012) to 190 now.

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



Figure 12. Number of students per disability support staff member in the HEIs from 2011/12 - 2019/20

In the same period, the number of students with disabilities per learning support staff member has increased by 85.2%, up from 319 students with disabilities per learning support staff member in 2011/12 (AHEAD, 2012) to 591 (AHEAD 19/20). It should be noted that this rise in the latter figure may be related in part to the increased use of externally contracted learning support provision.

On the Ground - Opinion

In light of the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in Semester2 which necessitated lockdown measures from March 2020, this year's "on the Ground" questions were about the impact of these measures on students with disabilities and the way support services were provided. The responses to questions posed are displayed in **Figures 12 and 13** below.

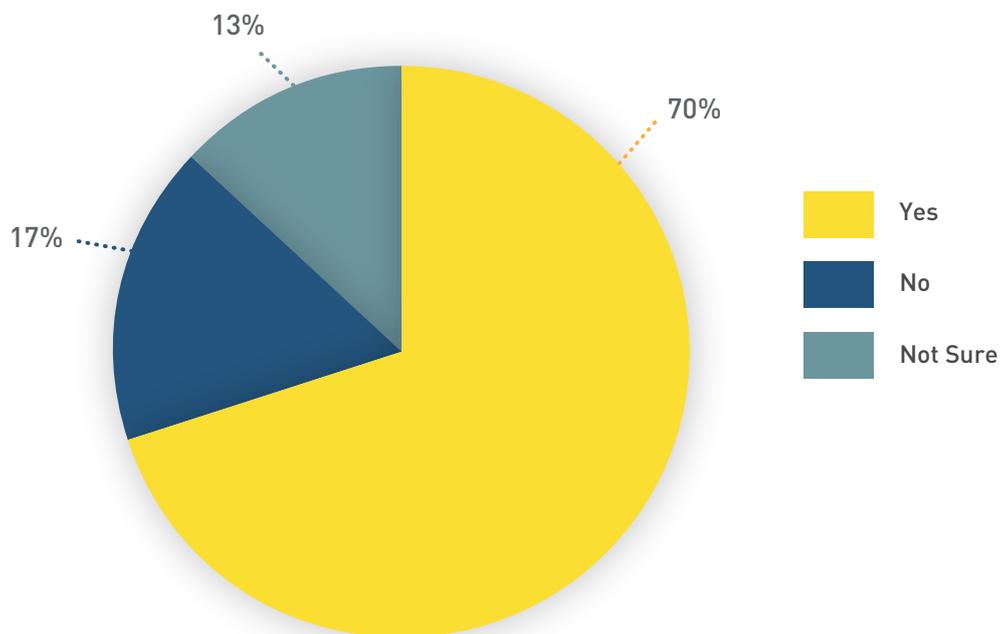


Figure 13. Breakdown of colleges which responded "yes" and "no" to whether the respondent believed that students with disabilities were adversely impacted by working remotely.

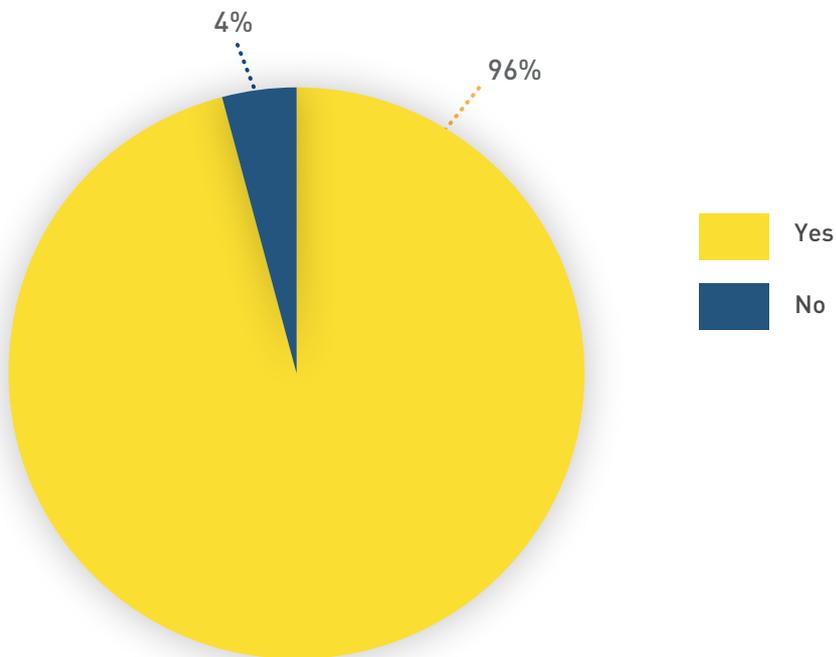


Figure 14. Breakdown of colleges which responded “yes” and “no” to whether the respondent believes the COVID-19 pandemic will significantly affect how they provide supports to students with disabilities.

The survey questionnaire provided space for respondents to submit additional comments to the “on the ground” questions. A small selection of representative comments are listed below and Appendix 4 contains the full list of comments.

96%

believe that the COVID-19 pandemic will significantly affect how they provide supports to students with disabilities.

Selected Comments

“The first question probably cannot be answered by a yes or no. I believe some students with disabilities were more adversely affected than their peers during COVID 19, particularly students who work well with daily routines, and within the structure of university life (for example some students with an ASD diagnosis). Some students noted finding the change to remote learning and remote exams difficult because they have learning strategies or learning preferences which no longer applied. For example, some students chose modules based on the type of assessment offered in the module, as they often perform better in these assessments. However, in some cases an alternative assessment was assigned during COVID 19 university closures, and some students with disabilities felt the alternative assessment would put them at a disadvantage.

However, remote learning also offered some advantages to some students with disabilities. Not having to travel to a physical campus was in some cases beneficial, to students with physical disabilities or significant on-going illnesses for instance. Remote learning also saw an increase in recorded lectures which could be assessed several times and at times which suited the student. This flexible learning was certainly beneficial to students with specific learning difficulties, or where attention or fatigue may feature as a part of their disability.

It is important to note that students from all backgrounds experienced remote learning differently, making it difficult to conclude if students with disabilities were more or less affected than their peers. Any student could have experienced increased stress, illness, or grief during this time. Any student could have experienced loss of a job or increased financial hardship during this difficult economic time. Additionally, many students were now studying in a new environment, with the possible added pressure of additional caring roles.

I hope students will be able to experience a more flexible learning environment going forward, such as being able to access lectures at a time that suits them and review those lectures in their own time. This would not only be of benefit to students with disabilities but the university community as a whole. During remote learning some supports were no longer required such as alternative exam locations, and some needed to be changed slightly for instance need for slightly different AT.”

“The suddenness of the change was difficult for some students because of the change in how modules were assessed. The essay and project type assessment did not suit everyone. Students sought out technology like Grammarly from DSS to address these issues. Some cohorts of students find change difficult and struggled to motivate themselves to complete assignments. The move to online learning requires high levels of independent learning and motivation. Students felt isolated and this was not helpful. The move to online learning did suit some students and shows that choice is important going forward. In general, there is very little negative feedback from students.”

“Students with disabilities liked that all the lectures were online and the fact that more supports were available to the student body. The exam format at the end of semester 2 suited most students better. We now have a better range of support structures in place moving forward, we will now have both virtual and face to face options for students, which should make it easier to access supports for students. Even our additional learning support services were able to move online and this is something that we will continue to offer once COVID restrictions are ended, if a student feels that this method would suit better. It must be noted that all our students are supplied with a laptop on entry so no student had difficulty accessing their lecture notes or materials.”

“Working with vulnerable groups of students, there was a sense of positivity where some students embraced the change to eLearning/online assessments and once they received clear communication as to what was expected of them they felt back in control. Remote learning has been beneficial for some students due to their disability and gives them greater opportunities to study in the comfort of their home without having to travel and use public transport etc.

On the other hand some of our students were met with a number of challenges:

- Some students did not have access to high speed internet. Anyone that did not have access to the internet and an appropriate device, were at an immediate disadvantage.
- Others were sharing one device in their household where a number of people in that household needed to use it.

- Students with financial difficulties where they are unable to work added additional stress some not having enough money for basic essentials.
- Other students are living in unstable home environments, (e.g. students sharing household with a large number of others, or some living in hostels).
- Students who are parents/some are guardians of younger siblings with additional responsibilities during COVID 19.
- Some students identified that lack of structure to their day was difficult.”

“It has suited some students and a majority have indicated a positive experience. But some categories like SLD/DCD had found the increase in workload and change from exams to assignments created pressure - especially combined with the difficulties they have with managing and organising skills. Live classes not accessible/being recorded and a lot of internet issues made this more difficult. Group work difficulties were something that students found very challenging across the categories.”

“Some students preferred to be at home and learning at home and remote assessment suited them. In our survey of DS students 55% of those who replied to the survey said they would prefer to be on campus.”

“While we are aware of some students with disabilities whose ability to study remotely was severely impacted during the lockdown, we are also aware of students who appeared to manage the transition without undue difficulty. We are equally aware that some of their fellow students were also severely impacted and some appeared to manage the transition without undue difficulty. We anticipate that the nature of our engagement with students will be significantly altered due to social distancing and health requirements. All components of service delivery will need to be redesigned in response to the emerging situation and in light of institute guidelines.”

Summary

AHEAD has identified the following key findings and observations based on the analysis of the data collected from the responding higher education institutions on the participation rates of students with disabilities in higher education for the academic year 2019/20:

- **AN INCREASE, OF 226% (10,993) IN THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES REGISTERING WITH SUPPORT SERVICES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE LAST 11 YEARS (AHEAD, 2009).** The academic year 2019/20 marked another year of continued growth in the participation of students with disabilities registered with disability support services in higher education and there are now 15,846 students with disabilities representing 6.3% of the total student population in the responding institutions. This figure represents a 1% rise in the number of students with disabilities in higher education year on year and a 226.5% increase over the last 11 years of AHEAD's research in this area (AHEAD, 2009).
- **A SIGNIFICANT PERCENTAGE OF NEW ENTRANTS HAVE A DISABILITY BUT DO NOT DISCLOSE AND REGISTER FOR SUPPORT.** In 2019/20, 12.3% of new entrant undergraduates reported having one or more disabilities in the HEA Equal Access Survey, but only 7.5% of the new entrant population registered with the disability support services of participating institutions in the AHEAD survey for the same academic year. Although the underlying datasets are not the same, this suggests that a significant number of new entrant students with a disability did not disclose their disability and register for disability supports in their first year in higher education in the period under survey. AHEAD recognises that disclosure of disability is a complex issue and there are likely myriad reasons for non-disclosure which require further investigation, such as no requirements for support, a desire for independence, or reasons related to the perceived stigma which may be felt by some individuals engaging with support services.

- **A MINOR DECREASE IN NUMBER OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES STUDYING PART-TIME IN HIGHER EDUCATION, A CONTINUING TREND OF LOW PART-TIME PARTICIPATION.** 2019/20 witnessed a slight decrease in the number of students with disabilities studying part time courses 775 (1.3%) compared to the previous year at 785 (1.3%). Students with disabilities are significantly underrepresented in part-time study, a consistent trend in AHEAD research, with just 1.3% of the part-time student population registered with disability support services in comparison to 7.8% of the full-time population.
- **AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF POST-GRADUATE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, BUT SIGNIFICANT UNDERREPRESENTATION PERSISTS.** There was a 7.9% increase in the number of postgraduate students with disabilities engaging with support services (1,298) across the responding institutions in 2019/20 compared to in 2018/19 (1,206). While the actual number of students with disabilities undertaking post graduate studies has increased notably over the last ten years (AHEAD, 2010), as a percentage of the total post graduate student population, it has increased only modestly from 1.5% (399) (AHEAD 2010) to 2.5% (AHEAD 2019/20). Students with disabilities are significantly underrepresented in postgraduate study, a consistent trend in AHEAD research, with just 2.5% of the postgraduate student population registered with disability support services in comparison to 7.2% of the undergraduate population.
- **ONE IN FIVE NEW REGISTRATIONS TO SUPPORT SERVICES FROM STUDENTS NOT IN THEIR FIRST YEAR OF STUDY.** In 2019/20 there were 1,037 new registrations with disability support services of students not in their first year of study, representing 20% of all new registrations with support services.
- **INCREASE OF 7.6% IN THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN THE ASPERGER'S/AUTISM CATEGORY IN 2019/20.** The responding institutions reported 1,206 students in the Asperger's/Autism Category registered with support services, representing 7.5% of the total population of students with disabilities in 2019/20, which is a 14.3% increase in the numbers of students in this category from the previous year (1,055, 6.9%). The numbers in this category have grown almost twenty-fold in the last eleven years from 62 in 2008/09 (AHEAD, 2009) to 1,206 in 2019/20.

- **LOW REPRESENTATION OF STUDENTS WITH SENSORY DISABILITIES IN 2019/20, HIGHLIGHTING PERSISTENT TREND.** The number of students in the Blind/Visually impaired category registered with HE support services in 2019/20 was 261 and the number in the category of Deaf/Hard of Hearing was 379. In the last eleven years, the number of students with sensory disabilities has grown at less than half the rate of students with disabilities more generally. While the number of students with disabilities has grown by 226.5% in that period, numbers in the Blind/Visually Impaired category have grown by 95% (from 134 (08/09)) and numbers in the Deaf/Hard of Hearing category by just 84% (from 206 (08/09)).

- **87% OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN 2019/20 RECEIVE EXAM ACCOMMODATIONS.** 13,795 students with disabilities in 2019/20 received one or more exam accommodations, representing a 5% (666) increase year on year 13,129 (2018/19). The number of students with disabilities receiving exam accommodations has risen more than 80% in the last six years, up from 7,608 in 2013/14 (AHEAD, 2015).

- **45% INCREASE IN NUMBER OF STUDENTS PER DISABILITY SUPPORT STAFF MEMBER IN LAST EIGHT YEARS.** Across all 23 responding institutions, there was an average of 190 students registered per disability support staff member in 2019/20. Over 8 years of AHEAD research in this area, the number of students with disabilities per disability support staff member has increased by 45%, up from 131 2011/12 (AHEAD, 2013). The number of students per learning support staff member rose 85% in the same period, from 319 in 2011/12 to 591 in 2019/20.

- **96% OF COLLEGE DISABILITY SUPPORT STAFF BELIEVE COVID-19 WILL SIGNIFICANTLY CHANGE DISABILITY SUPPORT PROVISION.** When asked “do you believe that the Covid-19 will significantly change how you provide support for students with disabilities and what supports are provided? 96% (22 respondents) replied “Yes” while 4% (1 respondent) replied “No”.

Recommendations

1. MAKE THE UNIVERSAL DESIGN OF HIGHER EDUCATION A NATIONAL PRIORITY AND DEVELOP A NATIONAL CHARTER FOR UNIVERSAL DESIGN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The findings in this report further highlight the need for the higher education sector to prioritise the implementation of Universal Design (UD) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles in the design and delivery of higher education. While individual supports and services are vital for students with disabilities, the add-on accommodation approach to disability support as the predominant/only means of supporting students with disabilities is no longer a sustainable method of ensuring quality access and participation. This is highlighted by the following findings in this report:

- **Demographics:** An increase, of 226% (up by 10,993) in the number of students with disabilities registering with support services in higher education in the last 11 years shows the need to move to a more culturally and financially sustainable support model where responsibility for inclusion is spread across campus.
- **Non-Disclosure:** Data suggesting that a significant percentage of new entrants have a disability but do not register with support services highlights the need to build more accessibility, flexibility and choice into the mainstream delivery of higher education to ensure the needs of these students are sufficiently met.
- **Assessment:** 87% of students with disabilities require reasonable accommodations in exams, highlighting the structural barriers present in that form of assessment for many students, and the need to offer more alternative and accessible assessment options as standard for all students. Over 13,000 students received exam accommodations in 2019/20 and each student will likely have 8-10 exams in a given year, highlighting the huge administrative burden of approaching provision in this manner.

- **Flexible Delivery:** Comments provided in the ‘On the Ground’ section of this report further support the need for a more universally designed approach to the delivery of programmes - “I hope students will be able to experience a more flexible learning environment going forward, such as being able to access lectures at a time that suits them and review those lectures in their own time. This would not only be of benefit to students with disabilities but the university community as a whole.” Universal Design and UDL offer us evidenced based frameworks to address learner variability in higher education and reduce barriers for all at the point of delivery. AHEAD recommends that the HEA commission the development of a national charter for Universal Design in higher education in collaboration with the sector based on a model similar to Athena Swan, where institutions would apply for recognition based on a range of indicators and gain eligibility for EPA, HRB, IRC and SFI funding calls upon recognition.

2. HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIs) SHOULD INCREASE LEVELS OF RESOURCING TO DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES TO ENSURE QUALITY AND SUPPORT A WHOLE COLLEGE APPROACH TO INCLUSION

To be truly inclusive of students with disabilities and promote the mainstreaming of support to students in line with the goals of the UNCRPD, HEIs must implement Universal Design and UDL for all students, and provide high quality individual supports for those in need of them. Support services need to be sufficiently resourced to both engage in delivering quality-assured reasonable accommodations, and to collaborate across campus and promote more inclusive practice in the mainstream delivery of programmes and services underpinned by the principles of UDL.

The 45% increase in number of students per disability support staff member in the last 8 years reported in this research, shows that resourcing in these services has not kept pace with the growing number of students who need support. The 85% increase in the number of students per learning support staff member is of equal concern.

AHEAD recommends that the HEA increase the weighting for access in the next iteration of the Recurring Grant Allocation Model in order to bolster the resourcing of disability and access services and place more emphasis on inclusion in the funding model.

3. SET NATIONAL TARGETS FOR THE PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN POST-GRADUATE STUDY.

Students with disabilities are significantly underrepresented in postgraduate study, a consistent trend in AHEAD research, with just 2.5% of the postgraduate student population registered with disability support services in 2019/20, in comparison to 7.2% of the undergraduate population.

National targets set within the National Access Plan around general participation of students with disabilities in higher education have proven to be very successful in driving participation at an undergraduate level, but this has not been replicated at postgraduate level. This highlights the need for specific targets around postgraduate participation to be set within the next iteration of the National Access Plan.

4. PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR PART-TIME LEARNERS THROUGH SUSI AND RECOGNISE THE ADDED COST OF DISABILITY IN THE STUDENT GRANT.

Part-time learning offers a very suitable pathway for many students with disabilities to manage the impact of their disability and continue learning. However, students with disabilities are significantly underrepresented in part-time study, a consistent trend in AHEAD research, with just 1.3% of the part-time student population registered with disability support services in comparison to 7.8% of the full-time population in 2019/20.

Opening eligibility for SUSI (student universal support Ireland) to part-time learners would remove a significant barrier to participation for individuals who may otherwise be unable to engage with further and higher education courses. The opening of eligibility for the Fund for Students with Disabilities to cover the cost of supports for part-time learners in recent years recognised the underrepresentation in this mode of study, and there is a need for SUSI to mirror that in order to achieve higher participation of students with disabilities in part-time study. SUSI grant levels awarded could be equitably awarded on a pro rata basis, linked to academic credits or other tangible measures.

Equally, the added cost of living and learning with a disability should be recognised in the redevelopment of SUSI by the Department of Further and Higher Education. Currently, in determining the eligibility of individuals and the level of grant awarded, SUSI examines household income, but does not consider the impact of disability and the proven additional outgoing expenditure of living with a disability.

Cullinan and Lyons (2015) estimated the added cost of living with a disability to be an average of €207 per week (with a higher range estimate of €276), totalling an average of more than €10,000 a year. For students, these additional costs incurred may include medical and social care service costs, the higher cost of low availability accessible housing, off-campus professional counselling services, specialised diets and increased transport costs. It is imperative that the state recognise these added costs, as well as the decreased opportunities for supplemental employment, and provide additional support to achieve equity of access in all modes of higher education study.

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Appendices

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

Institution Name	Total Students with Disabilities	Students with Disabilities as a % of Total Institution Population
AIT	405	6.7%
CIT	892	7.1%
DCU	901	5.2%
DKIT	263	5.3%
ITC	287	3.3%
ITS	315	3%
ITTRA	291	8.6%
LIT	578	9.9%
LYIT	321	7.5%
MIC	182	3.6%
MIE	95	8.3%
MU	970	7%
NCAD	131	10.4%
NCI	233	3.8%
NUIG	1183	6%
RCSI	139	3.5%
St Angela's	86	10.5%
TCD	1777	9.4%
TuD	1725	5.7%
UCC	1646	7.3%
UCD	1899	6.4%
UL	943	6%
WIT	584	6.3%

Appendix 2 - Fields of Study

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

Generic programmes and qualifications

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

Education

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

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

Arts and Humanities

- Arts not further defined or elsewhere classified
- Audio-visual techniques and media production
- Audio-visual techniques and media production
- Fashion, interior and industrial design
- Fine arts
- Handicrafts
- Music and performing arts
- Humanities (except languages) not further defined or elsewhere classified
- Religion and theology
- History and archaeology
- History
- Philosophy and ethics

- Languages not further defined or elsewhere classified
- Language acquisition
- Literature and linguistics
- Inter-disciplinary programmes and qualifications involving arts and humanities

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

Social Sciences, Journalism and Information

- Social and behavioural sciences not further defined or elsewhere classified
- Economics
- Political sciences and civics
- Psychology
- Sociology and cultural studies
- Journalism and information not further defined or elsewhere classified
- Journalism and reporting
- Library, information and archival studies
- Inter-disciplinary programmes and qualifications involving social sciences, journalism and information

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

Business, Administration and Law

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

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

Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics

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

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

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)

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

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

Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction

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

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

Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary

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

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

Health and Welfare

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

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

Services

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

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

Appendix 3 - Inside the Service Comments

Comments from responding institutions relating to the question detailing numbers of disability and learning support staff they have employed in 2019/20. Any information which may identify a particular institution has been redacted since these comments were agreed to be reproduced anonymously;

“Several staff are working 0.5 days per week.”

“I have included my OT’s in the first block. Any learning supports students” required is provided via the general student learning service.”

“For readers, 10 are physical and 257 are using reading pens”

“The stated 1.8 disability staff would not be accurate as the office staff also administers support for the HEAR students.”

“1 Disability Officer, 1 Access Officer - two separate offices. Two learning Support Tutors for one-to-one assistance for students registered with Disability Service, one person works 2 days Mon & Tues, and the other 3 days Wed - Fri.”

“We have a number of learning support staff. Learning support staff may for example work 2 days a week over 24 weeks of the academic year that equates to 2 WTE staff over a full academic year.”

Appendix 4 - On the Ground Comments to Question 1

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

Comments from respondents relating to whether they considered they have institutional backing to collaborate with other departments on inclusive practice and whether they believed they had sufficient resources to carry this out.

Any information which may identify a particular institution has been redacted since these comments were agreed to be reproduced anonymously.

- “The first question probably cannot be answered by a yes or no. I believe some students with disabilities were more adversely affected than their peers during COVID 19, particularly students who work well with daily routines, and within the structure of university life (for example some students with an ASD diagnosis). Some students noted finding the change to remote learning and remote exams difficult because they have learning strategies or learning preferences which no longer applied. For example, some students chose modules based on the type of assessment offered in the module, as they often perform better in these assessments. However, in some cases an alternative assessment was assigned during COVID 19 university closures, and some students with disabilities felt the alternative assessment would put them at a disadvantage.

However, remote learning also offered some advantages to some students with disabilities. Not having to travel to a physical campus was in some cases beneficial, to students with physical disabilities or significant on-going illnesses for instance. Remote learning also saw an increase in recorded lectures which could be assessed several times and at times which suited the student. This flexible learning was certainly beneficial to students with specific learning difficulties, or where attention or fatigue may feature as a part of their disability.

It is important to note that students from all backgrounds experienced remote learning differently, making it difficult to conclude if students with disabilities were more or less affected than their peers. Any student could have experienced increased stress, illness, or grief during this time. Any student could have experienced loss of a job or increased financial hardship during this difficult economic time. Additionally, many students were now studying in a new environment, with the possible added pressure of additional caring roles.

I hope students will be able to experience a more flexible learning environment going forward, such as being able to access lectures at a time that suits them and review those lectures in their own time. This would not only be of benefit to students with disabilities but the university community as a whole. During remote learning some supports were no longer required such as alternative exam locations, and some needed to be changed slightly for instance need for slightly different AT.”

- “There was a lot of communication with students and staff were available to meet students virtually to address. How we engage with students will change as the majority of our interaction will most likely be online. The supports put in place will depend on the mode of delivery for courses and as that is still not finalised we cannot be 100% sure but the reasonable accommodations put in place for 20/21 could be very different than those in place for 19/20.”
- “Yes. Students were negatively affected due to closure of university in the following ways: change of assessments format e.g. from timed exam to written assessment, isolation from peers and study partners, change of living situations. Reliance for students on technology including Assistive Technology. Reduced motivation due to working alone. Increase in mental health and anxiety. Closure of the university meant limited access to books and study space, including AT area. It was more difficult in providing the same level of support in an online environment.”
- “Needs assessments will need to be carried out remotely, either by video or phone call. Students requiring personal assistants to access course material or notetaking will need to be delivered remotely and this becomes more challenging in how to give PA access to the online learning materials. It will be more challenging and logistically more difficult to provide AT support to students remotely. Students may find it more difficult and are concerned about accessing books and resources from the library. Many students may find it very difficult to keep engaged in their course if most of their learning is done online.”

- “Students were well accommodated in COVID-19 period and their needs were adapted in the online teaching and assessment. It did identify some issues that need to be addressed and work is underway to ensure accessibility is improved. Students produced a video outlining issues positive and negative for online way of working.”
- “Changes will be required in the blended way of working - situation isn’t fully clear. Online resources for students and staff have been added to college website to help both deal with adapting to new way of working. Accessibility and inclusion has gone up the agenda and there is good engagement with all areas implementing teaching and technology.”
- “The answer of Yes was provided as survey feedback and exam results show a detrimental impact for a number of students with disabilities. However, the reality is more nuanced. For a proportion of students with disabilities, the move to remotely study has been an improved experience compared to their previous position. Some students who experience fatigue, or with mobility difficulties, or with mental health concerns or who have accessibility issues with materials have found that they are better suited to the online learning environment. There is the potential for remote learning to be the most beneficial for students with disabilities.”
- “The office has completely changed how we provide supports for students with disabilities. Everything from the team ethos, to the provision of remote advisory supports, to the advice required by academics on accessibility concerns and providing examination supports, to the level of engagement with students at key points, to the increased use of technology across the board for communicating, interacting, tracking, training and reporting, The office is excited to implement new approaches in supporting students with disabilities, recognising that the changes are precipitated by the pandemic but not driven by it.”
- “Students with our service continued to engage with us via Zoom during the college closure. They reported increase anxiety and uncertainty about the future. Many stated that they were now thinking of doing a PG as they were uncertain about the job situation.”

- “The suddenness of the change was difficult for some students because of the change in how modules were assessed. The essay and project type assessment did not suit everyone. Students sought out technology like Grammarly from DSS to address these issues. Some cohorts of students find change difficult and struggled to motivate themselves to complete assignments. The move to online learning requires high levels of independent learning and motivation. Students felt isolated and this was not helpful. The move to online learning did suit some students and shows that choice is important going forward. In general, there is very little negative feedback from students.”

- “All services will change so the whole experience for students will be very different. Not having face to face contact will affect the relationship building. Building rapport is really important and this will be more difficult to do. Online supports may not suit everyone and some supports may be difficult to provide online. It may be difficult to provide training for high needs students with medical conditions. Some students may not be in a position to ever come on campus. Staff roles may change as face to face contact is reduced. Supports may depend on how academic departments support students, this could be positive or negative. Students might have different expectations. Online support resources will be available to support students. There was not as many technology related problems as anticipated. The same or very similar supports can be provided but the context is much more difficult to navigate.”

- “Students with disabilities liked that all the lectures were online and the fact that more supports were available to the student body. The exam format at the end of semester 2 suited most students better. We now have a better range of support structures in place moving forward, we will now have both virtual and face to face options for students, which should make it easier to access supports for students. Even our additional learning support services were able to move online and this is something that we will continue to offer once COVID restrictions are ended, if a student feels that this method would suit better. It must be noted that all our students are supplied with a laptop on entry so no student had difficulty accessing their lecture notes or materials.”

- “From the earliest stages of the Covid19 emergency, the Disability Support Services was in touch with all registered students via email to encourage engagement and to reassure them that although the university campus was closed our support services would continue to support them remotely.

Working with vulnerable groups of students, there was a sense of positivity where some students embraced the change to eLearning/online assessments and once they received clear communication as to what was expected of them they felt back in control. Remote learning has been beneficial for some students due to their disability and gives them greater opportunities to study in the comfort of their home without having to travel and use public transport etc.

On the other hand some of our students were met with a number of challenges:

- Some students did not have access to high speed internet. Anyone that did not have access to the internet and an appropriate device, were at an immediate disadvantage.
- Others were sharing one device in their household where a number of people in that household needed to use it.
- Students with financial difficulties where they are unable to work added additional stress some not having enough money for basis essentials.
- Other students are living in unstable home environments, (e.g. students sharing household with a large number of others, or some living in hostels).
- Students who are parents/some are guardians of younger siblings with additional responsibilities during COVID 19
- Some students identified that lack of structure to their day was difficult”

- “Usual 1-1 sessions will have to move online. AT training will have to be reimagined, will probably through a blended method with very short in-person sessions followed up by remote training. This will take longer than usual and we cannot know yet whether it will be effective. Genuinely concerned for students that require in-person sessions. Student requirement for better quality technology, laptops and internet connections will require us to invest more in provision of these to students so that they can support AT applications being used.”
- “It has suited some students and a majority have indicated a positive experience. But some categories like SLD/DCD had found the increase in workload and change from exams to assignments created pressure - especially combined with the difficulties they have with managing and organising skills. Live classes not accessible/being recorded and a lot of internet issues made this more difficult. Group work difficulties were something that students found very challenging across the categories.”
- “In terms of delivering supports and meetings online, and connecting with the students remotely. Moving online has really pushed the agenda of the DSS in many ways (UDL, online exams, MCQ”s, use of/access to AT, notes online, recorded lecturers etc.) but there is a long way to go. We are concerned about the skills new students will have in September and the steep learning curve they will have in order to access their course, as well as access to suitable hardware/software/wifi to fully engage with their course/supports.”
- “Some students preferred to be at home and learning at home and remote assessment suited them. In our survey of DS students 55% of those who replied to the survey said they would prefer to be on campus.”
- “We envisage that more students will use computers as a reasonable accommodation in exams, in favour of more traditional supports such as scribes. More students will be inclined to use AT such as reading software for assignments. Online learning support will be used on a regular basis.”

- “While we are aware of some students with disabilities whose ability to study remotely was severely impacted during the lockdown, we are also aware of students who appeared to manage the transition without undue difficulty. We are equally aware that some of their fellow students were also severely impacted and some appeared to manage the transition without undue difficulty. Yes, we anticipate that the nature of our engagement with students will be significantly altered due to social distancing and health requirements. All components of service delivery will need to be redesigned in response to the emerging situation and in light of institute guidelines.”
- “Students with disabilities, especially those with ASD, struggled to work remotely without the structure of college. A number of students had poor/no Wi-Fi. I feel that face-to-face, one-to-one interactions are very important in the transition to 3rd level for students with disabilities and I fear that this is going to be limited in September. I’m also concerned about how ESW’s are going to fulfil their role.”

Thank you

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

**Tel: (01) 7164396
Email: ahead@ahead.ie**

AHEAD Educational Press
East Hall UCD
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Blackrock, Co. Dublin

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Email: ahead@ahead.ie

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