**Immediate Release**

**NUMBERS OF BLIND AND DEAF STUDENTS IN THIRD LEVEL CONTINUES TO DECLINE SAYS NEW AHEAD REPORT**

***While the Overall Numbers of Third Level Students with Disabilities are Rising, the Numbers with Sensory Disabilities are Falling***

**Monday 28th January, Dublin** – A new report released today by the Association for Higher Education Access & Disability (AHEAD) on the “Participation Rates of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education for the Academic Year 2011/12” reveals that while the overall numbers of students with disabilities participating has risen 15% year on year since 2010/11, the numbers of students with sensory disabilities participating has actually declined.

Ann Heelan, Executive Director of AHEAD said “students who have visual impairments are four times less likely than other students to make it through the second level system to higher education. These are bright, able students who in this age of e-books and virtual learning environments should have the same opportunities as other school leavers to follow the career path of their choice. There is an urgent need to review how these children are included in mainstream education and how they engage with technology.”

The report also highlights the severe under-representation of students with disabilities on part time courses. While students with disabilities make up almost 5% of the full time student population, they represent less than 1% of the part time population.

Ms Heelan elaborated: “A recent CSO report says that people with disabilities are only half as likely to be in work as other adults and are more likely to experience discrimination. In order to break that persistent cycle of unemployment, people with disabilities must be given the same opportunities to up-skill and retrain as anyone else and equal access to part-time courses is vital. Crucially, the provision of funding for educational supports on these courses is paramount in ensuring that students with disabilities can access them.”

The report identified almost 8000 students with disabilities in the responding institutions, representing 4% of the total student population.

**ENDS**

**NOTE TO EDITOR**

[Download the full report here>>](http://www.ahead.ie/userfiles/file/PR_2012.pdf)

AHEAD has been tracking this data since 1993/94, and on an annual basis since 2008/09.

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**About AHEAD**

AHEAD, the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability is an independent non-profit organisation working to promote full access to and participation in further and higher education for students with disabilities and to enhance their employment prospects on graduation.