

Members Newsletter

President Michael D Higgins calls for assisted citizenship at the Better Options Fair

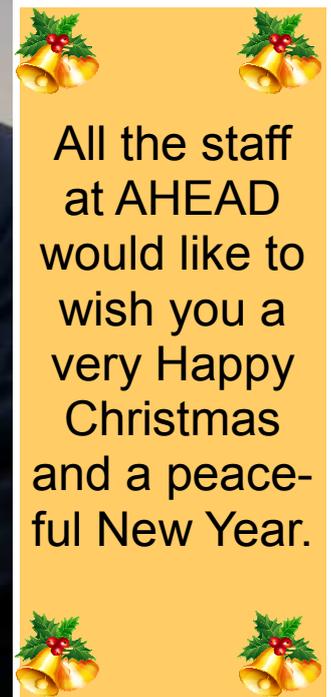


Lorraine Gallagher (Information & Training Officer, AHEAD) presents President Higgins with an original piece of art from her personal collection, with Ann Heelan (Director, AHEAD).

By Ann Heelan, Director

At the recent Better Options Fair, held in NCAD on the 30th November, President Michael D Higgins called for a society in which everyone is included, one in which we have assisted citizenship which ensures that people with disabilities can realize their potential just the same as anyone else.

It is up to us all, he said to create the type of society we want to live in, one in which all citizens are valued and their creative talents appreciated. His message struck a particular chord with students probably because they reacted very positively to his call for a strong community. Our values need to embrace the collective, to be more than about the individual, the me, me, me view of life. It is instead about an inclusive community, where people look out for each other, where young people are concerned for older people and older people are anxious not about themselves, but about employment for younger people.



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Spotlight on DCU



Service Improvement with Cooperative Learning

On Monday 27th June 2011 at the School of Nursing and Human Sciences, Dublin City University twelve students celebrated their achievement of successfully completing a module entitled Service Improvement with Cooperative Learning. This module draws teams of individuals together to work on projects specifically focused on improving and changing services for people with intellectual disability. Four teams associated with St Michael's House, L'Arche Dublin, Saint John of God Kildare Services and SOS Kilkenny came together to celebrate and receive their certificates.

The celebration began with the Head of School, Ms Catherine McGonagle welcoming the students, their families and friends and representatives from the many services and organisations involved. She spoke of the commitment of each student and congratulated them on their achievement and the importance of continuing their projects within the services. On behalf of the students, Mags Holohan spoke of her experience of undertaking the module at DCU and expressing her wish to engage in further similar opportunities. Deirdre Corby the module coordinator congratulated the students and also took the opportunity to thank all those who had been involved in the development and continued support of the module. Deirdre highlighted the role of the mentors from each service who provided support for the teams within each service. Mr David Kenefick the Deputy CEO from St Michael's House also congratulated the students and spoke of the commitment of St Michael's House to this project and the cooperative learning methodology. In particular, he commented on the strength of having a team of three individuals linked together from one service but representing the different perspectives of staff member, service user and family member or carer. He highlighted the opportunity for all three people to study and work together on an equal footing as a unique element of this module and the impact of the four projects showed how this method can work.

The team from Saint John of God Kildare Services then presented their project which made a valuable contribution to service change. Their Saoirse project aims to provide a flexible extended Day Service and give the opportunity to Service Users to socialise in the community in "Real Time". It will also support people to achieve personal goals and continue to foster links with key workers from both Day & Residential services. The team continue to work on their project and all agreed that the module had given them the opportunity to effect change and provide new opportunities for people who use the service. They extended thanks to their mentor who provided valuable support to this initiative.

Catherine McGonagle then presented each student with a Certificate to mark their achievement of completing an approved DCU module at level 8 using cooperative learning and welcomed everyone to the Atrium in the School of Nursing and Human Sciences for refreshments.

Further information on this module can be obtained by contacting Deirdre Corby on 01 7008524 or by email at Deirdre.corby@dcu.ie.

Spotlight on Students



Capping numbers is a short sighted measure

A cap on student numbers would have disastrous consequences for vulnerable student cohorts. Since the early 1990s we have seen how the numbers of students with disabilities attending higher education institutions has increased substantially, from about 450- 7000. This is a testament to the great work of organizations such as AHEAD. Their work is certainly paying dividends.

In recent weeks the funding crisis in higher education has been a topic of much comment and discussion nationwide. The report* of the Higher Education Authority to the Minister for Education, has suggested that one way of dealing with the funding crisis would be to introduce a cap on student numbers.

The Union of Students in Ireland (USI) has warned against such short sighted measures as it would drastically impact on Ireland's road to recovery. We are very lucky in Ireland to have a participation rate of 60% of second level students going on to third level. This compares very favorably with our colleagues in the UK where the average is 40%.

If a cap were to be introduced this would put an added pressure on Leaving Certificate students as CAO points are sure to rise as the supply of college places reduces.

As CAO points increase it is vulnerable student groups such as students with disabilities that will be affected the most, as they aim to compete with their peers for limited places. It should be said that a cap on student numbers may serve to increase a divide which had been narrowing between the traditional and nontraditional student.

I am delighted to say that I am a recent graduate with a disability. I have firsthand experience of navigating the higher education system as a student with a disability. Certainly my experience at third level has been extremely positive and I firmly believe education is the key for all people with disabilities to lead a fulfilling and successful life.

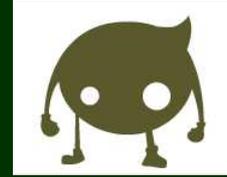
The development of the DARE (Disability Access Route to Higher Education) Programme shows that efforts have been made to ensure that students with disabilities are given the best possible chance to go on to higher education in Ireland today.

Recently I was privileged to attend the AHEAD Better Options Fair, where President Higgins addressed the attendees. This event aims to encourage students with disabilities to apply to college. I was encouraged and delighted to see the large numbers in attendance and to see the excitement and enthusiasm with which all those prospective college students embraced the idea of higher education, and prospect of the new exciting chapter that college life offers.

Over the past ten years great strides have been made in the area of higher education for students with disabilities. Access Offices, Disability Support Services and most importantly students themselves recognize that a lot has been achieved but it's still a work in progress. However a cap in student numbers would only serve to undo the great work that has already been accomplished, as student with disabilities will struggle to access higher education.

*Read the recent HEA Sustainability Report here: <http://bit.ly/v9SNNS>

Spotlight on AHEAD



Talking to Employers — Talking to Students

Building the Future was a unique one day talk to business, careers fair for students and graduates with disabilities. It was hosted by Bank of Ireland in their Learning Zone in Dublin on the 11th November 2011, and was supported by 13 companies. Over 40 staff from **Bank of Ireland, An Post, Abbott Ireland, ESB, Bord Gais, Google, Sigmar Recruitment, Citi, Deloitte, Irish Dairy Board, Covidien, Enterprise Rent-a-Car and the UCD School of Nursing** attended throughout the course of the day. There were employer stands, mock interviews, CV reviews and workshops on disclosure, considering self employment, minding your mental health and networking.

Roberto Magliocco of Citi captured the feedback of employers perfectly when he gave us this perspective:

“We found the event to be highly beneficial. From a recruitment perspective it gave us the opportunity to meet with a wide selection of graduates with a vast array of skill sets, many of which would complement those required for a successful career within financial services. This open forum gave us the opportunity to converse with graduates in an informal setting, allowing us to offer advice in terms of interview skills, CV writing techniques and general career guidance. I feel this event was well organised, managed in an extremely efficient and effective manner and offered value to both graduates and participating companies alike. We thank you for allowing Citi the opportunity to form part of this event and look forward to supporting further sessions into the future.”

Students maximized the event and the feedback has been very positive:

“I benefited from the very positive atmosphere and wearing work clothes, as simple as that sounds, and the fact that it gave me hope that I would work again in a supportive environment”

“Both the CV doctor and mock interview were excellent. Thank you for providing such a useful day. “

We hope to run this event again in 2012 and if you are interested in finding out more, please do not hesitate to contact us by emailing getahead@ahead.ie.

Participation of Students with Disabilities in Third Level Continues to Rise

Research recently carried out by AHEAD states that despite current competition for college places, the number of students with disabilities in third level education continues to rise. AHEAD carries out this research annually and the recently published report covering the 2010/11 academic year indicates that there are now almost 7,000 students with disabilities participating in third level education. This number has risen seven fold since AHEAD records began in 1993/94, has almost doubled in the last five years and has risen 10% since last year alone. Students with disabilities now make up 3.9% of the total student population and if we look to the UK, where 4.7% of all full time undergraduates receive the Disabled Student's Allowance and 7.2% of first year students declare themselves (no documentation requested) as having a disability on registration, that percentage figure looks set to increase again in the coming years.

While there are encouraging signs in the report that our third level institutions are becoming more inclusive and that overall participation is widening, it is also clear that students with sensory disabilities are under-represented in third level. While we have seen a 92% rise in the total number of students with disabilities in third level education in the last five years, the number of blind/visually impaired students has only risen 45% in the same period, while the number of deaf/hard of hearing students has risen just 22%.

You can download the full report for €2 from our online shop – www.ahead.ie/shop.

New Members

AHEAD are delighted to welcome both **Dublin Business School & Teagasc** as members for the coming year. A full list of our members is available here: <http://www.ahead.ie/members.php>

Call for Papers

AHEAD Annual Conference, 15th March 2012, Dublin Castle

Theme: Access to teacher training for students with disabilities, enhancing professional experiences.

Keynote Speaker: Professor Paul Connolly, Queens University Belfast.

AHEAD in collaboration with the Department of Education & Skills, the HEA and key stakeholders will host a conference on 15th March 2012 on "Access to Teacher Training for Students with Disabilities". Teaching is a great profession and the aim of the event is to hear from teachers with disabilities and to consider the diversity of experience and knowledge they bring into education.

Teaching is changing and recognises the benefits of diversity in the classroom. This also applies to teachers with disabilities who bring a wealth of skill, technology and understanding of children with disabilities into teaching. However the nature of some student's disability prompts concerns about their ability to meet program outcomes and registration criteria. The time is right to tackle the challenges faced by colleges and students with disability in accessing teaching. The aim of the day will be to share knowledge about innovations in teaching, to review best practice nationally and internationally and to look at access in terms of evolving changes in the profession of teaching. Such discussion should result in a clearer understanding and consistent approach to access across the sectors.

This event is aimed primarily at teacher training providers at all levels, at teachers and inspectors in supervisory roles and will appeal to policy makers, professional bodies, career advisors and student teachers.

Are you interested in presenting a paper to add to the discussion?

If so please send a 300 word abstract by 14th January 2012 to Ann Heelan at ahead@ahead.ie

Query Corner

My son Sean has dyslexia and is studying for his Junior Certificate. He was assessed by an educational psychologist when he was 12 years old and has an exemption from Irish and French. Will he still be able to go to third level?

Most colleges will consider applications from students with dyslexia seeking an exemption from Irish and the third language requirement. Such applications are considered on an individual basis, but generally, if a student has had an exemption during post-primary education, then they are likely to be exempted from Irish and a third language as a college entry requirement. The student applying for a third-level course through the Central Applications Office (CAO) should send a copy of the exemption certificate with their CAO application form.

However if your son wishes to study in any of the third level institutions under the umbrella of the National University of Ireland, he must make an application for exemption from Irish and French to the NUI. This can be done at any stage following the completion of his Junior Certificate. The NUI have a stated policy that they are prepared to consider applications, for an exemption from Irish and the third language requirement from students who are certified by a qualified professional as having a significant dyslexic condition. The application must include Sean's DES Certificate of Exemption, signed by the Head of the School/Principal and a professional report from an educational psychologist. Exemption application forms and information about which third level institutions come under the NUI are available from the National University of Ireland website: www.nui.ie

Students seeking a language waiver from Trinity College must apply directly to the Admissions Office. All supporting documentation requested must be included and as with the NUI, students can apply for the waiver once they are in senior cycle up to when they sit the Leaving Certificate.

If Sean is considering applying to any of the institutes of higher education operating the Disability Access Route to Education scheme (DARE), the educational psychologists report must have been carried out within the last 3 years from the time that the student starts college. For more information about DARE check out www.accesscollege.ie

Regardless of any waivers students must meet the minimum entry requirements and any specific course requirements for their chosen area of study. For example, a person interested in studying to become a national school teacher must have the required standard in Irish. Likewise, some courses may have a European language component e.g. business, which is mandatory so it's advisable to check course requirements before applying.

News in Review

- The 50 most influential people in education | <http://bit.ly/psH9Bs>
- Disability fund will meet demand, claims department | <http://bit.ly/uWUp1m>
- Exploding the Lecture | <http://bit.ly/uWSNji>
- A disability that nobody can see | <http://bit.ly/s8l9Qg>
- Disability hate speech has no place anywhere – not even online | <http://bit.ly/uxvekp>
- Adapting adventure to disability | <http://bit.ly/pDzdUI>
- Depression can be a slow ebb | <http://bit.ly/tgeRel>
- Recession had no major effect on workplace equality – study | <http://bit.ly/vDyNmc>
- Advice for job hunting graduates | <http://bit.ly/tRWmNO>

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What do you do on Tuesday?

Have you checked out our weekly TED Talk Tuesday post?

Make sure every Tuesday to go to [Getahead-blog.wordpress.com](http://getahead-blog.wordpress.com)



From L-R: Andrew Blair, Bank of Ireland & Board Member AHEAD, Dermot O Sullivan, Bank of Ireland, Charlotte Cunningham, Student, Brian Mooney, Guidance Counsellor & Irish Times Columnist, Robert Brady, Graduate & John Lonergan, Former Governor of Mountjoy Prison at the GET AHEAD Building the Future Event, held on the 11th November in the Bank of Ireland Learning Zone.



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