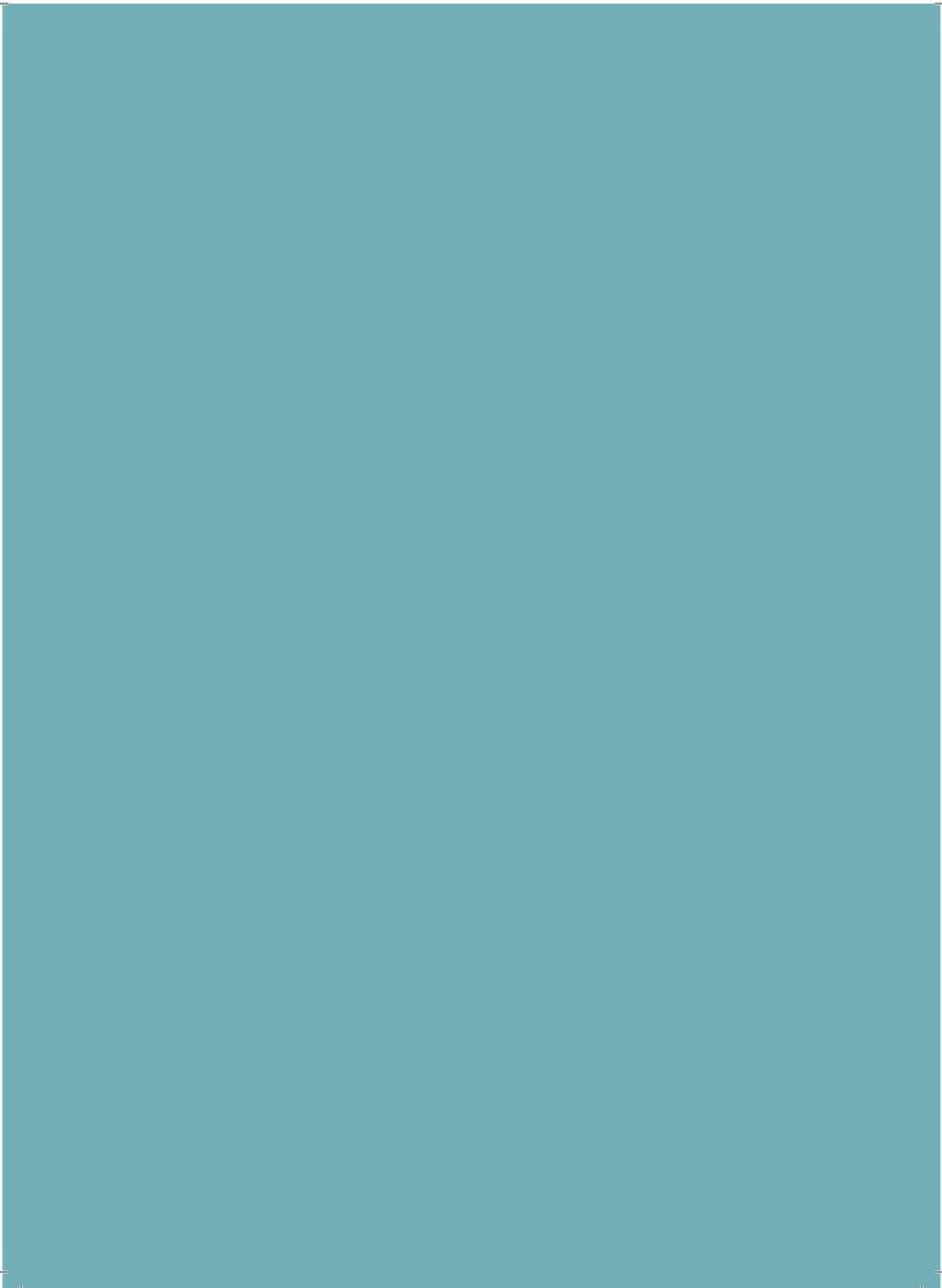


Access Success

A Brief Guide to Accessing Third Level Education for
Students with Disabilities & Specific Learning Difficulties





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This booklet is aimed primarily at students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties. It is also relevant to guidance counsellors, parents and teachers. There are a number of basic queries and issues that frequently arise for students with disabilities and this booklet aims to address these queries from a general perspective.





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Access & Admissions

Routes to College:

- » The standard entry into college is through the CAO (Central Applications Office) which is based on the Leaving Certificate Examination.
- » Attainment of points qualifies the student for the course of their choice.
- » This is the most commonly known way of getting into college but there is an alternative route which is specifically for students with a disability or specific learning difficulty called the Supplementary Admissions Route.

Supplementary Admission Route recognises that due to the impact of the student's disability, they may have been put at an educational disadvantage. Applying to college through this route may allow the student to enter a course below the standard CAO points requirement.

However, the supplementary admission entry criteria varies from one college to another. For example, in some colleges it is within 15% below the mandatory points, while some operate quota systems and in others, it is decided on an individual basis.

The student must attain the minimum core subject entry requirements for their chosen course unless they have an approved language exemption: e.g. Irish.

But be advised, a language waiver is not automatically accepted by colleges participating in this scheme. The student must apply directly to Trinity College Dublin and the National University of Ireland.

How does a student with a disability or specific learning difficulty apply for college under the Supplementary Admission Route?

- » Students who complete the CAO in hard copy should indicate that they have a disability or medical condition by ticking the box asking if they have a Disability/Specific Learning Difficulty on the first page.
- » They will receive a Supplementary Information Form from the CAO, which must be completed and returned with all the supporting documentation to the CAO office by March – (check closing date on CAO website).
- » Students who complete the CAO form online should indicate that they have a disability or medical condition by ticking the box asking if they have a Disability/Specific Learning Difficulty on the first page.
- » They should then follow the link to the **Supplementary Information Form (SIF)**, which must be completed and returned with all the supporting documentation to the CAO office by March – (check closing date on CAO website).

- » The CAO will then circulate the supplementary information form to the colleges the student has applied to which operate this alternative admissions procedure.
- » Offers under this scheme are made to applicants as part of the CAO first and second round offers.
- » The student will still be considered for this scheme if they use the change of mind form or make a late application. However, the student must still submit the supplementary information form by the date specified.

Mature Applicants:

Mature applicants are not considered under the Supplementary Admission Route. Contact individual colleges for mature applicant information.

Colleges who participate in the Supplementary Admission Route:

- » Athlone Institute of Technology
- » Dublin City University
- » Dublin Institute of Technology
- » National College of Ireland

- » National University of Ireland Galway
- » National University of Ireland Maynooth
- » Trinity College Dublin
- » University College Cork
- » University College Dublin
- » University of Limerick

What information is required on the Supplementary Information Form?

- » Details of the students disability/specific learning difficulty and its impact on their education.
- » Supports received in secondary school.
- » Likely supports required in higher education.
- » An academic record from secondary school.
- » Verification of disability from a medical consultant.
- » Students with a specific learning difficulty must include an educational psychologist report undertaken within the last three years.

Reasons why the student should inform third level institutions about their disability or specific learning difficulty:

- » This helps third level colleges to plan ahead for the support needs of their students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties.
- » In order for the student to carry out their studies and to take part in college activities they may require alternative methods to assist in their education.
- » Upon registration, students with disabilities/specific learning difficulties are advised to contact the Disability Support Service or Access Officer in their college to discuss any equipment or services they may require to enable them to participate fully on their course. The disability or access officer will carry out a **Needs Assessment** and then submit an application to the **Fund for Students with Disabilities** on the student's behalf, which is used to pay for equipment and/or supports that have been identified as necessary.
- » Whether or not the student chooses to disclose their disability is entirely up to the individual student. However, if the student chooses not to disclose they will not be able to avail of the services provided by the *Disability Supports Service in college.

*see section on disability support services

Getting Orientated!

A student with a mobility or sensory impairment should arrange for an orientation prior to the start of term. This will enable them to become familiar with routes to and from lectures, the canteen, the library, the student union offices, etc.

A student requiring wheelchair access should make direct contact with the college(s) of their choice to check how accessible the buildings are, and to give the college an opportunity to make the necessary modifications in time. Few, if any, of the Irish colleges are fully wheelchair accessible but efforts are being made by individual colleges to address this problem.

Disability Support Services

The aim of the disability support service is to provide support for the student during their time at college and to facilitate faculties implementing the institution's disability policy.

The Disability Support office is concerned with the following areas:

- » Assisting with admissions.
- » Carrying out needs assessments to identify the support needs of students with disabilities/or specific learning difficulties.
- » Organising assistive technology.
- » Co-ordinating learning support services.
- » Liaising with the examinations office.

For further information about each third level institution's specific services contact the Disability or Access Office of the institution in question.

Assistive Technology

Assistive technology is an umbrella term for any device, piece of equipment, system, or software that allows an individual to perform a task they would otherwise be unable to do, or increases the ease and safety with which the task can be performed. Some assistive technology is specifically designed to support people with disabilities or impairments in their everyday tasks.

In college, Assistive Technology is usually used by students with disabilities or specific learning difficulties to support independent learning and to increase the accessibility of materials. Some examples of assistive technology include voice recognition systems, voice synthesis, Braille embossing, alternative computer input devices (track-balls, switches, etc), SpeedText and tape recorders.

If the student is using a new piece of assistive technology or computer software package it is important that they receive adequate training from the designated staff in the college.

Learning Support Service

This service helps students to develop learning strategies to assist them in their studies. It does this through a variety of courses, workshops and other programs.

These sessions are not about academic support. At third level the students are in control of their own learning. The role of the learning support tutor is to facilitate the student to develop independent learning skills and strategies to enable them to cope with the demands of progressing through their course work.

Examples of services include:

- » Study skills
- » Tutor support
- » Reading techniques
- » Research skills
- » Note-taking
- » Memory techniques
- » Essay writing
- » Revision tips
- » Time management
- » Examination preparation

Get to grips with studying at third level, check out the study skills website [Quest for Learning](http://www.questforlearning.org) on www.questforlearning.org

Examination Facilities

Examinations are central to the academic process and students with disabilities are encouraged to request appropriate supports and arrangements for the examinations at the beginning of each academic year.

Students with a disability or specific learning difficulty can access the following facilities during examinations if they are deemed necessary:

- » Extra time.
- » Transcription of examinations.
- » Enlarged examination papers.
- » Brailled examination papers.
- » Tape recording of examinations.
- » Use of assistive technology.
- » Provision of individual rooms.
- » Sitting examinations in an alternative centre, such as a hospital.
- » Sign language interpreters / Personal Assistance - the use of any specific personnel must be approved by the institution prior to the examination.

To avail of any support services the student will have to negotiate with lecturers, tutors and the disability/access officer in the college.

It is the student's responsibility to apply well in advance to the appropriate college authority (Disability/Access Officer or Examination Office) for provision of facilities or supports as they may involve administrative and timetabling changes.

Students must have adequate working practice in any facility which they request to use in the examination for example, assistive technology. This is to safeguard against delays and errors during the examination.

Funding

Main sources of financial assistance at third level

Fund for students with disabilities

- » This fund enables colleges to provide specialised equipment and support services for students with a disability or specific learning difficulty.
- » The fund is administered by the Higher Education Authority.
- » Support Services can include: Personal assistants, Sign Language Interpreters, SpeedText Operators, photocopying, additional tuition and learning support.
- » Specialised equipment can include: Tape recorders, radio aids, computer software e.g. JAWS, Text Help Gold.
- » The application to the fund is made by the Disability or Access Office and the form must be signed by both the student and the Access/Disability service in the third level institution.
- » No money will go directly to the student and it cannot be used to cover other costs such as food, books or study materials.

- » This fund is only available to students attending full-time third level courses (including Fetac level 5 or above).

Any equipment provided remains the property of the third level institution.

Information provided by the student with a disability will be treated as strictly confidential and is subject to the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Higher education grants for third level

- » These grants are administered by local authorities and are financed by the Department of Education and Science under the management of the Higher Education Authority.
- » The grants are given for full-time education at third level and can cover post-graduate studies as well as primary degrees.
- » These grants are not specifically for students with a disability but can be availed of by them.
- » The grants are means tested. The amount given depends on where the student lives in relation to the third level institution, i.e.

the amount differs if you live within or outside a 15 mile radius of the college.

- » As well as full fees being paid, a maintenance allowance is also given.
- » Application should be made to the Local Authority e.g. Dublin City Council.

Back to Education Allowance Scheme

This funding scheme is authorised by the Department of Social and Family Affairs. To avail of the Back to Education Scheme students must be registered on a full time course and have been in receipt of a disability benefit for the previous six months.

This payment is the same amount as the Disability Allowance but can include:

- » A once-a-year cost of education payment at the start of the academic year.
- » Students can work while on the scheme without it affecting their payment.

Students should contact their local Citizens Information Centre or Social Welfare Office for more information.

Student Assistance Fund

Students with a disability can also apply to the Student's Assistance Fund while attending third level, this fund is administered by the Department of Education and Science under the auspices of the Higher Education Authority. Eligibility is subject to a means test.

For more information about funding at third level check out the following website: www.studentfinance.ie

Inclusive Education

Current education legislation and how it affects the student's rights at college

The Education Act (1998) is concerned with promoting equality in our educational system. According to this Act, educational institutions must provide students with a disability or learning difficulty with adequate resources, accommodations and supports to meet their educational needs.

Educational institutions must establish and maintain an admissions policy that provides for maximum accessibility within education.

The Equal Status Act (2000) outlines specific provisions for education known as Reasonable Accommodation.

A reasonable accommodation can be any means of providing special treatment or facilities if, without such accommodations it would be impossible or unduly difficult for the person to avail of the service provided by the educational establishment. (Section 4)

However, the act goes on to state that the service provider (educational establishment) will not have to provide that accommodation if it gives rise to more than a 'nominal cost'.

Where funding is available to meet the costs of accommodations required, such as the Special Fund for Students with Disabilities in third level, then the educational institution is obliged to pursue them in addition to covering any other costs up to a 'nominal level' which will be defined through case law.

Reasonable accommodation ensures that students with a disability:

- » Are not hindered by their disability, enabling them to compete on an equal basis with other students.
- » Enjoy equal access to courses, facilities or benefits provided by the third level institution.

The Disability Act (2004) places a number of statutory obligations on public bodies (which include Higher Education Institutions) to:

- » Provide accessible information.
- » Ensure accessible buildings (Part M compliant by 2015).
- » Ensure access to all elements of college services.

What can the student expect from College?

There is a different approach to learning and teaching in college than at school.

- » The student is expected to work on their own for longer periods, without a tutor in the room to guide them.
- » It is the student's responsibility to ensure that they attend lectures and hand in assignments on time.
- » The student can feel that their study lacks structure. However, it can also be very liberating – giving them more freedom to study in ways that suit them.
- » Taking advantage of this freedom and gaining an understanding of their own learning pattern can help the student to study more effectively.

Teaching methods – These can differ, but at least some of the following can be expected:

- » Lectures provide a general overview of a subject or topic. They can vary in size, length and frequency. Lecturers deliver the material using microphones, overhead projection notes and blackboards. Students are expected to listen, take notes and participate only if invited.

- » Seminars are aimed at developing discussion of topics. Size is generally small to medium with approximately 10-30 participants. A student or a group of students may be asked to open a discussion with a presentation. It is vital to prepare for seminars by completing readings or preparing discussion materials as the student's participation is assessed. Attendance and contribution at seminars often counts towards a final subject mark.
- » Tutorials are delivered in small groups of 5-20 or on an individual basis. They are used to provide feedback on the student's work and facilitate discussion of topics delivered in lectures. Tutorials are rarely of more than an hour's duration and can occur weekly or only once or twice a term.

Making contact with Lecturers

While tutors are often reasonably accessible, it is sometimes more difficult to make contact with a lecturer.

- » Some lecturers are available to speak to students directly after a lecture.
- » Others will request that the student make an appointment to speak in private and at a scheduled hour. The student should adhere to the office hours or visiting hours specified by the lecturer in question.

All departments and even individual lecturers have certain preferences regarding the behaviour of, or contact with students; essay writing styles and assignment presentation. The student needs to be alert and get to know what individual lecturers or departments prefer.

Assessments:

How departments assess learning can vary. Some will base it on coursework or continuous assessment, or by formal exams, while others implement a mixture of methods.

Deadlines and Extensions:

These exist in order to train the student in time management and task completion. It is in the student's interest to adhere to them. In special circumstances, such as illness or bereavement, exceptions may be made but a lecturer is under no obligation to provide such consideration and in some cases, may not be in a position to facilitate requests for consideration.

Due to the impact of the student's disability or specific learning difficulty they may be able to avail of deadline extensions for assignments but need to be aware that this can lead to an accumulation of assignments.

Inclusive Teaching Strategies

Students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties need to be aware of their own learning needs.

First of all, the student needs to register with the Disability Support Service, then make themselves known to their lecturers and discuss their learning needs with them at the beginning of the academic year.

Deaf or hard of hearing students require:

- » The Lecturer to face the group when speaking.
- » Different means of recording notes such as a speedtext operator, sign language interpreter and/or note-taker.
- » Academic staff to directly address the student, not the interpreter or assistant.
- » Prioritised reading lists available in advance so that they have sufficient time to translate material into an accessible format.
- » Copies of lecture notes and/or overheads.
- » Flexibility of assignment deadlines.

Students with visual impairments require:

- » Background noise to be kept to a minimum.
- » Different means of recording notes, such as, cassette recorders, laptops with adaptive technology, Braille and Speak and/or note-takers.
- » Lecture notes available in advance in electronic format.
- » Prioritised reading lists available in advance so that they have sufficient time to translate material into an accessible format.

Students with mobility impairments need to ensure:

- » Ramps and doors are wide enough for easy access.
- » Classrooms, lecture halls and theatre spaces are physically accessible.
- » Laboratory and other workspace equipment can be adapted.
- » Availability of wheelchair accessible toilets.

Students with specific learning difficulties will benefit from:

- » Access to assistive technology.
- » Different means of recording notes, such as, cassette recorders, laptops with adaptive technology, and/or note-takers.

- » Lecture notes available in advance in electronic (alternative) format.
- » Prioritised reading lists available in advance so that they have sufficient time to translate material into an accessible (alternative) format.

Making time for play....

College life is not just about academia, it's also about making new friends. A new student probably won't know any of the other students. Remember, all Freshers are in the same boat! The new student should visit the Students Union office and check out the events calendar. Most colleges have a range of student societies and clubs. Joining one of these is a great way to meet people and make new friends. College can be an exciting but daunting experience but remember, there are many facilities in place to offer support such as, the disability, counselling and medical services.

For further information contact:

AHEAD, The Association for Higher Education Access & Disability
East Hall, UCD, Blackrock, Co. Dublin

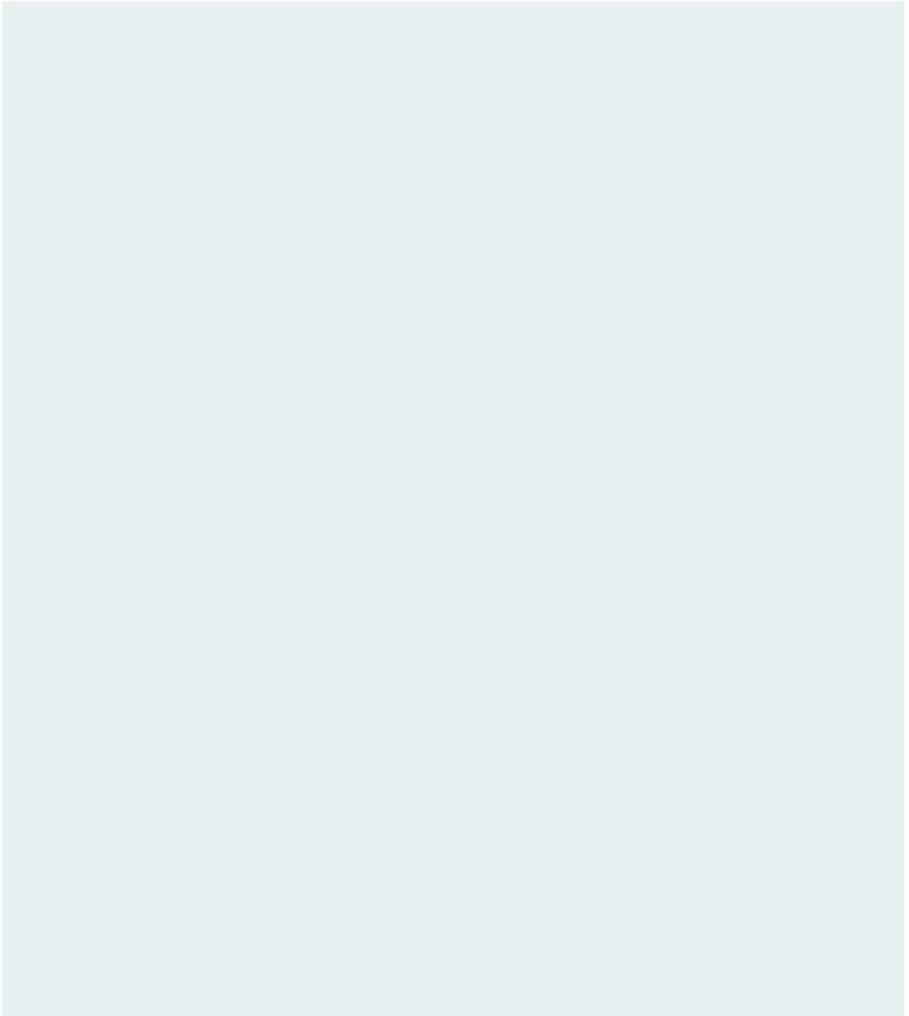
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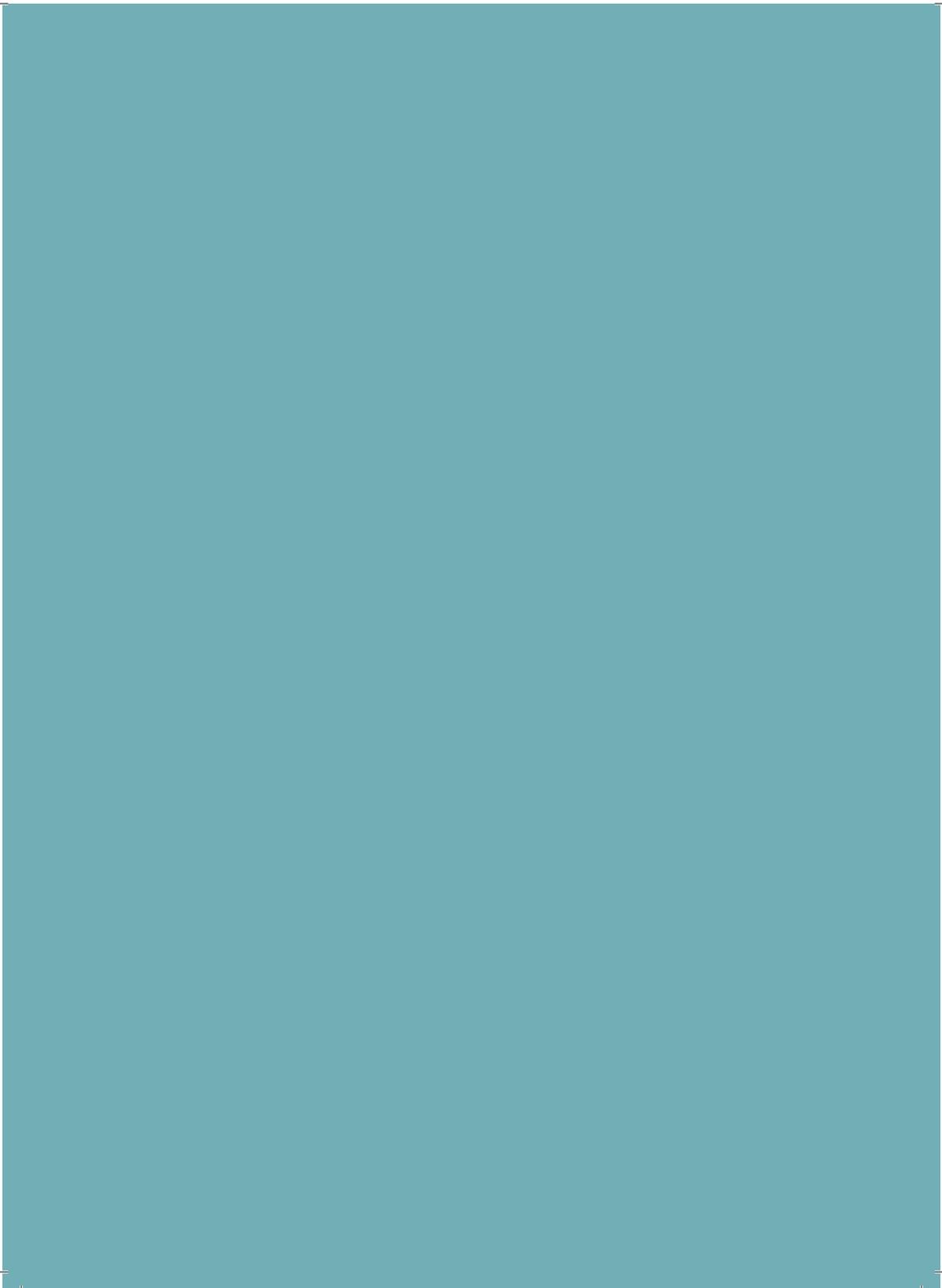
e ahead@ahead.ie

www.[ahead.ie](http://www.ahead.ie)



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AHEAD, East Hall,
UCD, Carysfort Avenue
Blackrock, Co. Dublin

t (01) 716 4396
e ahead@ahead.ie
www.ahead.ie