

Submission 4.30 CAO

INTRODUCTION

The Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) and the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) are the most prominent national schemes which help increase participation from targeted groups in Higher Education.

Since 2010, DARE HEAR applicants have been able to apply centrally to CAO (instead of making applications to each individual HEI). Since 2016, CAO has taken responsibility for the operations of DARE and HEAR and has recruited a full time national DARE HEAR Co-ordinator and DARE HEAR administrative support staff.

CAO has now become central to the applications processing, data management, and coordination of the DARE HEAR schemes for widening access to higher education.

This has created an efficiency for applicants who can apply for both DARE and HEAR access routes using a centralised application process through their CAO application. This shared service has also reduced duplication of effort and processing for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Mature applicants also apply to CAO.

CAO has contributed significantly to the increase in applications from students with a disability or those from a socio economically disadvantaged backgrounds through mainstreaming. CAO has helped contribute to the success of the DARE and HEAR schemes and has helped HEIs to reach their access targets.

Since CAO assumed responsibility for the management of DARE HEAR operations, it has also reduced the time required by access and disability services in the daily operations and management of the schemes.

- In 2019/2020 12.3% of new entrants were students with disabilities. The original National Access Plan target of 8% has now been exceeded. In 2019/2020, over 8,000 students declared a disability on their CAO application and completed some element of the Supplementary Information form. This accounts for over 10% of CAO applicants.
- In 2020/2021, one in five (20%) CAO applicants indicated DARE or HEAR, with 15% of CAO applicants continuing to make a complete application to either DARE or HEAR.
- There has been a 10% increase in completed DARE applications for entry 2021.

CAO continues to work with all participating HEIs to implement and operationalise DARE HEAR and national access policy changes. CAO Response to the National Access Plan Consultation Paper

WHAT SHOULD OUR OVERALL VISION FOR EQUITY OF ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN IRELAND BE FOR 2022-2026?

An equal playing field for all applicants.

WHO ARE THE TARGET GROUPS THAT SHOULD BE SPECIFIED IN THE NEXT NATIONAL ACCESS PLAN?

The target groups that CAO believes should be specified in the next national access plan are:

- Learners currently in care

Increased supports should be made available to applicants in care of the state; to help them to navigate the CAO application process and submit a completed HEAR application. Applicants in care will be eligible for HEAR once they have submitted a letter from their TUSLA social worker. CAO has noted (through the appeals process) that some vulnerable applicants in care miss HEAR application deadlines when they do not have the support of a social worker to help them complete their application or provide relevant supporting documents by the application deadlines. Annually, just over 100 applicants in care apply to HEAR. Additional training and information on DARE, HEAR, Access programmes and progression to Higher Education for TUSLA social workers would be beneficial.

- Travellers

The HEAR Review group has agreed that Travellers should be included for eligibility for HEAR.

- Young parents (where this has impacted their second-level education)
- Homeless people (where this has impacted their second-level education)
- Applicants who are in direct provision

HEAR receives a number of applications every year from applicants who are residing in direct provision centres.

HOW CAN PRE-ENTRY AND POST-ENTRY ACTIVITIES BE DEVELOPED?

The success of DARE and HEAR has demonstrated what can be achieved nationally through collaboration between HEIs, relevant stakeholders and mainstreaming into the national central application process. HEIs and education stakeholders should continue to work together to further develop pre-entry and post entry activities.