

HEA

An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas
The Higher Education Authority

Speaker Bio's

Student Progression and Continuation in Higher
Education — Exploring Next Steps

October 2026

HEA

An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas
The Higher Education Authority

Dr Laura Keane- SETU

Dr Laura Keane is Director of Student Life and Experience at South East Technological University (SETU), having previously served as Head of Student Life and Learning since 2012. She has extensive experience in supporting and enhancing the student experience, with a particular focus on student transition, belonging, engagement and success. Her experience also includes work in the areas of access, widening participation and disability, and she has a strong interest in developing inclusive approaches that support students to progress and succeed in higher education. Her work has included the development of a range of initiatives to support student success, including SETU's **Peer-to-Peer (P2P) mentoring programme** and holistic programmes that support students' academic, personal and social development.



Dr Vivienne Patterson- HEA

Dr Vivienne Patterson joined the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in 2006 as Head of Statistics, leading the Statistics Unit for 10 years. During this time, she was responsible for transforming the communication of higher education data and overseeing the publication of a number of key reports.

Since becoming Head of Skills, Engagement and Statistics in 2016, Dr Patterson's responsibilities have included the management of Springboard+ and MicroCreds, national programmes supporting upskilling and reskilling. She also manages the tertiary offering in higher education through strategic oversight of national apprenticeships and the National Tertiary Office. In 2026, Dr Patterson participated in the establishment of the National Skills Observatory and, as a member of its Steering Group, contributes to shaping its work programme. In 2019, she implemented the Human Capital Initiative, a €300 million investment in agility and innovation across the Irish higher education system.

Dr Patterson's role within the HEA also involves strategic engagement with enterprise to strengthen the relationship between higher education, future employment needs and innovation. She is a member of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs and the High Level Skills Implementation Group.



Linda Darbey - HEA

Linda Darbey- Linda Darbey is Senior Manager for Policy and Strategic Planning at the Higher Education Authority. With extensive experience across higher education policy, student success, and academic administration, she has previously held leadership roles at Trinity College Dublin, including Assistant Academic Secretary, and at the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE). Drawing on this career experience, she works on strategic initiatives that support the development and performance of Ireland's higher education system in the HEA.



Dr Rachel Keegan- DCU

Dr Rachel Keegan - Dr Rachel Keegan is Director of Quality and Institutional Research at Dublin City University (DCU). With more than 20 years' experience in higher education, she has held a variety of leadership roles across academic affairs, graduate studies, quality assurance, and institutional research. Rachel leads DCU's quality enhancement and review processes, institutional research activities, and rankings strategy, working closely with university leadership to support continuous improvement and evidence-informed decision making.



Prof Brian Bowe- TU Dublin

Prof Brian Bowe is Head of Academic Affairs at Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin). With a background in physics and higher education, he has spent more than two decades leading innovation in learning, teaching and academic development. He founded TU Dublin's Physics Education Research Group and later the CREATE research group, which focuses on engineering and technology education. Professor Bowe has worked extensively with higher education institutions in Ireland and internationally on curriculum design, quality assurance, assessment, and student learning.



Dr Deirdre Ryan- TUS

Dr Deirdre Ryan- is Assistant Registrar and Head of Quality at Technological University of the Shannon (TUS) Midlands Campus. Following an earlier career in IT services, she returned to higher education as a mature learner, completing a BA in Psychology and Mathematics before earning a PhD in Psychology. She has held a range of leadership roles in teaching, learning, educational development, and quality assurance, including serving as Director of Quality at Mary Immaculate College. Throughout her career, she has contributed to national projects focused on digital learning, innovation, and quality enhancement, and is passionate about fostering cultures of continuous improvement that support student success and institutional excellence.



Dr Áine Ní Shé- MTU

Dr Áine Ní Shé- Dr Áine Ní Shé is Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement at Munster Technological University (MTU). With extensive experience in higher education leadership, quality assurance, and academic development, she leads initiatives that support continuous improvement in teaching, learning, and the student experience. Dr Ní Shé has also contributed to national higher education policy, including chairing the Higher Education Authority's Policy Forum on Student Progression



Jean O'Mahony- DFHERIS

Jean O'Mahony- Jean O'Mahony is Principal Officer for Higher Education Learners and Skills at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. She leads policy initiatives focused on learners, student outcomes, and skills development across Ireland's higher education sector.



Dara Ryder- AHEAD

Dara Ryder- Dara Ryder is Chief Executive Officer of AHEAD, an independent non-profit organisation working with and for disabled people to shape inclusive and empowering environments in tertiary education and employment. Having joined AHEAD in 2008 after working as a lecturer in further education, Dara has spent over 15 years leading initiatives in inclusive practice, Universal Design, digital learning, and accessibility. He is widely recognised for his work advancing inclusive teaching and learning across Ireland's further and higher education sectors.



Dr Ross Woods- HEA

Dr Ross Woods - Dr Ross Woods is Senior Manager for Teaching and Learning, Student Success, Health and Wellbeing at the Higher Education Authority (HEA). He leads national initiatives to enhance teaching and learning, student success, mental health and wellbeing across Ireland's higher education sector. Previously, he led the HEA's work on equality, diversity and inclusion, overseeing initiatives on gender equality, race equality, and ending sexual violence and harassment in higher education. More recently, he has led the review of the National Student Success Framework and the development of the HEA's National Teaching and Learning Strategy.



Daniel Walsh- AMLÉ

Daniel Walsh - Daniel Walsh is President of Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn (AMLÉ), the national representative body for students in Ireland. A graduate of Trinity College Dublin and a former AMLÉ Vice President for the Dublin Region, he has been a strong advocate on issues affecting students, including the cost of higher education, student accommodation, access, and wellbeing. In his role, Daniel represents more than 370,000 students nationwide, working with government, higher education institutions, and sector partners to ensure that student voices are reflected in national policy and decision-making.



Prof Colin Scott- UCD

Professor Colin Scott- Professor Colin Scott is Registrar, Deputy President and Vice President for Academic Affairs at University College Dublin (UCD). With a distinguished career in higher education leadership and research, he has previously served as UCD's Vice President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Principal of the College of Social Sciences and Law, and Dean of Law. An internationally recognised scholar in regulation and governance, Professor Scott has led major educational reforms focused on curriculum innovation, student partnership, experiential learning, and academic development



Órla Barry- QQI

Órla Barry is Head of Qualifications Information and Learning Opportunities at **Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)**, where she leads the development and implementation of strategy relating to Ireland's **National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)**. She has extensive experience in education quality assurance, academic governance and higher education regulation, having previously held management roles in **UCD** and **CORU**. Órla is a member of the **European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group** and Ireland's National Correspondent for the **Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area**. She is also a Chartered Governance Professional and brings significant experience in governance, qualifications and lifelong learning at both national and European level.



Prof Barbara Dooley- UCD

Professor Barbara Dooley - Professor Barbara Dooley is Emeritus Professor of Psychology at University College Dublin (UCD) and former Dean of Graduate Studies, Deputy Registrar, and Acting Registrar and Deputy President. A leading researcher in youth and student mental health, she served as Director of Research for Jigsaw, Ireland's National Centre for Youth Mental Health, and was Principal Investigator of the landmark *My World Survey*, Ireland's largest study of youth mental health and wellbeing. Her work has significantly influenced understanding of student success, wellbeing, and mental health in higher education.



Dr Michelle Morgan

Dr Michelle Morgan- Dr Michelle Morgan is Dean of Students at University of East London and a nationally and internationally recognised expert in student experience and transitions in higher education. With more than 30 years' experience across academic, research and student support roles, she has led major sector initiatives to improve student success, engagement and belonging. Dr Morgan is widely published in the field and led the £2.7 million Postgraduate Experience Project, a collaborative study that helped shape understanding of postgraduate student needs across the UK.



Róisín O'Grady- MTU

Róisín O'Grady is a Student Engagement Officer with AnSEO - The Student Engagement Office at Munster Technological University (MTU). She works across a range of student success, transition, engagement, and learner development initiatives that support students throughout their higher education journey. Róisín has played a key role in projects including REACH, MTU Ready, and SUCCEED, which focus on mentoring, student engagement, belonging, and the effective use of student feedback to enhance teaching and learning. She is particularly interested in partnership approaches that empower students and strengthen the student experience across the university.



Linda O'Sullivan- MTU

Linda O'Sullivan is an Academic Project Lead with AnSEO – The Student Engagement Office at Munster Technological University (MTU). With a background in Computer Science and Statistics, she has worked at MTU since 2002 and has led a range of initiatives focused on coaching, mentoring, professional development, student engagement and student success. She has played a key role in the development of programmes such as **SUCCEED**, which helps make student feedback data more accessible and actionable across the university, supporting evidence-informed approaches to enhancing student progression and success. Her work centres on fostering continuous enhancement and creating the conditions that enable students and staff to thrive.



Dr Angela McGlynn- MTU

Dr Angela McGlynn works within student engagement at Munster Technological University (MTU), where she supports initiatives that enhance the student experience, foster connection and belonging, and promote student success. Through her work with AnSEO - MTU's Student Engagement Office, she has been involved in a range of programmes that support student transition, engagement, and recognition, including the EDGE Award and MTU Ready. Dr McGlynn is passionate about creating inclusive learning environments and strengthening meaningful partnerships between students and staff to support success throughout the student journey.



Prof Tim Thompson- MU

Professor Tim Thompson is Vice-President for Students and Learning at Maynooth University, where he leads the university's strategic work on the student experience, learning, and student success. Prior to joining Maynooth, he served as Dean of the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences at Teesside University and held senior leadership roles in learning and teaching, academic development, and faculty management. Originally trained as a forensic anthropologist, Tim is an internationally recognised researcher whose work focuses on forensic anthropology and biological anthropology. A National Teaching Fellow and experienced higher education leader, he is passionate about enhancing student learning, belonging, and success through evidence-informed practice and innovation.



Dr Etain Kiely- ATU

Dr Etain Kiely is a Senior Lecturer in Mathematics and Statistics at Atlantic Technological University (ATU) and Academic Lead of REAL Analytics. An award-winning educator, she brings together intelligent assessment, learning analytics and student voice to strengthen learner agency, self-regulation and progression.

Working with large first year STEM cohorts, she designs assessments that provide feedback and generate signals about learning. Her research examines how students and educators can interpret those signals together, with AI scaffolding and timely human support to make learning visible and actionable using open learner feedback model, moving beyond learning dashboards towards a dialogic model in which students and staff interpret learning evidence together.

She also supervises interdisciplinary research in diabetes and health modelling and co-leads *My World*, a nature-based creative community project exploring patterns, participation and voice beyond words. She received the President's Award for Teaching Excellence in 2021.



Dr Cormac Quigley- ATU

Dr Cormac Quigley is a Senior Lecturer in Forensic and Chemical Sciences at Atlantic Technological University (ATU). Alongside his scientific research, he is widely recognised for his work in learning analytics, educational technology, and student engagement. He has led and contributed to projects exploring the use of analytics, artificial intelligence, and digital tools to enhance feedback, assessment, and student success. An award-winning educator, Dr Quigley received the Irish Education Award for Best Use of Educational Technology and has played a key role in advancing evidence-informed approaches to teaching and learning in higher education.



Danielle Byrne- UCC

Danielle Byrne is Admissions Officer at University College Cork (UCC), where she leads admissions processes and supports student access to higher education. With almost two decades of experience in UCC, she has previously served as Deputy Admissions Officer and Schools Liaison Officer, working closely with higher education partners, prospective students, schools, and guidance counsellors. Danielle has played a key role in supporting development of admissions policy both locally and across the sector, as well as in student recruitment, widening participation initiatives, and transition into higher education. She is committed to ensuring that students can successfully access and navigate their educational journeys.



Dr Keith Quille- TU Dublin

Dr Keith Quille is a Senior Lecturer in Computing at TU Dublin and Director of the CSinc (Computer Science Inclusive) Research Centre. His research focuses on computer science education, student success, learning analytics, artificial intelligence in education, and widening participation in computing. Keith's PhD research examined how machine learning can be used to identify students at risk of failure or withdrawal in introductory programming courses, with tools and approaches now applied internationally. He has also led major national initiatives in computer science education across primary, secondary, and higher education, and is widely recognised for his work promoting inclusion, innovation, and evidence-informed teaching and learning.



Tim Conlon- HEA

Tim Conlon- Tim Conlon is Head of Policy and Strategic Planning at the Higher Education Authority (HEA). Having worked in the HEA for almost 20 years, he has held leadership roles across research, infrastructure, system development, and policy. He currently leads the HEA's policy and strategic planning function, helping to shape the future direction, performance, and accountability of Ireland's higher education system. Tim has been closely involved in major initiatives relating to system development, strategic planning, and sector performance across Irish higher education.

