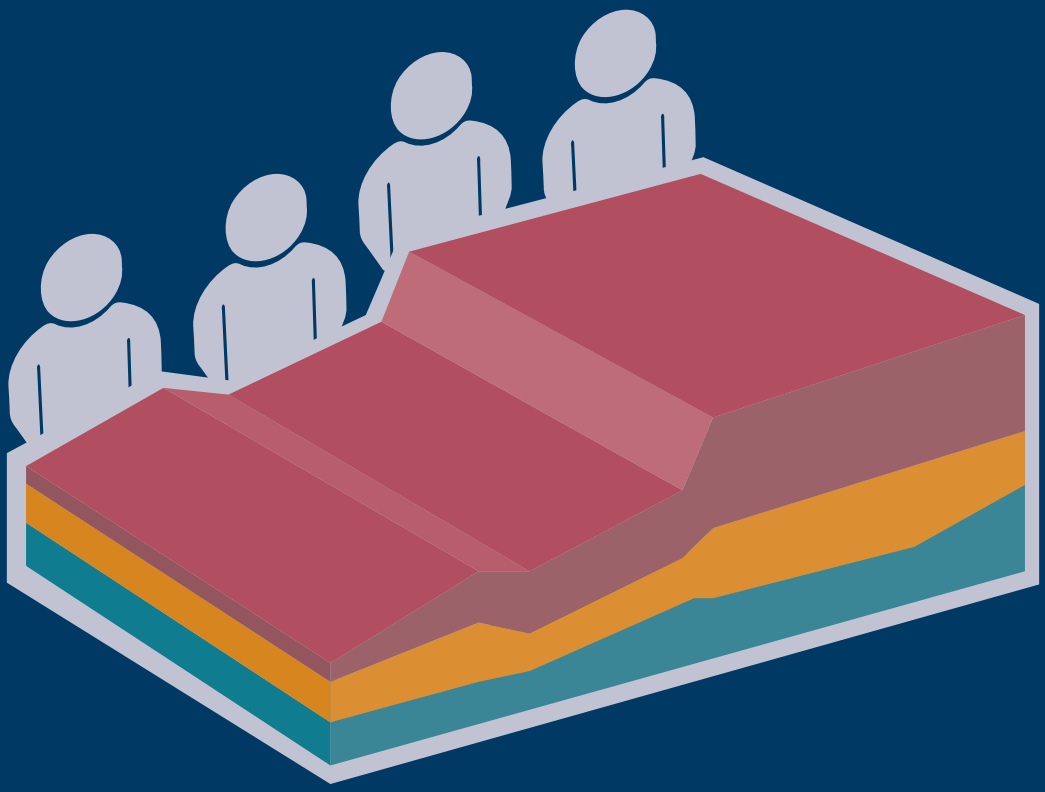
Numbers of Students with Disabilities Studying in Higher Education in Ireland 2017/18



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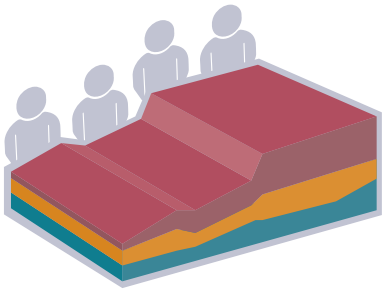
Association for Higher Education Access & Disability



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Foreword

By Ann Heelan, Executive Director, AHEAD

It is my pleasure to introduce the results of the AHEAD Survey on the participation rates of students with disabilities in higher education in Ireland for the academic period 2017/18. AHEAD has been surveying the participation rates of this cohort of students for over 20 years. While the findings of a single survey offers the opportunity to examine outcomes in a given academic year, the cumulative findings of the AHEAD surveys over time offers readers the opportunity to study the flow of students with disabilities entering the higher education system, observe their progress and identify emerging patterns and trends. AHEAD surveys of participation rates are a useful tool especially to those involved in the delivery and management of our higher education sector.

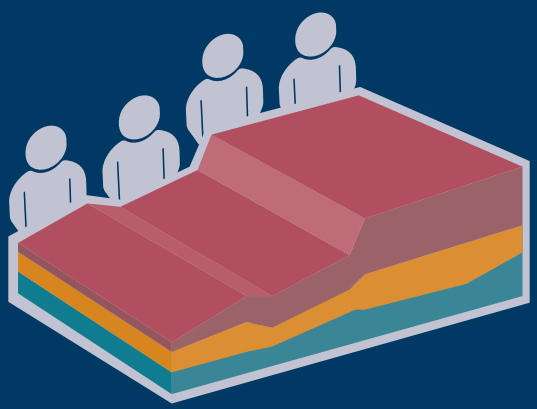
It is heartening to report that this year survey's results confirms that students with disabilities are making the transition into higher education in ever increasing numbers. In the academic year 17/18 they represented 6.2% of the total student population. However, this positive growth trajectory does not hold for students with sensory disabilities that is students who are listed under the Deaf/Hard of hearing or Blind/Visually impaired categories. This is alarming given that AHEAD has raised and publicised this issue in the past and that the Higher Education Authority (HEA) has identified both categories as target groups to promote their advancement in education.

AHEAD has also persistently raised over the years the issue of undertaking part-time Vs full-time courses by people with disabilities. AHEAD has pointed out that for a number of students with disabilities, part-time education is their only option. In the academic year under review the participation rate of students with disabilities studying full-time courses was more than five times higher than the rate of students studying part-time courses. Therefore it is great to report that the HEA's review of the fund for students with disabilities has resulted in an agreement to extend the fund in 2019 to cover part-time courses that incur a qualification of 60 credits or greater. It is a welcome move and it will be interesting to note the impact of this extension in the coming years.

Taking part and feeling included has a substantial baring on student retention rates and on positive outcomes for students including their transition to the world of work. The reality for students with disabilities, AHEAD upholds, is that full integration requires a whole college approach rather than the current model of relying heavily on disability support units and the fund for students with disabilities to meet their needs.

Looking to the future this is not sustainable and what is required is a shift in thinking in which the inclusion of students with disabilities is understood as the responsibility of all staff. There is an onus on staff to disability proof their own practices, not an easy task given the numerous challenges facing the further and higher education sectors. However, AHEAD promotes universal design for learning (UDL), as a model that results in inclusion and caters for the growing diversity in the student population as well as supporting college staff whose role it is to manage the corresponding demands.

Introduction



Introduction

The Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (henceforth AHEAD), is an independent, non-profit organisation. Its vision is shaping a future where students with disabilities can succeed. The annual research report on the participation rates of students with disabilities in higher education is part of AHEAD efforts to achieve this vision.

This research is made possible by the substantial work of the staff in the participating higher education institutions who supply statistics yearly and also through the consistent support provided by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) annually as part of their commitment to further the promotion of equal opportunity in higher education (HEA, 2018). This research also plays an important role in aiding The Department of Education and Skills to respond to the needs and raise the aspirations of all students as outlined in a recent strategy document, Empowering through Learning (DES, 2019).

The research on participation rates provides an accurate measure of the number of students with disabilities in higher education in Ireland in a given academic year and also provides a snapshot of their progression. This annual research report has been part of a project that scales back over twenty years of examination on this topic to support the work of AHEAD along with key stakeholders by giving insight into key areas for potential targeting to enhance the quality of the experience and overall access of students with disabilities.

AHEAD is focused on building an inclusive learning environment in higher education that embeds flexibility and equality into learning and assessment practices across all higher education courses. AHEAD seeks to achieve its mission by pursuing four core strategic themes:

- To influence national policy to impact positively on the inclusion of students with disabilities in education and employment
- To develop AHEAD's existing emerging partnerships and build on its successes
- To build relationships within the higher education sector to promote the integration of the principles of Universal Design for Learning in education and employment
- To sustain and grow the organisation of AHEAD through engagement with key strategic partners

Survey Method

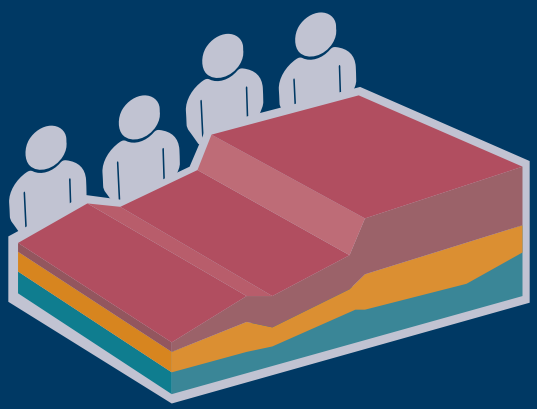
The AHEAD survey on the participation rates of students with disabilities in higher education in Ireland for the academic period 2017/18 was carried out with the support of participating institutions of higher education and, in particular, with the support of Disability/Access Officers therein. A survey questionnaire was sent out to the disability/access office in each of the higher education institutions involved.

Participating institutions were selected on the basis that they are funded by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and are included in the HEA's annual statistics on the general student population in higher education in Ireland, with one exception– the National College of Ireland. National College of Ireland, although funded by the Department of Education and Skills, is included in the AHEAD survey because it hosts a large student population and is therefore deemed too significant to omit. AHEAD compares the results of its annual survey on the participation rates of student with disabilities in higher education with that of the HEA's statistics for the same corresponding period. 27 institutions were approached to partake in the survey. The 27 institutions which responded are listed below*:

Universities (later referred to as)	Institutes of Technology and Other Institutions (later referred to as)
University College Cork (UCC)	Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT)
University College Dublin (UCD)	Cork Institute of Technology (CIT)
National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG)	Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT)
Trinity College Dublin (TCD)	Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (DLIADT)
Maynooth University (MU)	Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT)
Dublin City University (DCU)	Galway Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT)
University Limerick (UL)	Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (ITB)
Mary Immaculate College (MIC)	Institute of Technology Carlow (ITC)
Marino Institute of Education (MIE)	Institute of Technology Sligo (ITS)
National College of Art and Design (NCAD)	Institute of Technology, Tallaght (ITT)
Royal College of Surgeons Ireland (RCSI)	Institute of Technology, Tralee (ITTRA)
St. Angela's College (St. Ang.)	Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT)
	Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT)
	National College of Ireland (NCI)
	Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT)

* Some institutions were unable to complete all sections of the survey. Where this occurs, information will be provided in the footnotes in each of the relevant sections.

Findings

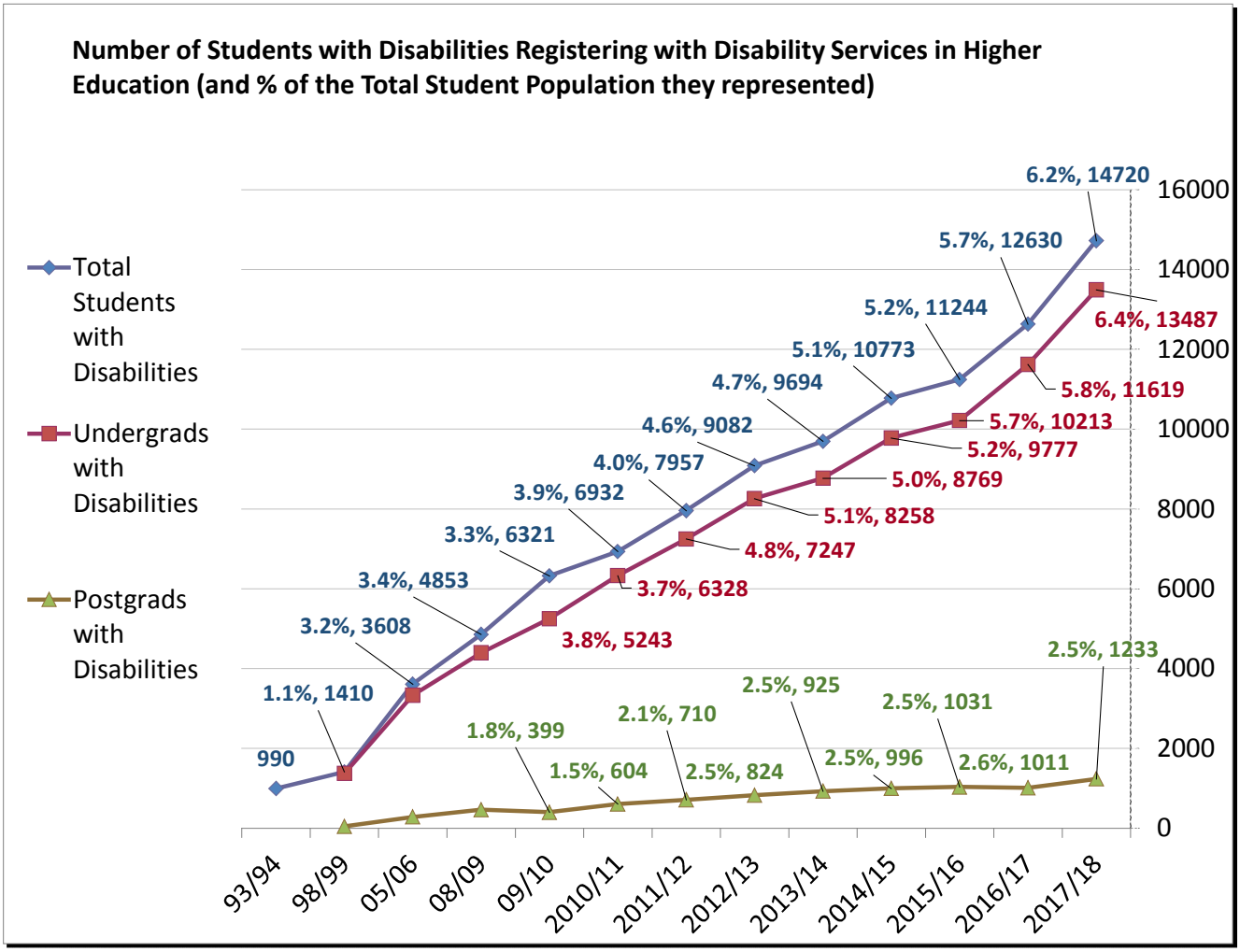


Findings

Participation Rates of Students with Disabilities

The 27 responding Higher Education Institutions identified 14,720 students with disabilities which represents 6.2% of the total student population (up from 5.7% in 2016/17) which was 236,731*. This represents a 17% increase in the number of students with disabilities in higher education from the previous year (up from 12,630 in 2016/2017) and a 62% rise in the last five years of AHEAD surveys (up from 9082 in 2012/13). This illustrates a consistent growth trajectory in the number of students with disabilities across higher education institutions as illustrated in figure 1 below.

Figure 1 - Number of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education and percentage of total student population they represent



* The total student population was provided by the responding institutions as part of this AHEAD survey.

In the academic year 2017/18 the participation rate (percentage of total student population) of students with disabilities in the IT/Other Sector was 6.5% (6409), marginally higher than the University Sector at 6% (8311). The participation rate of students with disabilities in the IT/Other Sector remained the same as the previous academic year but the actual number of students within this cohort increased by 21% (6409 in 2016/17). The participation rate of students with disabilities in the University Sector rose from 5.2% in 2016/17 to 6% of the total student population in 2017/18 and actual numbers increased by 14% (up from 7312 in 16/17).

At an institutional level the participation rates of students with disabilities varied across the responding institutions from 2.4% to 10.1% of the total student population. In 2017/18 Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology recorded the highest representation of students with disabilities at 10.1%, followed by IT Tralee at 9.5%. Other responding institutions with a high proportion of students with disabilities were NCAD at 9.4% and Limerick IT at 9.4%. A full breakdown by institution is shown in the appendix section 2.1.

Undergraduate and Postgraduate

Across the responding institutions in 2017/18 students with disabilities represented 7% (13,487) of the student population at undergraduate level and 2.8% (1,233) of the student population at postgraduate level. Year on year there was an increase in the participation rate of students with disabilities across both academic levels; at undergraduate level there was a 16% (1,868) increase in the numbers of students with disabilities enrolled and at postgraduate level there was a 22% (222) decrease in the numbers of students with disabilities.

Across the population of students with disabilities identified by the responding institutions for 2017/18, 92% of these students were studying at an undergraduate level while 8% were studying at a postgraduate level.

In 2017/18, postgraduate level continued to have a significantly lower participation rate of students with disabilities than at undergraduate level across the responding institutions as in previous years of this survey (AHEAD 2018; 2017; 2016; 2015; 2014; 2012). The scope of The AHEAD Survey is not designed to capture the reasons for the persistent low representation of students with disabilities at postgraduate level however AHEAD acknowledges that there may be a range of variables, both personal and systemic, involved which require further research to determine why this is the case.

Full time and Part Time

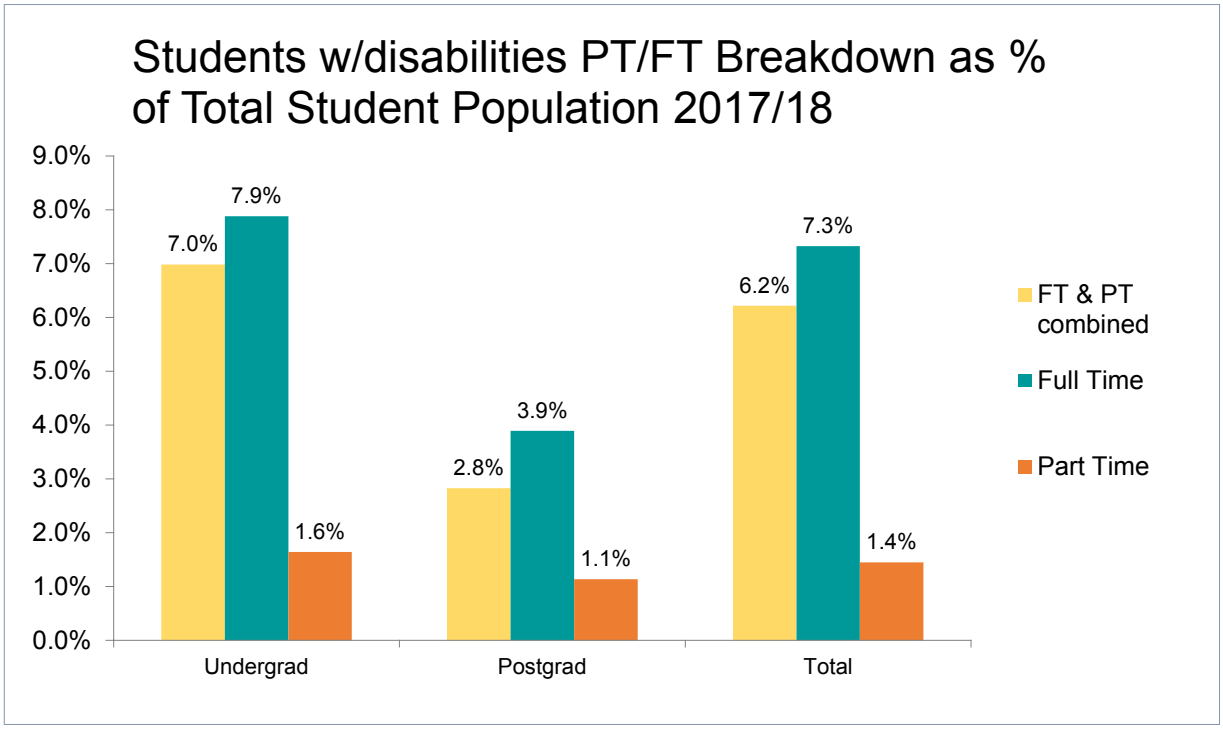
In 2017/18, there were 14,073 students with disabilities enrolled in full time studies in the responding institutions, which represented 7.3% of the total full time population. In the same period, there were 647 students with disabilities enrolled in part time studies, representing 1.4% of those studying part time.

The numbers of students with disabilities enrolled in full and part time courses increased compared to the previous year, where we identified 12,036 in full time and 594 in part time studies from the responding institutions in 2016/17. The 2017/18 figures represent a year on year 17% increase in the numbers of students with disabilities studying full time and a 9% increase studying part time. However, while the numbers of students with disabilities studying part time courses has risen by 9%, the participation rate in part-time courses actually fell from 1.5% in 2016/17 to 1.4% in 2017/18, indicating that the total number of part-time students in the responding institutions is growing at a faster rate than the number of part-time students with disabilities.

AHEAD welcomes the increase representation of students with disabilities undertaking both full time and part time education, but it is important to highlight that the participation of students with disabilities at part time level has historically grown at a significantly slower rate than at full time level (AHEAD 2017; 2016; 2015; 2014; 2012).

The graph below illustrates the breakdown of students with disabilities (as a percentage of the total population) studying full and part time courses at postgraduate level, undergraduate level and overall in 2017/18.

Figure 2 - shows the participation rate of students with disabilities broken down by full time/part time study and academic level



New Entrant Undergraduates with Disabilities

The responding institutions identified a total number of 3,906 new entrants (students entering their first year of studies) with disabilities in 2017/18. This number of new entrants represents an 11% increase from the number of new entrants with a disability in the previous academic year. In 2017/18, new entrants represented 29% of the total number of undergraduate students with a disability (13,487).

By category of disability, there were some notable differences in the new entrants profile compared to the previous year including a 20% decrease in the number of students in the ADD/ADHD category, an increase of students in the Asperger's/Autism category of 25% and a 24% increase in numbers in the Significant Ongoing Illness category.

New Registrations

As part of this survey, the responding institutions provide AHEAD with information on the number of new registrations signed up to The Disability Service each year. New registrations relates to the number of students registering with the disability services during the academic year including those not in their first year of study. The data provided by the responding institutions allows AHEAD to ascertain how many students go through at least their first year of study without supports before registering with the disability service in subsequent years.

In 2017/18, the responding institutions reported 5207 new registrations across their disability services, 1,301 of which were not new entrants. Therefore, this suggests that this group of 1,301 students completed 1 or more years of study without registering with disability services, before realising it was necessary to do so.

This cohort represents 9% of the total population of students with disabilities and 25% of all new registrations in 2017/18, the same percentage figure as in 2016/17. This figure (1,301) represents a 12% increase from 2016/17 (1161) in the number of students who register with disability services for the first time after their first year of study, a continuing rising trend in this cohort in recent years (2015/16; 2014/15; 2013/14).

Mature Students

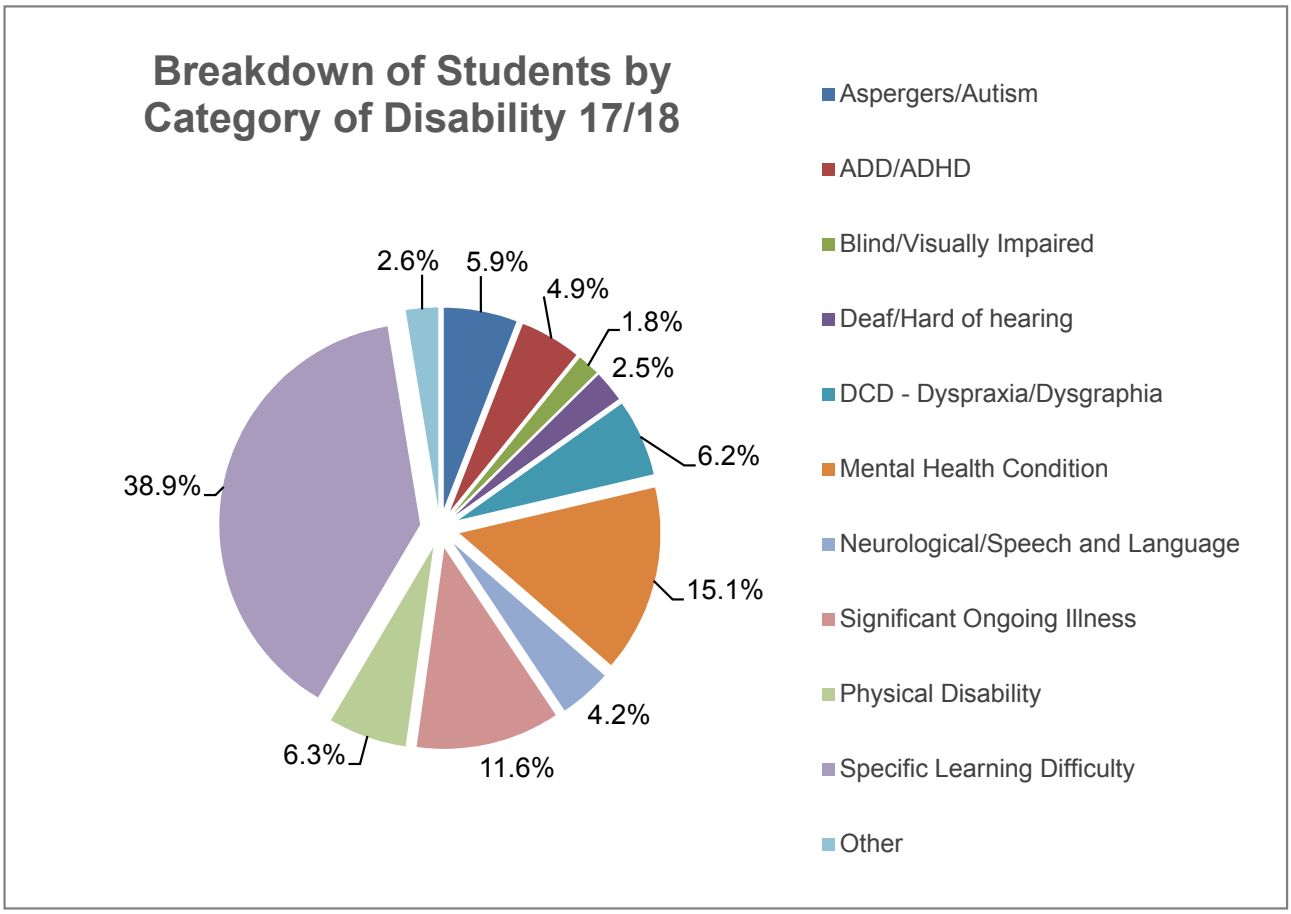
In 2017/18, there were 1761 mature students registered with a disability across the 27 responding institutions, which was a 20% increase in the number from the previous year (1469). Mature students represented 12% of the total number of students with disabilities recorded for 2017/18.

International Students

In 2017/18, there were 604 international students registered with a disability in the responding institutions, which was a 36% increase in numbers from the previous year (445). International students represented 4.1% of the total number of students with disabilities recorded for 2017/18, up from 3.5% the previous year.

Nature of Disability

Figure 3 - percentage breakdown of students with disabilities by category of disability



The categories of disability which are applied as part of this study are based on the categories of disability applied by the Higher Education Authority in the Fund for Students with Disabilities guidelines for higher education institutions, with an addition of the Other category which is added to cater for any additional registrations with the disability service that do not fall under the HEA specified categories. Students are categorised by their primary disability only, regardless of whether more than 1 disability is present.

Looking at the breakdown of the total student population with disabilities identified across the responding institutions in 2017/18 illustrated in figure 3, the largest category of disability represented was the Specific Learning Difficulty at 38.9% (5724) of all students with disabilities, the second largest being the category of Mental Health Condition at 15.1% (2217). 11.6% (1703) of students with disabilities were registered under Significant Ongoing Illness, 6.3% (927) under Physical Disability, 6.2% (912) under DCD - Dyspraxia/Dysgraphia, 5.9% (870) under Asperger's/Autism, 4.9% (726) under ADD/ADHD, 4.2% (624) under Neurological/Speech and Language disability, 2.6% (384) under Other, 2.5% (370) under Deaf/Hard of Hearing and 1.8% (263) under Blind/Visually Impaired.

By category of disability, Blind and Visually Impaired and Deaf/Hard of Hearing were both among the lowest represented at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. A recent report by the Higher Education Authority (2018) analysing the progress of the targets set in the National Access Plan (HEA, 2015) found that the category of the Blind/Visually Impaired had the slowest rate of increase in participation at third level of the underrepresented target disability groups identified by the National Access Plan for increased participation measures.

There were no significant year on year changes in the overall percentage breakdown of students with disabilities. The percentage of students with disabilities in the Specific Learning Difficulty category fell from 41.4% in 2016/17 to 38.9% in 2017/18, the Mental Health Condition category rose from 13.9% to 15.1%. The percentage fall in the category of specific learning difficulty in the AHEAD Survey 2017/18 is part of a trend that been noted over the last number of years e.g. in 2010/11, students with a Specific Learning Difficulty represented 60.5% of the population of students with disabilities in comparison to just 38.9% in 2017/18.

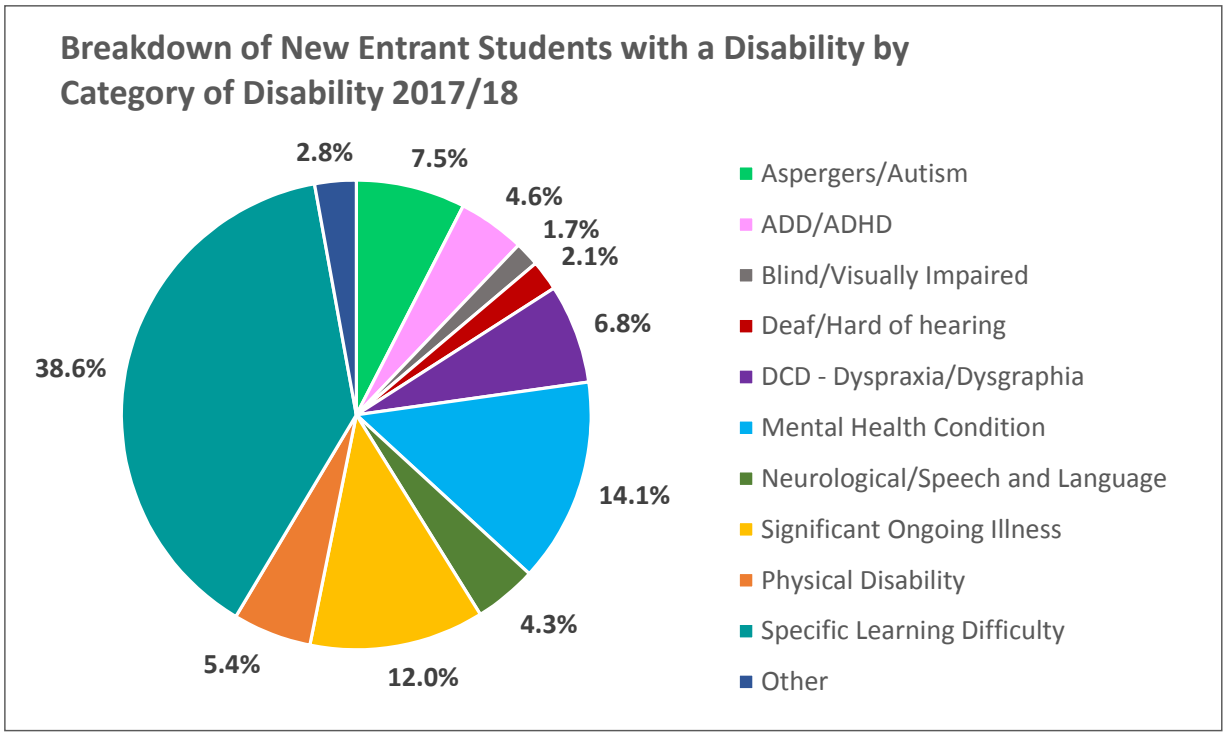
New Entrants Disability Breakdown

A total of 3906 new entrants with disabilities were recorded by the responding institutions for 2017/18. Broken down by disability, there were 294 (7.5%) in the Asperger's/Autism category, 180 (4.6%) in the ADD/ADHD category, 66 (1.7%) in the Blind/Visually Impaired category, 82 (2.1%) in the Deaf/Hard of Hearing category, 267 (6.8%) in the DCD Dyspraxia category, 549 (14.1%) in the Mental Health Condition category, 169 (4.3%) in the Neurological/Speech and Language category, 470 (12%) in the Significant Ongoing Illness category, 211 (5.4%) in the Physical Disability category, 1507 (38.6%) in the Specific Learning Difficulty category and 111(2.8%) in the Other category.

The most significant year on year increases in the number of new entrants with disabilities by category included those in the Other category (increased by over 150% from 44 to 111), the Asperger's/Autism category (increased by 25% from 235 to 294) and the Significant Ongoing Illness category (increased by 24% from 380 to 470). There were also significant decreases across other categories of new entrants including in the ADD/ADHD category (decreased by 20% from 224 to 180) and in the Deaf/Hard of Hearing category (decreased by 8% 89 to 82).

The increase in the number of students with disabilities being identified under the 'Other' category is an indication of a growing number of students with disabilities that are not matching or can be allocated under the categories of disabilities listed by the Higher Education Authority in The Fund for Students with Disabilities guidelines. If this trend continues, it may require further investigation to understand why responding institutions are categorising a growing number of students with disabilities under the 'Other' category.

Figure 4 - shows the percentage breakdown of new entrant students with disabilities broken down by category of disability



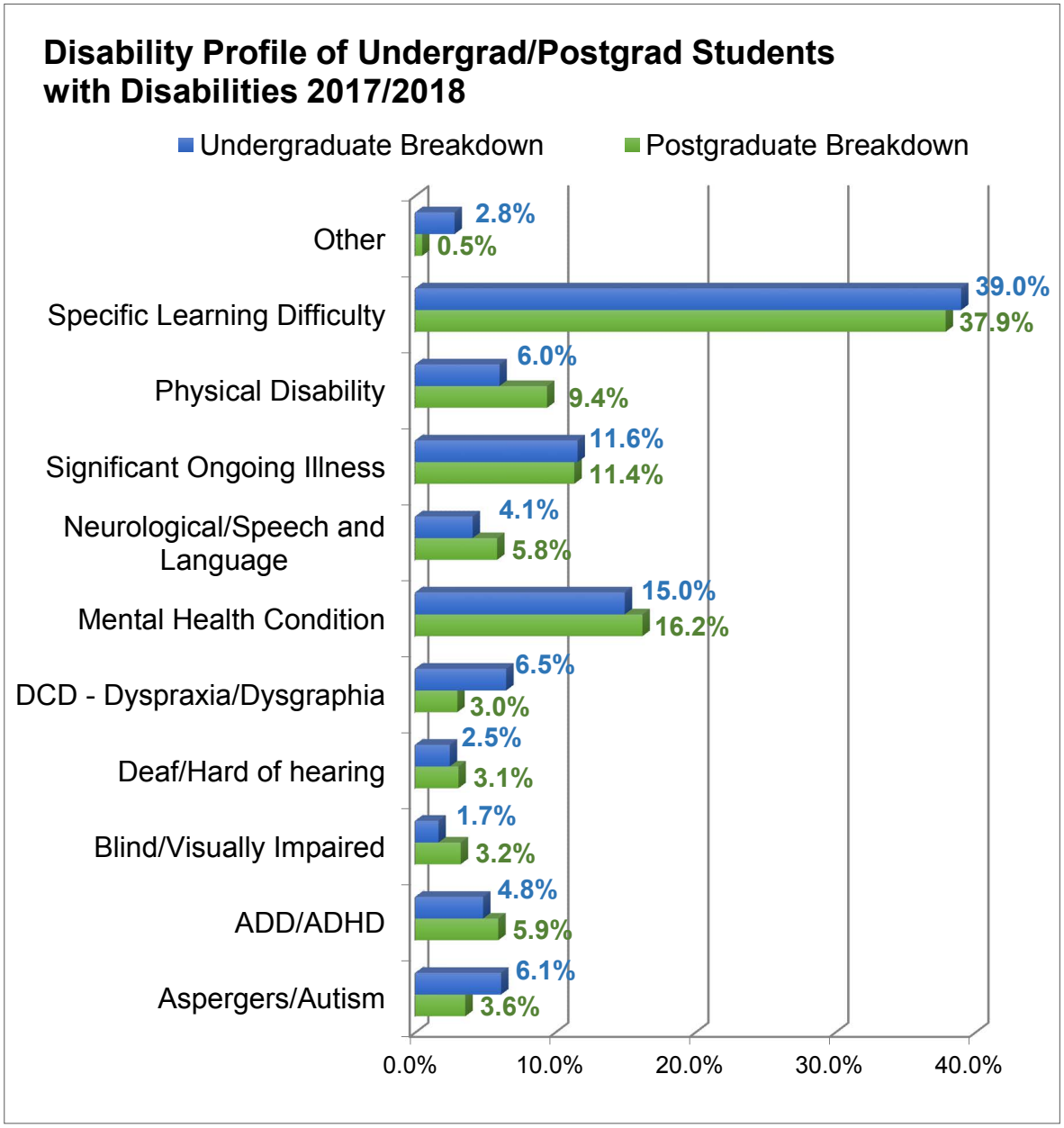
Undergraduate Disability Breakdown

Of the 13487 undergraduate students with disabilities in 2017/18 recorded by the responding institutions, 39% (5257) were in the Specific Learning Difficulty category which represented the largest portion of students with disabilities in undergraduate education that year. This was then followed by students in the Mental Health Condition category at 15% (2017), Significant Ongoing Illness at 11.6% (1563), DCD-Dyspraxia at 6.5% (875), Asperger's/Autism at 6.1% (826), Physical Disability at 6% (811), ADD/ADHD at 4.8% (653), Neurological/Speech and Language Difficulties at 4.1% (552), the Other category at 2.8% (378), Deaf/Hard of Hearing at 2.5% (332) and Blind/Visually Impaired at 1.7% (223).The most significant year on year changes were the increases in the number of undergraduate student with disabilities recorded in the Other category (up 73%), the Mental Health Condition category (up 25%) and Asperger's/Autism category (up 28%).

Postgraduate Disability Breakdown

There was a total of 1,233 students with disabilities who were studying at postgraduate level in 2017/2018, which represented 22% increase in numbers from the previous year by the responding institutions. Students with a Significant Learning Difficulty made up the largest category representing 37.9% (467) of the total student with disabilities population at postgraduate level for that academic year. This was followed by the Mental Health Condition category at 16.2% (200), the Significant Ongoing Illness category at 11.4 % (140), the Physical Disability category at 9.4% (116), the ADD/ADHD category at 5.9% (73), Neurological/Speech Language at 5.8% (72), the Asperger's/Autism category at 3.6% (44), the Blind/Visually Impaired category at 3.2% (40), the Deaf/Hard of Hearing category at 3.1% (38), the DCD-Dyspraxia category at 3% (37) and the Other category at 0.5% (6).

Figure 5 - shows the breakdown of undergraduate and postgraduate students by category of disability



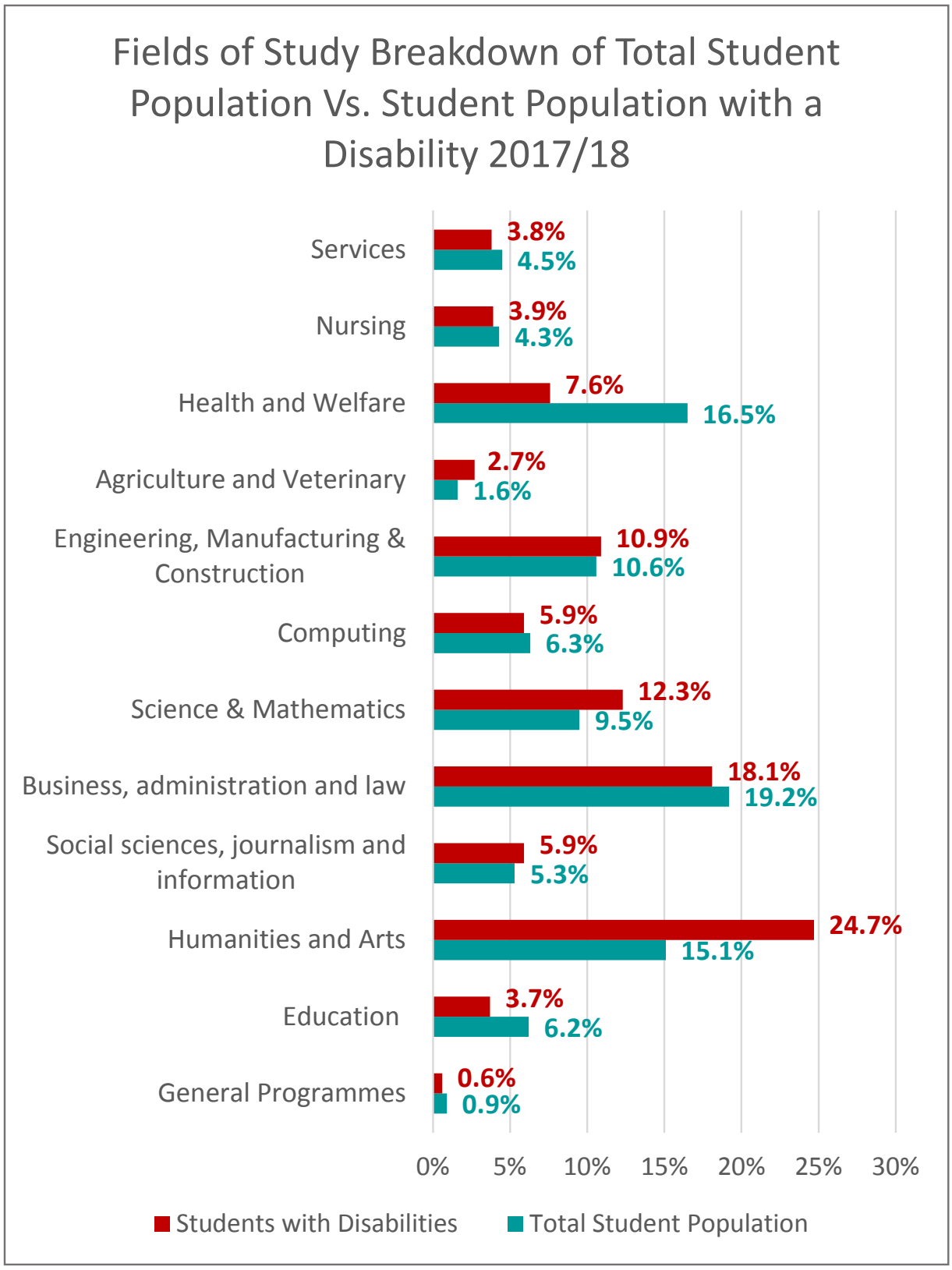
Fields of Study

The breakdown of 14,461 students with disabilities by field of study was obtained from 26 of the 27 responding institutions* for 2017/2018. Each institution was given the subject breakdown in accordance with The ISCED Classifications with some minor adjustments to categorisation**. The figure 6 below illustrates the breakdown of students with disabilities in comparison to the total student population across each field of study in 2017/18. The statistics on the breakdown of fields of study of the total student population was provided by the Higher Education Authority.

* This section does not include ITC as AHEAD was unable to obtain the figures for this section for 2017/18

** AHEAD requested separate statistics for the 'Nursing' enrolments which are normally part of The 'Health and Welfare' Field and due to the change in the ISCED Categories, whereby there is no longer a 'combined' category, it has been omitted in this report.

Figure 6 - shows the fields of study breakdown of students with disabilities and the total student population



The Field of ‘Humanities and Arts’ had the highest percentage of students with disabilities once again with 24.7% of students with disabilities studying in this field. This was then followed by ‘Business, Administration and Law’ with 18.1% and ‘Science, Mathematics and Statistics’ with 12.3%.

The least common fields of study for students with disabilities were ‘Generic Programmes’ with 0.6% of students with disabilities, followed by ‘Agriculture, Forestry Fisheries, and Veterinary’’ with 2.7% and ‘Education’ with 3.7%.

The most notable differences between the percentage breakdown for fields of study of students with disabilities and the breakdown for the total student population arise in the fields of ‘Health and Welfare’ and ‘Humanities and Arts’. Students with disabilities were less than half as likely (7.6%) to study in the field of ‘Health and Welfare’ as the average student (16.5%).

In contrast, students with disabilities are significantly more likely to study in the field of ‘Humanities and Arts’ at 24.7%, in comparison to their peers in the total student population at 15.1% which has been an ongoing trend noted in AHEAD surveys in recent years (AHEAD, 2018; 2017, 2016).

Fields of Study Breakdown by Disability

25 out of 27 responding institutions* provided a breakdown of the fields of study of 14,063 students with disabilities in the academic year 2017/18 broken down by disability category. The following sub sections examine the fields of study of each category of disability, with accompanying tables and two to four findings on the representation of each category of disability in comparison to other students with disabilities and to the general student population in 2017/2018.

The fields of study included in this section are based on the ISCED Classifications. Note that in this section the terms 'underrepresented' and 'overrepresented' are applied to show the fields of study where there is a high or low concentration of students in a particular category of disability in comparison to the general student population or the population of students with disabilities. No positive or negative inferences are intended when using these terms.

*ITC and ITS were unable to provide fields of study breakdown by disability

ADD/ADHD

Table 1 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the ADD/ADHD Category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all SWDs and for the student population in general

4.9% of all SWDs are in ADD/ADHD Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total SWD Studying Field	Numbers in ADD/ADHD Category Studying Field	% of Students in ADD/ADHD Category Studying Field	% of SWDs Studying Field in ADD/ADHD Category
Broad Programmes	0.9%	0.6%	1	0.1%	1.2%
Education Science	6.2%	3.7%	8	1.1%	1.5%
Humanities & Arts	15.1%	24.7%	219	30.6%	6.2%
Social Science & journalism and information	5.3%	5.9%	62	8.7%	7.5%
Business, Administration and Law	19.2%	18.1%	128	17.9%	5.1%
Science	9.5%	12.3%	66	9.2%	3.9%
Computing	6.3%	5.9%	42	5.9%	5.2%
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	10.6%	10.9%	84	11.7%	5.6%
Agriculture and Veterinary	1.6%	2.7%	18	2.5%	4.7%
Health & Welfare	16.5%	7.6%	52	7.3%	4.7%
Nursing	4.3%	3.9%	14	2.0%	2.5%
Services	4.5%	3.8%	21	2.9%	3.9%
Total			715	100.0%	

- Students in the ADD/ADHD Category were twice as likely to study in the field of Humanities and Arts as students in the general population.
- Students in the ADD/ADHD Category were significantly underrepresented in the field of Education Science, as they were more than five times less likely to study in this field compared to the general student population.
- In comparison to other students with disabilities, Students in the ADD/ADHD Category were approx. half as likely to study in the field of Nursing.
- Students in the ADD/ADHD Category were more than one and a half times as likely to study in the field of Social Science & Journalism and Information compared to students with disabilities and students in the general student population.

Asperger's/Autism

Table 2 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Aspergers/Autism Category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all SWDs and for the student population in general

5.9% of all SWDs are in Asperger's/ Autism Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total SWD Studying Field	Numbers in Asperger's/ Autism Category Studying Field	% of Students in Asperger's/ Autism Category Studying Field	% of SWDs Studying Field in Asperger's/ Autism Category
Broad Programmes	0.9%	0.6%	6	0.7%	7.1%
Education Science	6.2%	3.7%	13	1.6%	2.4%
Humanities & Arts	15.1%	24.7%	272	33.1%	7.7%
Social Science & journalism and information	5.3%	5.9%	31	3.8%	3.7%
Business, Administration and Law	19.2%	18.1%	103	12.5%	4.1%
Science	9.5%	12.3%	147	17.9%	8.8%
Computing	6.3%	5.9%	121	14.7%	15.0%
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	10.6%	10.9%	76	9.2%	5.0%
Agriculture and Veterinary	1.6%	2.7%	12	1.5%	3.1%
Health & Welfare	16.5%	7.6%	23	2.8%	2.1%
Nursing	4.3%	3.9%	5	0.6%	0.9%
Services	4.5%	3.8%	13	1.6%	2.4%
Total			822	100.0%	

- Students in the Asperger's/Autism Category were significantly overrepresented in the field of Computing compared to the population of students with disabilities and general student population. They were more than twice as likely to study in this field than, the average student.
- Students in the category of Asperger's/Autism were almost twice as likely to study in the field of Science in comparison to average students.
- In comparison to students with disabilities and the general student population, students in the Asperger's/Autism Category were significantly underrepresented in the Field of Nursing, as they were more than five times less likely to study in this area.
- Students in the Asperger's/Autism Category were more than five times less likely to study in the Field of Health and Welfare than those in the general student population.

Blind/Visually Impaired

Table 3 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Blind/Visually Impaired Category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all SWDs and for the student population in general

1.8% of all SWDs are in Blind/ Visually Impaired Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total SWD Studying Field	Numbers in Blind/ Visually Impaired Studying Field	% of Students in Blind/ Visually Impaired Category Studying Field	% of SWDs Studying Field in Blind/ Visually Impaired Category
Broad Programmes	0.9%	0.6%	1	0.4%	1.2%
Education Science	6.2%	3.7%	12	4.7%	2.2%
Humanities & Arts	15.1%	24.7%	77	30.1%	2.2%
Social Science & journalism and information	5.3%	5.9%	19	7.4%	2.3%
Business, Administration and Law	19.2%	18.1%	56	21.9%	2.2%
Science	9.5%	12.3%	20	7.8%	1.2%
Computing	6.3%	5.9%	20	7.8%	2.5%
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	10.6%	10.9%	12	4.7%	0.8%
Agriculture and Veterinary	1.6%	2.7%	2	0.8%	0.5%
Health & Welfare	16.5%	7.6%	25	9.8%	2.3%
Nursing	4.3%	3.9%	3	1.2%	0.5%
Services	4.5%	3.8%	9	3.5%	1.7%
Total			256	100.0%	

- Students in the Blind/Visually Impaired category were almost twice as likely to study in the field of Humanities and Arts compared to the general student population.
- Students in the Blind/Visually Impaired category were almost four times less likely to study Nursing compared to the general student population and more than three times less likely to study in this field compared to other students with disabilities.
- Students in the Blind/Visually Impaired category were more than three times less likely to study in the field of Agriculture and Veterinary than other students with disabilities.
- Students in the Blind/Visually Impaired category were less than half as likely to study in The Field of Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction as other students with disabilities and the general student population.

Deaf/Hard of Hearing

Table 4 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Deaf/Hard of Hearing Category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all SWDs and for the student population in general

2.5% of all SWDs are in Deaf/Hearing Impaired Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total SWD Studying Field	Numbers in Deaf/ Hearing Impaired Category Studying Field	% of Students in Deaf/ Hearing Impaired Category Studying Field	% of SWDs Studying Field in Deaf/ Hearing Impaired Category
Broad Programmes	0.9%	0.6%	3	0.8%	3.5%
Education Science	6.2%	3.7%	21	5.8%	3.9%
Humanities & Arts	15.1%	24.7%	89	24.6%	2.5%
Social Science & journalism and information	5.3%	5.9%	17	4.7%	2.1%
Business, Administration and Law	19.2%	18.1%	66	18.2%	2.6%
Science	9.5%	12.3%	49	13.5%	2.9%
Computing	6.3%	5.9%	16	4.4%	2.0%
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	10.6%	10.9%	29	8.0%	1.9%
Agriculture and Veterinary	1.6%	2.7%	10	2.8%	2.6%
Health & Welfare	16.5%	7.6%	34	9.4%	3.1%
Nursing	4.3%	3.9%	19	5.2%	3.4%
Services	4.5%	3.8%	9	2.5%	1.7%
Total			362	100.0%	

- Students in The Deaf/Hard of Hearing category were more than one and a half times as likely to study in the field of Agriculture and Veterinary when compared to the general student population.
- Students in The Deaf/Hard of Hearing category were significantly underrepresented in the field of Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction and in the field of Computing compared to other students with disabilities and the general student population.
- Students in The Deaf/Hard of Hearing category were more than one and a half times as likely to student Humanities and Arts compared to students in the general population.
- Compared to students in the general student population, students in The Deaf/Hard of Hearing category were a little more than half as likely to study in the field of Health and Welfare.

DCD- Dyspraxia

Table 5 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the DCD – Dyspraxia/ Dysgraphia Category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all SWDs and for the student population in general

6.2% of all SWDs are in DCD - Dyspraxia Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total SWD Studying Field	Numbers in DCD - Dyspraxia Studying Field	% of Students in DCD - Dyspraxia Category Studying Field	% of SWDs Studying Field in DCD - Dyspraxia Category
Broad Programmes	0.9%	0.6%	3	0.3%	3.5%
Education Science	6.2%	3.7%	21	2.3%	3.9%
Humanities & Arts	15.1%	24.7%	215	23.9%	6.1%
Social Science & journalism and information	5.3%	5.9%	40	4.5%	4.8%
Business, Administration and Law	19.2%	18.1%	181	20.2%	7.2%
Science	9.5%	12.3%	118	13.1%	7.0%
Computing	6.3%	5.9%	88	9.8%	10.9%
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	10.6%	10.9%	92	10.2%	6.1%
Agriculture and Veterinary	1.6%	2.7%	24	2.7%	6.2%
Health & Welfare	16.5%	7.6%	60	6.7%	5.4%
Nursing	4.3%	3.9%	17	1.9%	3.1%
Services	4.5%	3.8%	39	4.3%	7.3%
Total			898	100.0%	

- Students in The DCD-Dyspraxia category were more than one and a half times as likely to study in the field of Computing compared to other students with disabilities or the general student population.
- Students in The DCD-Dyspraxia category were less than half as likely to study in the field of Health and Welfare compared to the general student population.
- Compared to other students with disabilities and the general student population, students in the DCD-Dyspraxia category were less than half as likely to study Nursing.

Mental Health Condition

Table 6 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Mental Health Condition Category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all SWDs and for the student population in general

15.1% of all SWDs are in Mental Health Condition Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total SWD Studying Field	Numbers in Mental Health Condition Category Studying Field	% of Students in Mental Health Condition Category Studying Field	% of SWDs Studying Field in Mental Health Condition Category
Broad Programmes	0.9%	0.6%	7	0.3%	8.2%
Education Science	6.2%	3.7%	65	3.0%	12.1%
Humanities & Arts	15.1%	24.7%	801	36.6%	22.8%
Social Science & journalism and information	5.3%	5.9%	169	7.7%	20.4%
Business, Administration and Law	19.2%	18.1%	327	14.9%	13.0%
Science	9.5%	12.3%	278	12.7%	16.6%
Computing	6.3%	5.9%	102	4.7%	12.6%
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	10.6%	10.9%	88	4.0%	5.8%
Agriculture and Veterinary	1.6%	2.7%	46	2.1%	11.9%
Health & Welfare	16.5%	7.6%	170	7.8%	15.4%
Nursing	4.3%	3.9%	98	4.5%	17.6%
Services	4.5%	3.8%	40	1.8%	7.5%
Total			2191	100.0%	

- Students in the Mental Health Condition category were almost three times less likely to study in the field of Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction compared to other students with disabilities and the general student population.
- Students in the Mental Health Condition category were over twice as likely to study Humanities and Arts then the general student population.
- Compared to other students with disabilities and the general student population, students in the Mental Health Condition category were significantly underrepresented in the field of Education Science. Those in the general student population were more than twice as likely to study Education Science as students in the Mental Health Condition category.

Neurological/Speech and Language

Table 7 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Neurological/Speech and Language Category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all SWDs and for the student population in general

4.2% of all SWDs are in Neurological/ Speech and Language Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total SWD Studying Field	Numbers in Neurological/ Speech and Language Studying Field	% of Students in Neurological/ Speech and Language Category Studying Field	% of SWDs Studying Field in Neurological/ Speech and Language Category
Broad Programmes	0.9%	0.6%	4	0.6%	4.7%
Education Science	6.2%	3.7%	29	4.7%	5.4%
Humanities & Arts	15.1%	24.7%	156	25.3%	4.4%
Social Science & journalism and information	5.3%	5.9%	37	6.0%	4.5%
Business, Administration and Law	19.2%	18.1%	121	19.6%	4.8%
Science	9.5%	12.3%	80	13.0%	4.8%
Computing	6.3%	5.9%	21	3.4%	2.6%
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	10.6%	10.9%	56	9.1%	3.7%
Agriculture and Veterinary	1.6%	2.7%	14	2.3%	3.6%
Health & Welfare	16.5%	7.6%	47	7.6%	4.3%
Nursing	4.3%	3.9%	24	3.9%	4.3%
Services	4.5%	3.8%	27	4.4%	5.1%
Total			616	100.0%	

- Students in the Neurological/Speech and Language category were less than half as likely to study in the field of Health and Welfare compared to the general student population.
- Students in the Neurological/Speech and Language category were significantly underrepresented in the field of Computing compared to other students with disabilities and the general student population.
- Students in the Neurological/Speech and Language category were more than one and a half times as likely to study in the field of Humanities and Arts when compared to the general student population.
- Students in the Neurological/Speech and Language category were underrepresented in the field of Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction when compared to other students with disabilities and the general student population.

Significant Ongoing Illness

Table 8 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Significant Ongoing Illness Category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all SWDs and for the student population in general

11.6% of all SWDs are in Significant Ongoing Illness Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total SWD Studying Field	Numbers in Significant Ongoing Illness Category Studying Field	% of Students in Significant Ongoing Illness Category Studying Field	% of SWDs Studying Field in Significant Ongoing Illness Category
Broad Programmes	0.9%	0.6%	12	0.7%	14.1%
Education Science	6.2%	3.7%	98	5.9%	18.2%
Humanities & Arts	15.1%	24.7%	397	23.9%	11.3%
Social Science & journalism and information	5.3%	5.9%	99	6.0%	12.0%
Business, Administration and Law	19.2%	18.1%	304	18.3%	12.1%
Science	9.5%	12.3%	213	12.8%	12.7%
Computing	6.3%	5.9%	65	3.9%	8.0%
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	10.6%	10.9%	122	7.3%	8.1%
Agriculture and Veterinary	1.6%	2.7%	41	2.5%	10.6%
Health & Welfare	16.5%	7.6%	200	12.0%	18.1%
Nursing	4.3%	3.9%	77	4.6%	13.8%
Services	4.5%	3.8%	35	2.1%	6.6%
Total			1663	100.0%	

- Students in the Significant Ongoing Illness category were significantly underrepresented in the field of Computing and the field of Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction compared to other students with disabilities or the general student population.
- Students in the Significant Ongoing Illness category were significantly overrepresented in the field of Health and Welfare compared to other students with disabilities.
- Compared to the general student population, students in the Significant Ongoing Illness category were significantly overrepresented in the field of Humanities and Arts.

Physical Disability

Table 9 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Physical Disability Category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all SWDs and for the student population in general

6.3% of all SWDs are in Physical Disability Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total SWD Studying Field	Numbers in Physical Disability Studying Field	% of Students in Physical Disability Category Studying Field	% of SWDs Studying Field in Physical Disability Category
Broad Programmes	0.9%	0.6%	15	1.6%	17.6%
Education Science	6.2%	3.7%	41	4.5%	7.6%
Humanities & Arts	15.1%	24.7%	235	25.7%	6.7%
Social Science & journalism and information	5.3%	5.9%	59	6.4%	7.1%
Business, Administration and Law	19.2%	18.1%	168	18.3%	6.7%
Science	9.5%	12.3%	117	12.8%	7.0%
Computing	6.3%	5.9%	45	4.9%	5.6%
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	10.6%	10.9%	66	7.2%	4.4%
Agriculture and Veterinary	1.6%	2.7%	22	2.4%	5.7%
Health & Welfare	16.5%	7.6%	90	9.8%	8.2%
Nursing	4.3%	3.9%	32	3.5%	5.7%
Services	4.5%	3.8%	26	2.8%	4.9%
Total			916	100.0%	

- Students in the Physical Disability category were more than one and a half times as likely to study in the field of Humanities and Arts compared to the general student population.
- Students in the Physical Disability category were significantly underrepresented in the field of Computing and in the field of Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction compared to other students with disabilities and the general student population.
- Students in the Physical Disability category were significantly underrepresented in the field of Health and Welfare compared to students from the general population.
- Compared to the general student population, students in the Physical Disability category were almost one and a half times as likely to study in the field of Agriculture and Veterinary.

Specific Learning Difficulty

Table 10 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Specific Learning Difficulty Category compared to the breakdown by field of study for all SWDs and for the student population in general

38.9% of all SWDs are in Specific Learning Difficulty Category	**% of Total Students Studying Field**	**% of Total SWD Studying Field**	**Numbers in Specific Learning Difficulty Category Studying Field**	**% of Students in Specific Learning Difficulty Category Studying Field**	**% of SWDs Studying Field in Specific Learning Difficulty Category**
Broad Programmes	0.9%	0.6%	22	0.4%	25.9%
Education Science	6.2%	3.7%	226	4.2%	42.0%
Humanities & Arts	15.1%	24.7%	1025	19.0%	29.2%
Social Science & journalism and information	5.3%	5.9%	274	5.1%	33.1%
Business, Administration and Law	19.2%	18.1%	1037	19.2%	41.1%
Science	9.5%	12.3%	566	10.5%	33.8%
Computing	6.3%	5.9%	280	5.2%	34.6%
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	10.6%	10.9%	838	15.5%	55.5%
Agriculture and Veterinary	1.6%	2.7%	190	3.5%	49.1%
Health & Welfare	16.5%	7.6%	385	7.1%	34.9%
Nursing	4.3%	3.9%	263	4.9%	47.2%
Services	4.5%	3.8%	288	5.3%	54.0%
Total			5394	100.0%	

- Students in the Specific Learning Difficulty category were significantly overrepresented in the field of Agriculture and Veterinary in comparison to other students with disabilities and the general student population. They were more than twice as likely to study in this field as the general student population.
- Students with a Specific Learning Difficulty category were significantly overrepresented in the field of Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction compared to other students with disabilities and the general student population.
- Students in the Specific Learning Difficulty category were less than half as likely to study in the field of Health and Welfare in comparison to the general student population.
- Students in the Specific Learning Difficulty category were significantly underrepresented in the field of Computing in comparison to other students with disabilities or the general student population.

Other

Table 11 - Breakdown by field of study for students in the Other compared to the breakdown by field of study for all SWDs and for the student population in general

2.6% of all SWDs are in Other Category	% of Total Students Studying Field	% of Total SWD Studying Field	Numbers in Other Studying Field	% of Students in Other Category Studying Field	% of SWDs Studying Field in Other Category
Broad Programmes	0.9%	0.6%	11	4.8%	12.9%
Education Science	6.2%	3.7%	4	1.7%	0.7%
Humanities & Arts	15.1%	24.7%	29	12.6%	0.8%
Social Science & journalism and information	5.3%	5.9%	21	9.1%	2.5%
Business, Administration and Law	19.2%	18.1%	31	13.5%	1.2%
Science	9.5%	12.3%	21	9.1%	1.3%
Computing	6.3%	5.9%	9	3.9%	1.1%
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	10.6%	10.9%	48	20.9%	3.2%
Agriculture and Veterinary	1.6%	2.7%	8	3.5%	2.1%
Health & Welfare	16.5%	7.6%	17	7.4%	1.5%
Nursing	4.3%	3.9%	5	2.2%	0.9%
Services	4.5%	3.8%	26	11.3%	4.9%
Total			230	100.0%	

- Students in the Other category were almost four times less likely to study in the field of Education Science compared to students in the general student population.
- Students in the Other category were approx. half as likely to study Humanities and Arts compared to other students with disabilities.
- Students in the Other category were approx. half as likely to study Nursing compared to other students with disabilities or the general student population.
- Compared to other students with disabilities or the general student population, Students in the Other category were almost twice as likely to study in The Field of Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction

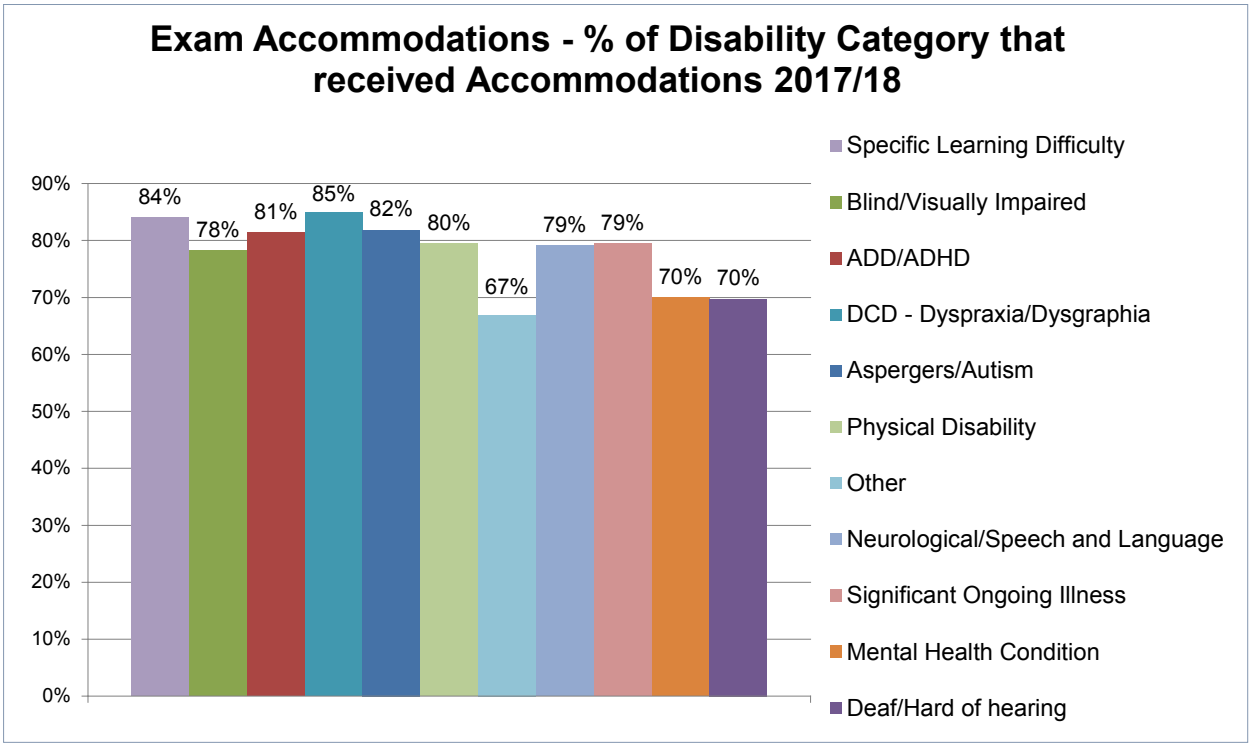
Exam Accommodations

The responding institutions also provided information on the number of students with disabilities who received exam accommodations in 2017/18, the breakdown of this figure by disability and the types of exam accommodations received. In total 12,256 students with disabilities were given one or more exam accommodation, representing 83% of the total student population with disabilities in that academic year (up from 82% in 2016/17). In contrast to the previous year, this figure signifies an 18% increase in students with disabilities that received one or more exam accommodations within this term (10,397 in 2016/17).

Exam Accommodation by Category of Disability

In 2017/18, 26 of the 27 responding institutions* provided the disability breakdown of 11,746 students with disabilities receiving exam accommodations. An analysis of the breakdown in 2017/18 by category of disability shows some variation in the percentage of each category receiving these accommodations. The category in which the highest percentage of students received exam accommodations was the DCD-Dyspraxia category with 85% (775) of the students in this category having received one or more exam accommodations, followed by Specific Learning Difficulties at 84% (4811). The third highest group of students receiving exam accommodations by category of disability recorded was in the Asperger's'/Autism Category, where 82% (712) received one or more.

Figure 7 - shows the percentage of each category of disability receiving exam accommodations in 2017/18



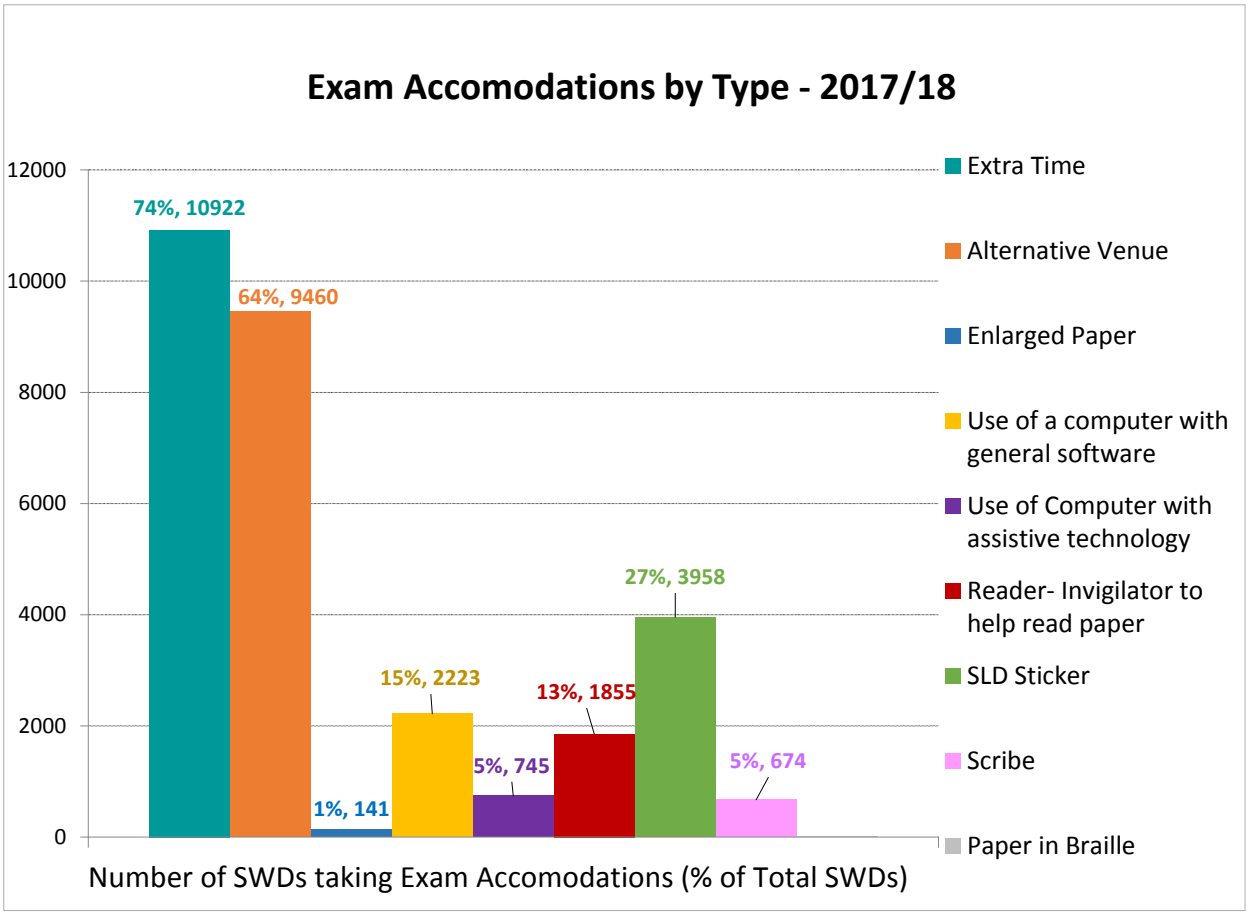
* GMIT were unable to provide these figures at the time of data collection for this study and therefore GMIT is not reflected in the breakdown of exam accommodations by category of disability.

Exam Accommodations by Type

Responding institutions provided information on the type of exam accommodations that students with disabilities received in 2017/18. The breakdown of types of reasonable accommodations that students with disabilities received are categorised under the following headings: Extra Time, Alternative Venues and Exam Supports e.g. a reader or use of a computer. Figure 7 illustrates the percentage of students with a disability who availed of the different types of accommodations. This gives a picture of the pattern of use across the categories of disabilities of the various types of exam accommodations provided. The 2017/18 survey asked for further details on the types of exam accommodations provided including 'The use of a computer with assistive technology' and 'The Use of a computer with general software', 'Paper in Braille'.

Extra time during an exam remained the most availed of exam accommodations with 74% (10,922) of all students with disabilities in 2017/18 receiving this accommodation. This was then followed by the use of an Alternative Venue which was availed of by 64% (9,460), and SLD Stickers at 27% (3,958). The use of a computer (general software) was availed of by 15% (2,223) of students with disabilities, 13% (1,855) availed of a reader (Invigilator to help read papers) during exams, 5% (745) availed of the use of a computer (with assistive technology), 5% (674) used a Scribe, 1% (141) received an Enlarged Paper and 0% (2) received a paper in braille.

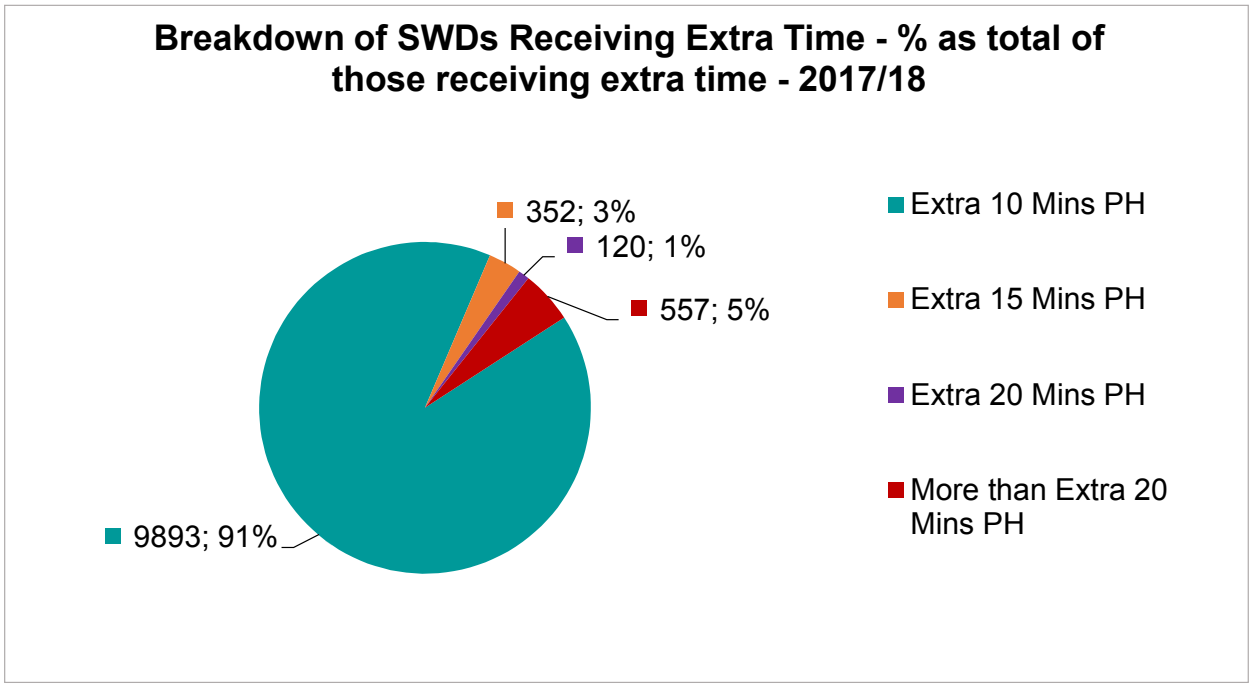
Figure 8 - shows a graph of examination accommodations provided by type



Extra Time Breakdown

Of the 12,256 students with disabilities that received one or more exam accommodations in 2017/18, 10,922 (89%) received extra time for exams, representing 74% of the total student population. Of those who received extra time as an accommodation, 91% (9,893) received 5-10 extra minutes per hour, 3% (352) received 15 extra minutes per hour, 1% (120) received 20 minutes extra per hour and 5% (557) received more than an extra 20 minutes per hour. The graph below illustrates the breakdown of extra time received by students with disabilities recorded by the responding institutions for 2017/18.

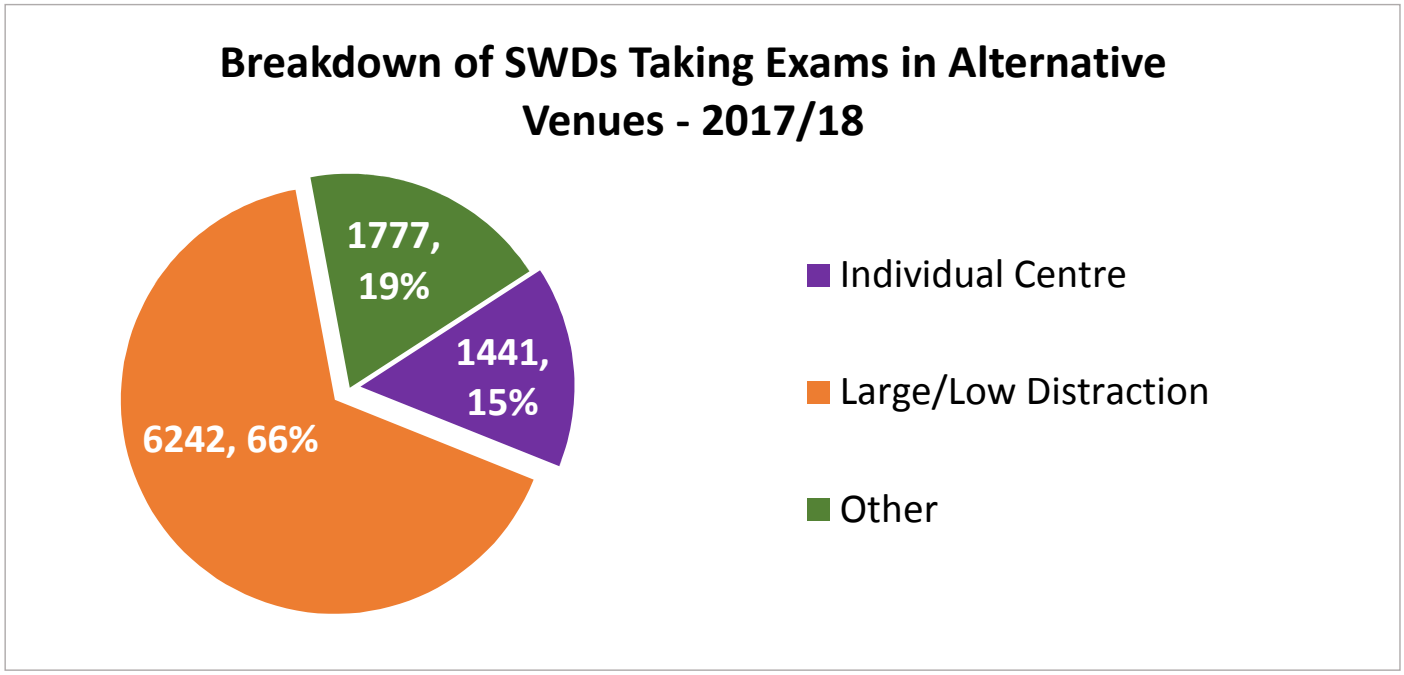
Figure 9 - shows the breakdown of students with disabilities receiving extra time by length of extra time granted



Alternative Venue Breakdown

The total number of students with disabilities who availed of an alternative venue as an exam accommodation in 2017/18 was 9460, representing 64% of all students with disabilities. Of those who availed of an alternative venue for exams, 15% (1441) availed of an Individual centre to sit their exams, 19% (1777) availed of an alternative venue marked as 'Other' alternative venue and 66% (6242) availed of a large or low distraction room. This breakdown is illustrated in figure 10.

Figure 10 - shows the breakdown of students with disabilities utilising an alternative exam venue by type of venue



Inside the Service

AHEAD asked responding institutions to provide information about the numbers of staff with responsibility for supporting students with disabilities and the number of learning support staff employed by the responding institutions*.

The responding institutions recorded that the number of students with disabilities per staff member across the sector was 116. The number of students with disabilities per learning support staff member across the sector was 339 (a decrease from 16/17 of 29%), while the number of students with disabilities per disability support staff member was 176 (an increase from 16/17 of 5%). When the growth in the number of students with disabilities undertaking courses generally is factored in, it suggests that there has been a significant increase in learning support staff allocation to students with disabilities between 2016/17 and 2017/18. However AHEAD participation rate surveys also show that since 2012 the overall number of students with a disability per disability support staff member has increased by 34% (131 in 2011/12 to 176 in 2017/18), a greater increase than the rise per learning support staff member of 6.3% in the same period.

When we look at the difference between responding institutions, the average number of students with disabilities per support staff member in the University Sector was higher with 145 students per staff member while there were just 92 students with disabilities per support staff member reported in The IT/Other Sector.

* Methodology: Responses were delivered as a decimal number where one full time (5 days a week) staff member = 1, and part-time staff members were included as a pro rata fraction of 1. For example, a college with one full time staff member working 5 days a week and one part time staff member working 2 days a week would report 1.4 staff members. Where staff members had shared responsibility over students with disabilities as well as other student groups, they were asked to estimate how much of their remit was dedicated to students with disabilities.

On the Ground

Responding institutions were asked if they considered the promotion of UDL (Universal Design for Learning) practices to be a key part of the role of their department on campus within their respective institution. All responding institutions engaged with this question with 63% (17) stating that they believe UDL promotion to be part of their role while 26% (7) disagreed and 11% (3) unsure if it was part of their role or not. This breakdown is illustrated in figure 11.

This year, AHEAD also asked institutions surveyed whether they think it would be beneficial to professionalise the disability support officer role at third level; the vast majority, 88% (23) felt that it would be beneficial, however 12% (3) were marked as being 'Unsure'. No respondent ticked the 'No' box. This breakdown is illustrated in figure 12.

The survey questionnaire provided space for respondents to submit additional comments to the UDL and professionalisation question. Some of the comments give insight into the different positions and concerns which the different institutions are taking on these areas (see Appendix section 4.1 for comments).

Figure 11 - shows breakdown of responses to question on whether disability support staff see the promotion of UDL as a key part of their role

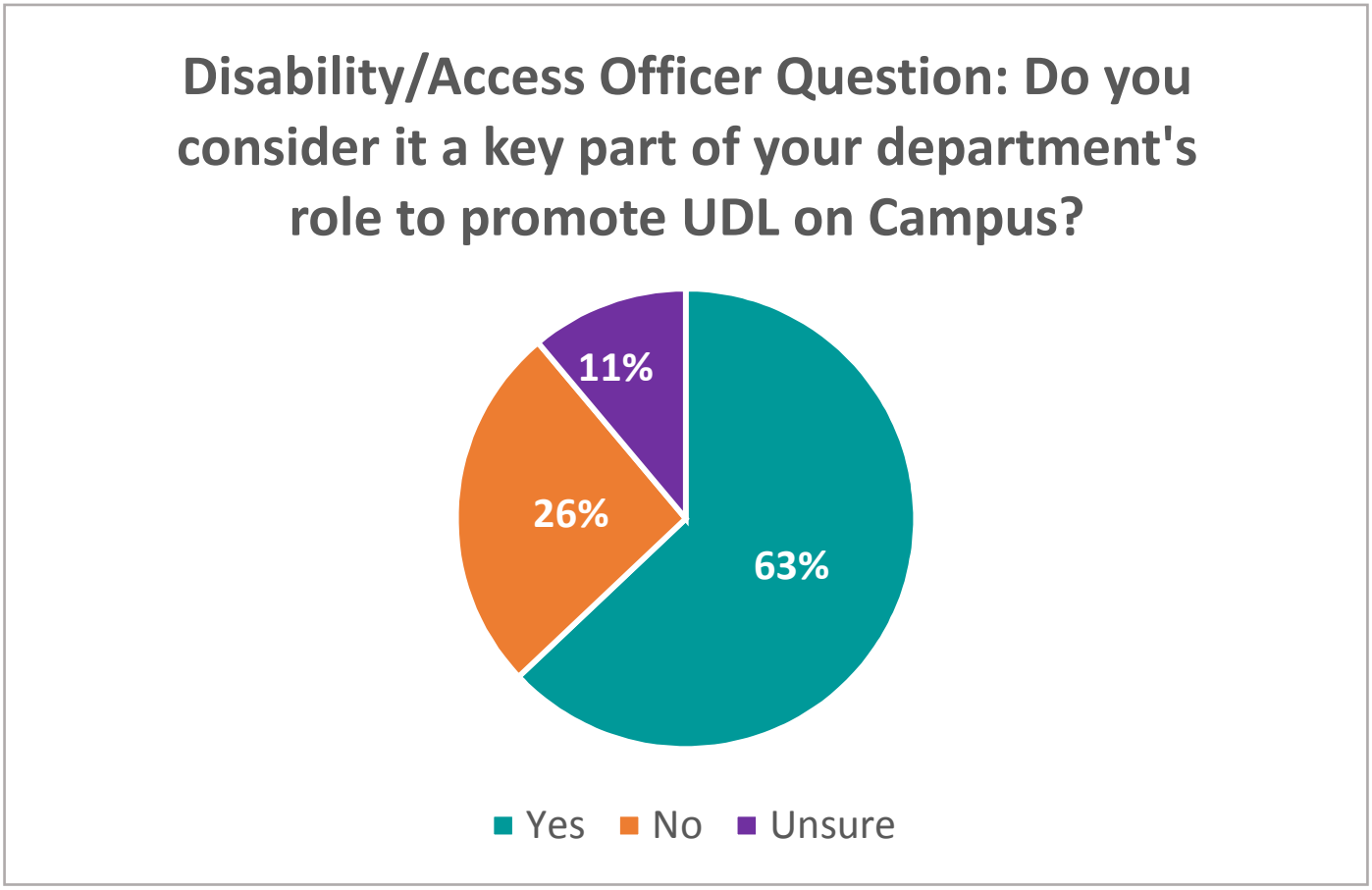
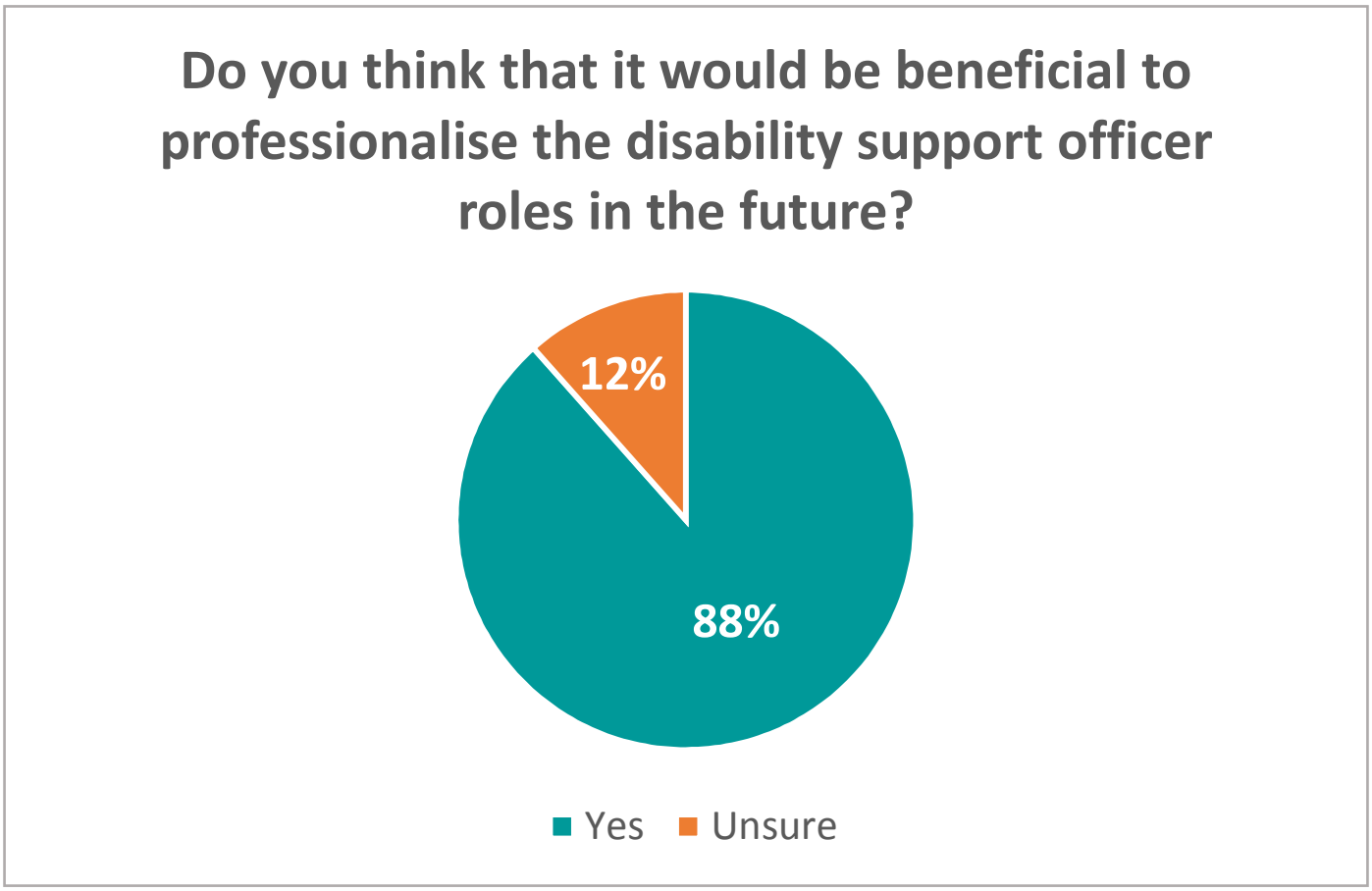
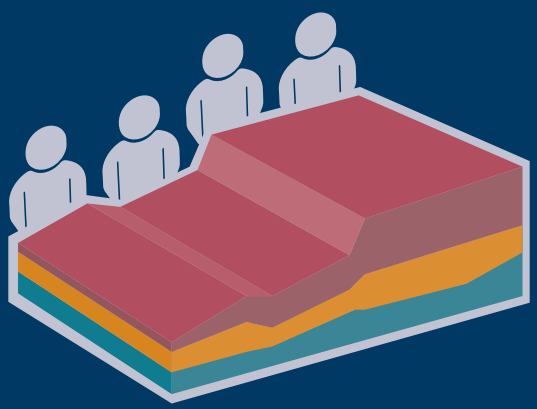


Figure 12 - shows the responses to question on whether disability support staff think it would be beneficial to professionalise their roles in the future



Summary



Summary

AHEAD has identified the following key findings and observations based on the analysis of the data collected from the responding higher education institutions on the participation rates of students with disabilities in higher education for the academic year 2017/18:

AN INCREASE IN THE REPRESENTATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

2017/18 marked another year of continued growth in the participation of students with disabilities in higher education. There are now 14,720 students with disabilities representing 6.2% of the total student population. This figure represents a 17% rise in the number of students with disabilities in higher education year on year and a 62% rise over the last 5 years of AHEAD's research in this area*. 2017/18 is the second consecutive year we have seen a 17% year on year rise in the numbers.

AN UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AT POSTGRADUATE LEVEL WHEN COMPARED WITH THEIR PEERS

The participation rate of students with disabilities at undergraduate level (7% of undergraduate population) is two and a half times the rate of postgraduate participation (2.8%). However, the number of students with disabilities participating at postgraduate level (1233, up 22% year on year) grew at a higher rate than the number participating at undergraduate level (13487, up 16% year on year).

PARTICIPATION ON FULL TIME COURSES SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER THAN ON PART TIME COURSES

The participation rate of students with disabilities studying full time (7.3% of the total full time student population) was more than five times the rate of students with disabilities studying part time courses (1.4% of part-time population).

* Please note that ITC and GMIT were unable to provide a response to the 2012/13 survey from which this comparison is made.

INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF NEW ENTRANTS

Our research found that there were 3906 new entrants with disabilities in higher education in 2017/18, representing just over a quarter of the total population of students with disabilities. This is an increase of 11% in the number of new entrants in higher education from the previous year.

LARGE PERCENTAGE INCREASE IN 'OTHER' CATEGORY

There has been a significant increase in the number of new entrants students with disabilities registered under the category of the 'Other' disability. 111 students were registered under the category of Other which represented a more than 150% increase in the number of students in this category year on year.

A QUARTER OF STUDENTS THAT NEWLY REGISTERED WITH THE DISABILITY SERVICES WERE NOT IN THEIR FIRST YEAR OF COLLEGE

A quarter of new registrations with disability services across all responding institutions were by students not in their first year of study in 2017/18 (1301), a proportion which has remained relatively static over the last five years of our research (AHEAD 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018). In this five year period, the number in this cohort has increased by 86%.

NUMBERS WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION RISING TWICE AS FAST AS OTHER GROUPS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Over the past five years of this research (AHEAD 2018; 2017, 2016, 2015, 2014), the numbers of students in the Mental Health condition category (up 127% to 2,217) has risen at more than twice the rate of total numbers of students with disabilities (up 62% to 14,720).

LOW REPRESENTATION OF STUDENTS WITH SENSORY DISABILITIES

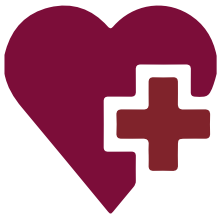
Students with sensory disabilities had the lowest representation across undergraduate and postgraduate levels in comparison to other categories of students with disabilities (Blind/Visually Impaired at 1.8% of total students with disabilities and Deaf/Hard of Hearing at 2.5%). Blind/Visually Impaired, has remained the lowest represented category of students with disabilities in higher education year on year, while students with a Specific Learning Difficulty remained the highest represented category at 38.9% (5,724). Over the past five years of this research (AHEAD 2018; 2017, 2016, 2015, 2014), the numbers of students in the Blind/Visually Impaired category (up 38%) and the Deaf/Hard of Hearing Category (up 28%) have grown at a significantly slower rate than numbers in the general population of students with disabilities (up 62%).

SIGNIFICANTLY MORE LIKELY TO STUDY IN HUMANITIES

Students with disabilities were significantly more likely to study in the field of 'Humanities and Arts' than their peers in the general student population. In 2017/18, 24.7% of students with disabilities were registered as studying in this field in comparison to 15.1% of the total student population.

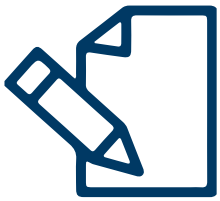
LESS THAN HALF AS LIKELY TO STUDY IN HEALTH AND WELFARE

Students with disabilities were less than half as likely to study in the field of 'Health and Welfare' compared to their peers in the total student population in 2017/18. 7.6% of the population of student with disabilities were studying in this field in comparison to 16.5% of the total population.



MOST STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES RECEIVE EXAM ACCOMMODATIONS

12,256 students with disabilities, representing 83% of all students with disabilities, received one or more exam accommodations in 2017/18. The number of students with disabilities in receipt of one or more exam accommodations increased by 18% from the previous year (10,397).



BIG INCREASE IN NUMBER OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES PER STAFF MEMBER SINCE 2011/2012.

The number of students with disabilities per disability support staff member has increased by 5% (176) year on year. This research has found that over the last six years there has been a 34% increase in the number of students with disabilities per disability support staff member (AHEAD 2013).

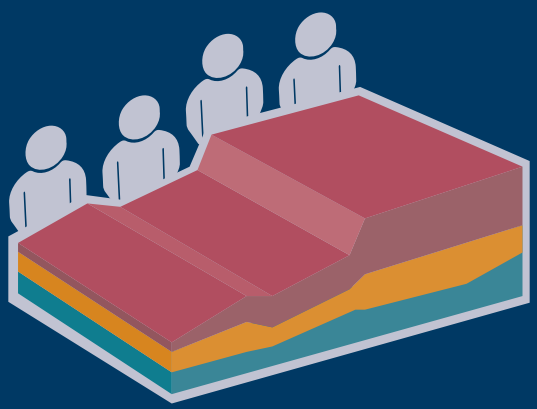
MOST SUPPORT STAFF THINK ROLE S SHOULD BE PROFESSIONALISED

88% of the disability support staff from the higher education institutions involved in this study agreed that it would be beneficial to professionalise roles within the disability support office at third level.

ALMOST TWO THIRDS OF SUPPORT STAFF SEE PROMOTION OF UDL AS KEY PART OF THEIR ROLE

63% of the disability support staff from the higher education institutions involved in this study said they considered the promotion of UDL (Universal Design for Learning) practices to be a key part of the role of their departments on campus at present, while 26% did not.

Recommendations



Recommendations

1. This research highlights the continuing positive growth in the overall numbers of students with disabilities registering with disability support services in higher education. It reflects how the strategic access policies and supports put in place by governing bodies, including The HEA, have increased the diversity of the student body in higher education significantly over the last number of years. However, the sustained increase in numbers, along with the reported significant rise in the number of students per disability support staff member in the last six years, indicate that institutions need to take a whole college approaching to including students with disabilities in order to maintain quality and improve their overall learning experience.

AHEAD recommends that institutions ensure that their disability support units are adequately resourced to continue to provide quality accommodations.

AHEAD also recommends that HEIs implement institutional policies, in line with priority A.3 of the HEA's Strategic plan (HEA, 2018), which encourage a whole college approach to supporting students with disabilities, reducing pressure on specialised disability support services and recognising the role that teaching and learning, examinations, library and other frontline staff have in providing an inclusive educational experience. Such policies should be supported by professional development opportunities for staff members to provide them with the knowledge and skills for them to meet the needs of diverse learners in the higher education system.

2. There is growing concern about the ongoing underrepresentation of students with sensory disabilities, i.e. students who are listed under Deaf/Hard of Hearing or Blind/Visually Impaired categories in higher education reported over the last number of AHEAD's surveys (2018; 2017; 2016; 2015). In consideration that these two categories of students are target groups identified by The HEA

to promote their advancement in education, it is surprising that their participation and growth rate remains comparatively low.

Following the ratification of The UNCRPD in Ireland in 2018, it is imperative that the state ensure that any barriers to access or support for these categories of students with disabilities are examined through further research and consultation with key stakeholders across all levels of education.

3. In light of the governing bodies review of The Fund for Students with Disabilities across Higher Education Institutions (HEA, 2018), it is worthwhile considering the huge year on year increase of new entrants with disabilities being classified under the 'Other' category. Comments contained in returns to this survey suggest many students placed in this category have an intellectual disability and are on specific courses aimed at this cohort. Students on many of these types of courses are currently not supported by the Fund for Students with Disabilities or the Recurring Grant Allocation Model (RGAM), however an increasing number are registering with the disability support services seeking support.

It is recommended that further investigation be carried out by the Higher Education Authority to identify whether a new category of disability would need to be included as part of the Fund for Students with disabilities to cater for this cohort in the provision of supports and review the criteria for students which can be included in the RGAM funding.

4. In the context of the ongoing diversification of the higher education student body, it is imperative that higher education institutions are operating effectively to address their needs and supporting student success in all aspects of their journey. Respondents in this study indicate that there are noted benefits to professionalising the disability officer role in order to benefit the operational supports for students with disabilities. A recent paper (2018) by AHEAD in collaboration with DAWN (Disability Advisors Working Network) outlined the rationale to

professionalise this role in higher education '...a new functionality is developing for the Disability Officer… [professionalization] would mean the student a disability would clearly know what to expect, and understand what the Disability Officer and other professionals in higher education can do collaboratively to support their learning experience' (McCarthy et. al., 2018, p. 14).

AHEAD recommends that key stakeholders collaborate to identify a viable pathway to the professionalisation of this role.

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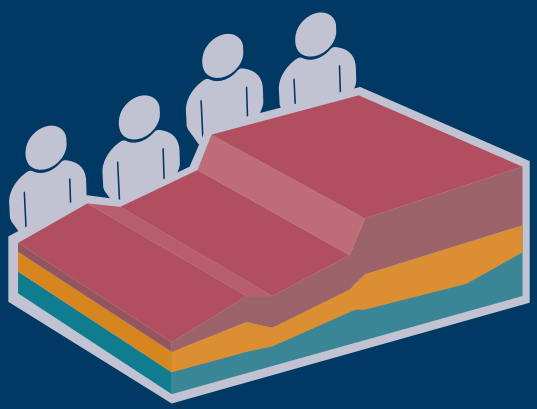

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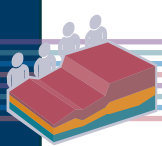

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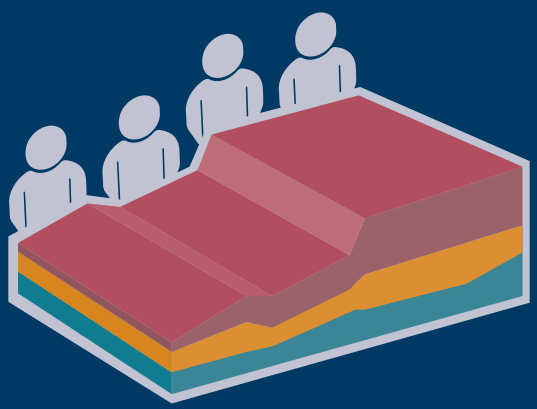
Appendix



Appendix

1.1 Fields of Study

The fields of study section illustrates a list of subjects which are analysed under each category of disability. This list is sourced from the students statistics provided by the Higher Education Authority and is modified to provide specific insight into numbers studying in key areas such as nursing.

Generic programmes and qualifications

Basic programmes and qualifications

Literacy and numeracy

Personal skills and development

Education

Education not further defined or elsewhere classified

Education science

Training for pre-school teachers

Teacher training without subject specialization

Teacher training with subject specialization

Arts and humanities

Arts not further defined or elsewhere classified

Audio-visual techniques and media production

Fashion, interior and industrial design

Fine arts

Handicrafts

Music and performing arts

Humanities (except languages) not further defined or elsewhere classified

Religion and theology

History and archaeology

Philosophy and ethics

Languages not further defined or elsewhere classified

Language acquisition

Literature and linguistics

Interdisciplinary programmes and qualifications involving arts and humanities

Social sciences, journalism and information

Social and behavioural sciences not further defined or elsewhere classified

Economics

Political sciences and civics

Psychology

Sociology and cultural studies

Journalism and reporting

Library, information and archival studies

Interdisciplinary programmes and qualifications involving social sciences, journalism and information

Business, administration and law

Business and administration not further defined or elsewhere classified

Accounting and taxation

Finance, banking and insurance

Management and administration

Marketing and advertising

Secretarial and office work

Wholesale and retail sales

Work skills

Law

Interdisciplinary programmes and qualifications involving business, administration and law

Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics

Biological and related sciences not further defined or elsewhere classified

Biology

Biochemistry

Environment not further defined or elsewhere classified

Environmental sciences

Natural environments and wildlife

Physical sciences not further defined or elsewhere classified

Chemistry

Earth sciences

Physics

Mathematics and statistics not further defined or elsewhere classified

Mathematics

Statistics

Interdisciplinary programmes and qualifications involving natural sciences, mathematics and statistics

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) not further defined or elsewhere classified

Computer use

Database and network design and administration

Software and applications development and analysis

Interdisciplinary programmes and qualifications involving Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)

Engineering, manufacturing and construction

Engineering and engineering trades not further defined or elsewhere classified

Chemical engineering and processes

Environmental protection technology

Electricity and energy

Electronics and automation

Mechanics and metal trades

Motor vehicles, ships and aircraft

Manufacturing and processing not further defined or elsewhere classified

Food processing

Materials (glass, paper, plastic and wood)

Textiles (clothes, footwear and leather)

Architecture and construction not further defined or elsewhere classified

Architecture and town planning

(0732) Building and civil engineering

Interdisciplinary programmes and qualifications involving engineering, manufacturing and construction

Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary

Crop and livestock production

Horticulture

Agriculture not further defined or elsewhere classified

Forestry

Veterinary

Interdisciplinary programmes and qualifications involving agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary

Health and welfare

Health not further defined or elsewhere classified

Dental studies

Medicine

Nursing and midwifery

Medical diagnostic and treatment technology

Therapy and rehabilitation

Pharmacy

Welfare not further defined or elsewhere classified

Care of the elderly and of disabled adults

Child care and youth services

Social work and counselling

Interdisciplinary programmes and qualifications involving health and welfare

Services

Personal services not further defined or elsewhere classified

Hotel, restaurants and catering

Sports

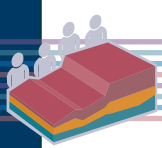
Travel, tourism and leisure

Occupational health and safety

Military and defence

Protection of persons and property

Transport services



2.1 Number of students with disabilities studying within each responding higher education institution

Institution	Total Students with Disabilities	SWD as a % of total student population
UCD	1483	5.1%
UCC	1434	7.3%
NUIG	975	5.2%
TCD	1551	8.6%
NUIM	813	6.5%
DCU	808	5.0%
UL	785	6.7%
MIC	133	2.8%
MIE	63	6.4%
NCAD	111	9.4%
RCSI	85	2.4%
St Angela's College	70	4.6%
AIT	381	7.5%
CIT	738	7.4%
DIT	1391	7.2%
DLIADT	255	10.1%
DKIT	266	5.4%
GMIT	505	7.4%
ITB	193	5.8%
ITC	259	3.1%
ITS	398	6.7%
ITT	193	3.9%
ITTRA	272	9.5%
LYIT	266	5.8%
LIT	527	9.3%
NCI	242	4.2%
WIT	523	6.2%

3.1 Inside the Service Comments

Comments from responding institutions relating to the question detailing numbers of disability and learning support staff they have employed in 17'/'18. Any information which may identify a particular institution has been redacted since these comments were agreed to be reproduced anonymously;

-We are taking on an additional full time member of staff for the academic year 2018-19 which isn't reflected in the numbers above. We also estimate that across the university in mainstream supports the equivalent of 4 full time posts would be involved in the support of students with disabilities. This includes student advisers in programmes, library, writing centre, maths centre, student desk, programme offices etc. We would suggest asking HEIs to quantify this in the next year's statistics to estimate the progression of mainstreaming across HE.

-New position in 17-18 - Student Services Case Co-ordinator role to manage support requirements of students with complex mental health difficulties.

-The two members of staff are also designated support for other Access groups and also administer the SAF. So, even though the office is manned by 2 full time members of staff - .75 of our joint time is given over to other ACCESS Groups - a more accurate recording of Disability support would be 1.25. Academic Learning Support Service is for all students- ACCESS Office refers students to ALC for more specific supports / also ESW hired for academic assistance.

-1 full time Learning Support Tutor, 18 hours AT Technician, Full time Access Office.

-We have an administrator who is available and one full time person to cover learning support and disability.

-I work 4 days a week as a disability officer and a learning support tutor.

-With increasing numbers of new students registering we were able to get additional hours for a staff member to conduct needs assessments during the first semester.

-National Learning Network provide learning support for students referred by ITB Student Services.

-Understaffed and under resourced. Disability Officer is also responsible for SAF/ Mature Students/School Access Work/Access Programme.

-The learning support worker is hired from an external agency and the funding is provided through the FSD.

4.1 On the Ground Comments

Comments from respondents relating to whether they considered UDL (Universal Design for Learning) practices to be a key part of the role of your department on campus at present and whether they believe a professionalisation of the disability officer role would be beneficial in third level in future.

Any information which may identify a particular institution has been redacted since these comments were agreed to be reproduced anonymously.

Comments on UDL being part of their department's role:

-In the past academic year we have dedicated a significant amount of time and resources to the promotion and support of mainstreaming and inclusive practice in a university-wide initiative. Not only is this a requirement in the HEA National Access Policy, we also feel that it is also the only way that we will achieve a fully inclusive learning environment for all students. Providing individual supports to students does not alleviate the disadvantages they may face in a learning environment where segregation and poor practice can present barriers which individual supports may not be able to overcome.

-We consider the promotion of UDL practices to be a key part of our role, and to this end we have produced a short [UDL advisory] document for academic staff, and have run some UDL workshops on campus with academic and administrative staff. However, we believe that the promotion of UDL needs to be led by University management for the benefit of all students, and we are keen to avoid a misperception that UDL is solely, or mostly, about supporting students with disabilities.

-UDL is a central pillar of the disability service, the fundamentals are in position now with the [Institutions Reasonable Accommodation] Policy and associated code of practice. Standard reasonable accommodations are deemed mandatory and inclusive in nature most are good teaching, learning and assessment practice. Disability Service staff will increasingly work with academic areas to assist them in making their curricula more inclusive as numbers of disabled students increase so will UDL.

-The University is developing a draft Teaching and Learning Policy. The Disability Office was consulted in the development of this draft policy and identified UDL as a possible framework for the University, but UDL is not a key part of the role of the Disability Office at present.

-I think this needs to be led by Senior Management, otherwise it will be associated with just disability and therefore limit both the understanding of UDI and its take-up.

-By its very nature UDL is a University wide issue.

-Universal design for learning is a key part of our role in conjunction with other offices who are responsible for universal design in the curriculum.

-No. It is not currently a key part of the role but elements of the Universal Design for Learning do exist in current practices and this will be developed in the future.

-Unsure due to the nature of the programmes on offer

-It is part of my role, but the college have a very strong Teaching & Learning unit that advocate for the use of UDL and this forms the core of a number of the modules that they offer to teaching staff.

-We see the role of UDL to be an institutional role, however, each department and service also need to increase awareness of UDL through their own practices. It is certain that there has been a significant increase in the conversations within the college regarding UDL, but would like to see a stronger commitment to UDL within the colleges Strategic Plan etc. It is up to the college to roll out best practice regarding UDL, but each department/service also has responsibilities for this - I certainly don't see this as a DSS issue alone. Within the DSS, we strive to have UDL at the core of our work and can see that other departments are following suit. Recently some of our students were successful in the Universal Design Grand Challenge Finals and we had several winners in these Finals - this demonstrates that the college is making progress, but has a long way to go. I think the college would benefit from having one person (initially) whose sole focus was rolling UDL out as much as possible across the college until it becomes more embedded in all our work.

-I am answering this question 'YES' as we try and encourage the 'universal design approach' in all we do. Inclusive education is education for all and we all have a responsibility to promote UDL within HEIs.

-It is probably not viewed as a key role but it is something that continuous work is carried out for in conjunction with other staff

-UDL is promoted within the college for teaching purposes however physical design is not following UDL. There are plans to rectify this with a new student services building.

-Remit of Teaching and Learning.

-At present it is the Disability Support Service - The Access Officer whom is actively playing a key part in our department on campus. Through her actively pursuing the roll of out UDL, it is now written into the institutes strategic plan and a number of academic staff are participating in the UDL Digital Badge that the Access Officer is facilitating.

-We are currently promoting a UDL Digital Badge Initiative which will begin in September 2018. This will be provided to all academic staff, who wish to participate.

-The role of DSS is to collaborate with Teaching, Learning and Engagement Strategy group in the HEI to promote UDL, share and develop best practice and support and contribute to staff CPD.

-We are working closely with Computer Services, our Educational Technologist and academic staff to incorporate UDL. We hold information days and workshops and offer ongoing support.

-I would like it to be but our department doesn't always get a voice in this area in the institution.

-As part of my work with The [Higher Education Institution] I have been making sure that UDL will be part of all factors within the university.

Comments on professionalisation of disability support officer roles

-While there are national standards at the moment for supports etc. our experience is that many HEIs are not adhering to this practice although they are stating that this is the case. For example, a number of HEIs are still providing “grinds” to students on a regular basis rather than focusing on skill acquisition and strategy development that would benefit the student in graduate study or the workplace. Students who have their assignments proofread by a tutor before each submission are left feeling they are dependent on that person and cannot submit any work independently. When they come to our HEI for graduate study they have a very difficult transition as the supports that were previously provided to them were inappropriate and actually “disabling” in some cases.

-We are supportive of the professionalisation of roles within Disability Support Services in recognition of the expertise of disability support staff being essential in providing quality support services to students with disabilities. Central to this professionalisation is the need to develop minimum standards of staffing and resources to assist in enhancing the effectiveness of disability services in the education sector. We believe that the sector would benefit from having a professional body to oversee a system of accreditation, a set of minimum standards, codes of ethics and practice, and professional development etc.

-Professional disability staff is key to being taking seriously in third level and staff need to skill up to meet an expectation that they are the disability professionals. Accredited CPD for all staff is an essential step and will encourage disability staff to broaden their sphere of influence.

-Disability staff deal with increasingly complex situations as the range of students registering with disabilities continues to broaden. CPD, specialist training and supervision is paramount for all staff who work in disability support.

-Yes, I think we have done a lot over the years to achieve this through the work of DAWN and AHEAD but we need to be mindful that different colleges may have different cohorts, or needs depending on the profile of the student population.

-Yes - It is not just an administrative role and should be acknowledged as such. Professional training would enhance our current services.

-Yes. The standardisation of professional practice of disability support would help expand the services on offer even further.

-I think that this would be beneficial to ensure standardisation of service to students and for CPD purposes. Also it would validate the role that disability officers can play in

ensuring that students with disabilities are supported throughout their education.

-We would be in favour of this move to professionalise DSS roles. There are many benefits to this, mainly ensuring a standard level of good practice and having the support network of the professional body that we would be aligned to also. This could only be a positive thing for students who are engaging with our service. It would mean that we would have access to training and CPD and the complexity of our roles would be acknowledged and supported. At the moment, it certainly does not appear that most of the staff working with the DSS feel that they are supported and/or encourage to develop their professional skills - we are doing very complex work with a potentially very vulnerable group of people.

-Yes, I do believe it would be beneficial to professionalise disability support roles so there is a consistent professional delivery of service in all HEIs.

-Smaller Institutions do not have the same budgets as large Universities and so are not able to provide the same supports to students with disabilities.

-In most HEI's it is an admin role which is highly inappropriate and does not represent the type of work carried out there. The role needs specialist skills and experience that is not reflective of an admin position.

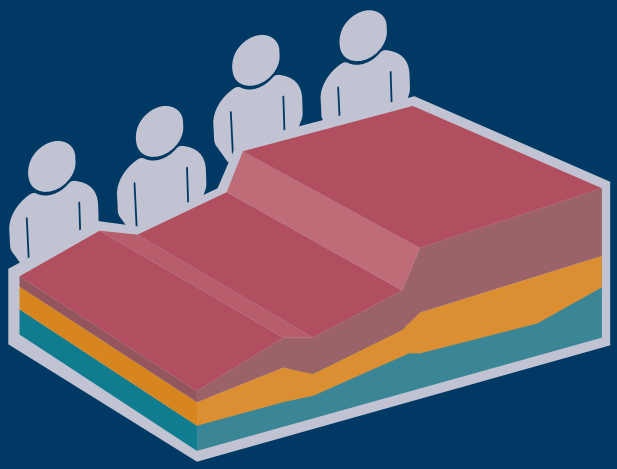
-As evidenced in joint publication from DAWN and Ahead, "The Role of the Disability Officer and the Disability Service in Higher Education in Ireland," the role of the (DSS) is changing and as the focus shifts from add-on supports to embedded supports and curriculum design, it is imperative that the disability officer role in third level education is categorised as a professional practice.

-Professionalisation of the role will support good practice nationally, facilitate a consistent student experience across Higher education in Ireland and provide CPD opportunities for these professionals in a sector that is ever-changing and increasingly diverse.

-Absolutely

ahead

Association for Higher Education Access & Disability



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